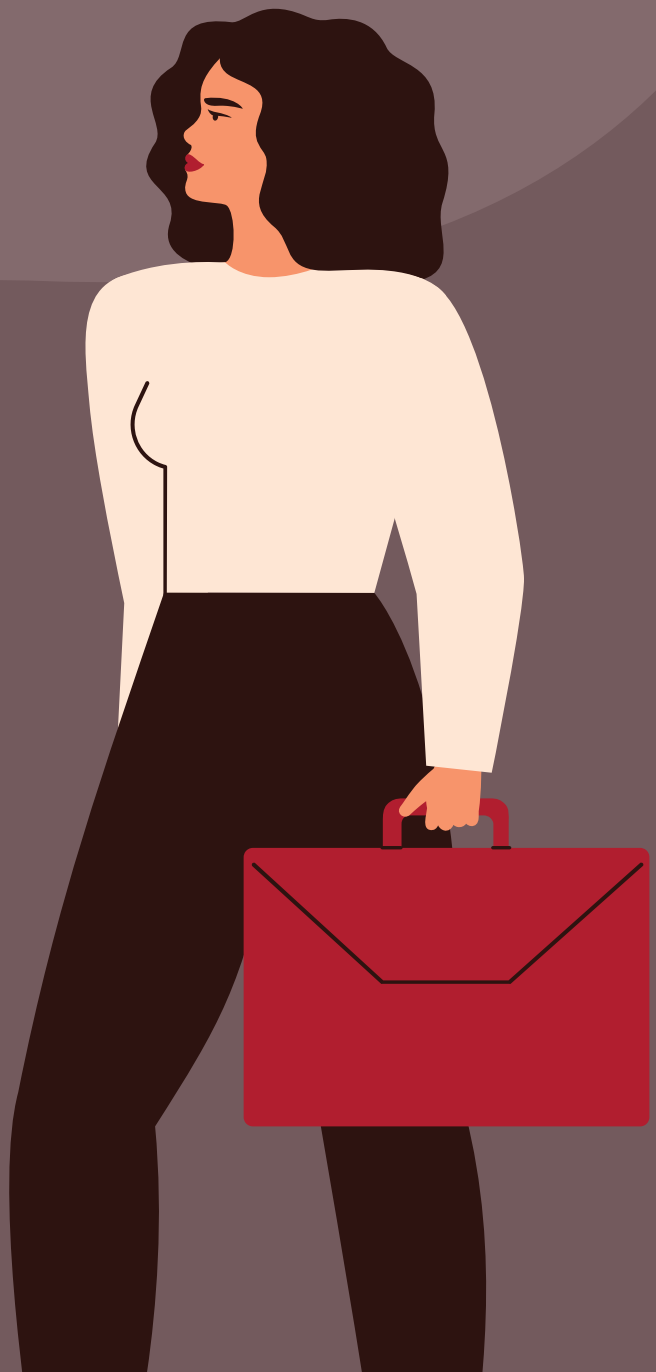
aware

"I QUIT":

Career and Financial Effects of Workplace Sexual Harassment on Women in Singapore



Executive summary

1 Workplace sexual harassment (WSH) is any unwelcome and unwarranted behaviour of a sexual nature by an individual that discomfits or exploits another individual, or creates a hostile environment for victim-survivors.[1] WSH is a serious issue in Singapore today. In the country's first national survey on WSH, conducted by AWARE and Ipsos in 2021, two in five workers reported having experienced WSH in the past five years.[2] However, there continues to be a lack of awareness of what constitutes WSH and the severity of the issue. The full extent of WSH remains largely unknown because under-reporting of sexual violence is fairly common, with 70% of survivors choosing not to file a report.[3]

2 This report builds on existing research on the career and financial impacts of WSH on survivors by privileging the lived experiences of 39 working women who have experienced WSH across various industries in Singapore in the past five years. Our respondents worked in a wide range of industries, with the most common being banking and finance. Most were employed at multinational corporations (MNCs) and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). The majority held middle-management positions while the rest held senior-management positions and clerical and/or administrative positions, or were professionals, freelancers or part-time workers.

3 In the first section, we examine the impact of WSH on our respondents' day-to-day work output, career progression, generation of income and overall economic security. This is followed by an analysis of respondents' reporting behaviours and factors that inhibited some from filing official reports against their harassers. The final section of our report explores the structural factors that persistently facilitate WSH.

4 In our research, short-term work-related impacts—the day-to-day effects of WSH—were experienced in various ways, the most common being decreased work productivity and lowered levels of job satisfaction. Respondents also reported that their collegial relationships were negatively impacted, and that their work environments turned hostile. Some faced reputational damage. Short-term financial impacts, or the day-to-day costs associated with WSH, came in the form of increased expenditure and lower income.

5 Career and financial impacts of WSH can often extend past the short term. Following their experiences of WSH, our respondents experienced such changes to their lives and career trajectories as job loss; a significant amount of time out of work (due to difficulty or fear of re-entering the workforce after losing one's job); extended periods of low productivity, and other career disruptions. Financially, more than half of our respondents also reported dips in their incomes, due to unemployment or the lower-paying jobs they took on after experiencing WSH.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO STRENGTHEN EXISTING LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK

01 Develop a national legislation in Singapore that deals with workplace sexual harassment

02 Adopt ILO Convention 190 on Violence and Harassment

[1] Individuals who have experienced WSH have the right to choose how they prefer to identify themselves. With that in mind, we are using the term "victim-survivor" or simply "survivor" in this report to refer to these individuals. [2] "AWARE-Ipsos survey reveals high prevalence of workplace sexual harassment in Singapore, low rates of reporting over past five years", AWARE, AWARE, 14 January 2021, aware.org.sg/2021/01/aware-ipsos-survey-reveals-high-prevalence-of-workplace-sexual-harassment-in-singapore-low-rates-of-reporting-over-past-five-years [3] Ibid

6 Of our 39 respondents, 22 did not file complaints with official channels[4] for reporting. Amongst these respondents, the most frequently cited reasons for not reporting included the fear of retaliation and the fear of not being believed. Several other considerations that deterred our respondents from reporting were the fear of being negatively stereotyped; the perception that filing a report was "not worth the effort"; the timing of their harassment; and the stages of their careers. Respondents' decisions to report were also influenced by factors such as reactions of first responders to their initial disclosure and access to reporting channels, including their organisations' Human Resource department.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO ADDRESS UNDER-REPORTING OF WORKPLACE SEXUAL HARASSMENT

03 Mandate that employers create a well-defined sexual harassment policy that includes examples of prohibited behaviour

04 Require employers to implement compulsory and regular gender-sensitive training in the workplace

05 Increase the procedural satisfaction of those reporting workplace sexual harassment

06 Provide protection to both survivors and witnesses of workplace sexual harassment

7 Certain organisational characteristics create fertile ground for repeated incidents of WSH, resultantly contributing to the persistence of this issue. In our research, these characteristics include a male-dominated management and/or organisation; poor organisational climate; the absence of an HR department or policies targeted at handling WSH, and dependency on sexualised customer interactions.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO IMPROVE EXISTING ORGANISATIONAL CLIMATE

07 Foster a work environment that has zero tolerance towards sexual harassment

08 Enhance support for women's career progression

[4] In our research, we define this as the organisation's HR department, labour unions, the police, the Tripartite Alliance for Fair and Progressive Employment Practices (TAFEP), the Ministry of Manpower (MOM) and the Tripartite Alliance for Dispute Management (TADM).

Introduction

BACKGROUND AND RESEARCH AIMS

The Tripartite Alliance for Fair and Progressive Employment Practices (TAFEP) defines workplace harassment as "behaviour that causes or is likely to cause harassment, alarm or distress to another party" and "[violates] a person's dignity or create[s] an unfavourable work environment for him/her, which poses a risk to the person's safety and health".[5] Sexual harassment is listed as an example of such behaviour.

With reference to this definition, WSH is defined in this report as any unwelcome and unwarranted behaviour of a sexual nature by an individual that discomfits or exploits another individual, or creates a hostile environment for survivors. WSH can occur both inside and outside an office setting, e.g. at work-related activities such as company functions, corporate events, team-building exercises or out-of-town business trips.

WSH can be verbal, non-verbal, physical or technology-facilitated in nature. Acts of verbal sexual harassment include inappropriately commenting or joking about another's appearance, making unwelcome advances or encouraging sexualised behaviours. Non-verbal sexual harassment may come in the form of winks, staring at another person's body or lewd gestures. Technology-facilitated harassment includes making inappropriate comments and jokes via text, making unwanted advances via text or sending explicit material. Lastly, examples of physical sexual harassment include assault, inappropriate touching or standing very close to another person, amongst others.

WSH is a serious issue in Singapore. The country's first national survey on WSH, conducted by AWARE and Ipsos in 2021, found that two in five workers in the country had experienced WSH in the past five years.[6] From 2017 to 2019, a total of 6,988 reports of sexual assault were made to the police, 619 of which occurred between colleagues, including supervisor and subordinate; 47 other cases occurred between professional and client.[7] In 2020, AWARE's Workplace Harassment and Discrimination Advisory (WHDA) provided support to 54 WSH survivors; the number made up a quarter of all WHDA clients that year.

In spite of these sobering statistics, there continues to be a lack of awareness of what constitutes WSH and the severity of the issue. The full extent of WSH remains largely unknown because under-reporting of sexual violence is fairly common, with as many as 70% of survivors choosing not to file a report due to fears of retaliation, potential re-victimisation and not being believed.[8]

To shed light on WSH in Singapore, this report builds on existing research on the career and financial impacts of WSH on survivors—an area of research that has been investigated less than WSH's physical, psychological and emotional effects. This report privileges the lived experiences of 39 working women who experienced WSH across various industries in Singapore in the past five years. In the first section, we examine the impact of WSH on our respondents' day-to-day work outputs, career progression, generation of income and overall economic security. This is followed by an analysis of our respondents' reporting behaviours and factors that inhibited some from filing official reports against their harassers. The final section of our report explores the structural factors, such as poor organisational culture, that facilitate WSH. As the first of its kind in Singapore, this report also sets out key recommendations for:

i) Ensuring a safe workplace environment for all employees irrespective of employment status or contract type, and
ii) Providing specific policies and strategies that help to identify, prevent and address WSH.

[5] Ministry of Manpower, Tripartite Advisory on Managing Workplace Harassment (Singapore: Ministry of Manpower, 2015), 2, www.mom.gov.sg/-/media/mom/documents/employment-practices/guidelines/tripartite-advisory-on-managing-workplace-harassment.pdf [6] "AWARE-Ipsos survey reveals high prevalence of workplace sexual harassment in Singapore, low rates of reporting over past five years", AWARE, AWARE, 14 January 2021, www.aware.org.sg/2021/01/aware-ipsos-survey-reveals-high-prevalence-of-workplace-sexual-harassment-in-singapore-low-rates-of-reporting-over-past-five-years [7] "Written Reply to Parliamentary Question on Sexual Assault Cases (5 January 2021), by Mr K Shanmugam, Minister for Home Affairs and Minister for Law", Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of Singapore, 5 January 2021, www.mha.gov.sg/mediaroom/parliamentary/written-reply-to-parliamentary-question-on-sexual-assault-cases-5-january-2021-by-mr-k-shanmugam-minister-for-home-affairs-and-minister-for-law [8] "AWARE-Ipsos survey"

Research methodology

RECRUITMENT

A public call for respondents was posted on AWARE's website, newsletter and social media accounts. This was also shared by partner organisations and clients of AWARE's Sexual Assault Care Centre (SACC).

SAMPLING

We used purposive sampling to recruit and select respondents. Eligibility screening questions focused on respondents' gender identity, whether the incident(s) of WSH had occurred within the last five years and whether the respondents had been over 18 years of age when the incident(s) occurred. The time period for the incidence of WSH was restricted to account for government measures put in place within the past five years to deal with WSH, such as the publication of the Tripartite Advisory on Managing Workplace Harassment.

People of all genders can experience WSH. However, evidence indicates that the vast majority of WSH survivors are women. Hence this report focuses on that specific population of survivors.

We also interviewed respondents from a range of different industries, positions and economic backgrounds to better understand the commonalities and differences between the plights of WSH survivors in different work settings.

METHODS

Semi-structured interviews were conducted to capture a holistic understanding of the survivors' experiences, as well as the factors that influenced the financial and career impacts they faced (e.g. reporting procedures, presence of HR departments, income). The flexibility of semi-structured interviews allowed the researchers to adapt questions and gain insights into the unique experience of each individual respondent. Respondents were asked questions about the following topics:

a) The nature of WSH experienced
b) Their career/job history
c) The career and financial effects they experienced
d) The nature of the working environment in which they experienced WSH, and
e) Their decision-making process around whether to file a formal report.

Interviews were carried out by the research team, both in person and online.

SAFETY MEASURES

Given the highly sensitive nature of this research, which required respondents to confront, reveal and discuss distressing experiences of WSH, a range of measures and protocols were put in place to ensure the safety of respondents before, during and after the interview.

During the recruitment process, potential respondents were provided with all the necessary details of the research project (e.g. project scope, what would be done with respondents' data), as well as the purpose and parameters of our interview questions. They were also informed that trauma-trained staff or volunteers from AWARE were available to sit in during interviews, should they have required additional support. Prior to the commencement of the interview, each respondent was guided through a consent form which detailed all this information and included additional resources if the respondent required emotional support after the interview had concluded.

Before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, interviews were scheduled to take place in private interview rooms at the AWARE centre, where counsellors and safety persons would be able to offer immediate emotional support to respondents. In view of social distancing measures following the onset of the pandemic, interviews were conducted online via WhatsApp or Skype to ensure the safety of both the respondent and interviewer(s), with the option of a trauma-trained staff member or volunteer being present during or after the call.

Following the interviews, check-ins were conducted either by interviewers or trauma-informed staff or volunteers. In the event that the respondent expressed feelings of distress or discomfort, they were given the option of making an appointment with SACC for counselling support, or with WHDA for practical and emotional advice. The interviewer would also conduct an additional check-in a few days later to ensure the respondent's well-being after the interview.

DATA ANALYSIS

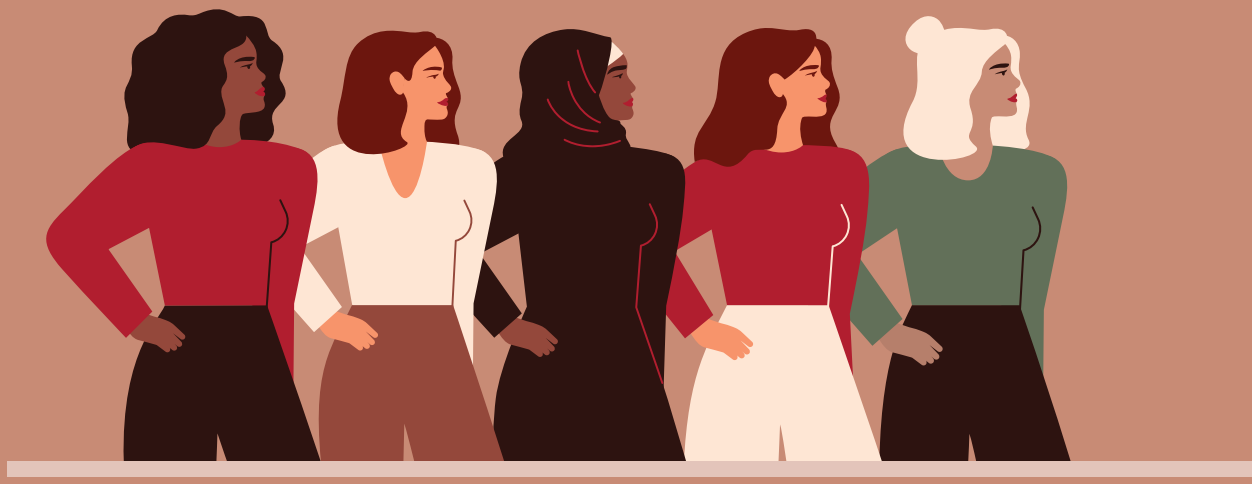
The data was coded and analysed by AWARE's research and advocacy team using deductive coding.[9]

The interpretations of the findings are:

01 Grounded in respondents' interviews and semi-quantified, and
02 Presented in the context of relevant previous research and national-level data, where available and/or appropriate.

[9] Deductive coding, or concept-driven coding, involves extensive secondary research and a literature review to develop a codebook with a predefined set of codes. Researchers then assign those codes to the new qualitative data to form emerging themes.

Overview of report



Profile of respondents

Thirty-nine female-identifying respondents who experienced WSH within the last five years were interviewed for this research.

Most respondents were in the 25-34 age range (n=22). Majority of them were Chinese (n=23), with the remaining being Malay (n=6), Indian (n=5), Peranakan (n=2), Eurasian (n=1), Caucasian (n=1) and Korean (n=1).

Out of all 39 respondents, 32 were full-time employees, three were part-time employees and four were freelancers. Meanwhile, nearly half (or 17) of our respondents were middle managers; four were senior managers and seven held administrative and/or clerical roles. The remaining four did not specify their occupation type.

At the time of their harassment, 70% of our respondents had been employed for less than one year at the company where they experienced WSH (n=28).

The largest proportion of our respondents (n=12) had monthly incomes ranging between $3,000 and $5,000. Seventeen of our respondents were primary breadwinners or main contributors to their household income, or had debts, loans or medical bills to pay off.[10]

Our respondents worked in a wide range of industries, with the most common being banking and finance (n=7). At the time of their harassment, majority were employed in multinational corporations (n=17) and small and medium-sized enterprises[11] (n=11); several worked in public institutions (n=5),[12] and non-profit organisations (n=2). The remaining four respondents were self-employed. Most companies at which our respondents worked had a Human Resource (HR) staff member or department (n=24).

[10] Nineteen of the respondents had none of the listed financial responsibilities. The remaining three did not specify their financial responsibilities. [11] Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) have an employment size of not more than 200 workers. [12] Public institutions include schools and hospitals.

Respondents' experiences of WSH

I Form of WSH experienced

The most common form of WSH experienced was verbal sexual harassment, which 28 of our respondents reported. This finding was also echoed in the 2021 AWARE-Ipsos survey—one in five respondents experienced "crude and distressing remarks, jokes or gestures of a sexual or sexist nature" while another one in five respondents received "alarming or offensive remarks or questions about their appearances, bodies or sexual activities" within the past five years.[13]

This was followed by physical harassment (n=24), technology-facilitated harassment (n=17) and non-verbal harassment (n=4).

II Frequency of WSH

WSH can occur as an isolated incident or a series of disparate incidents that occur simultaneously, or over a period of time. The majority of our respondents faced two forms of harassment simultaneously (n=17); the remaining experienced one form of harassment (n=13) or were subjected to three forms of harassment (n=9). The most prevalent combination of WSH faced by respondents was verbal and physical harassment.

Of those who experienced more than one form of harassment (n=26), 42% (or 11) reported experiencing "milder" forms of harassment that escalated to more "severe" harassment. This generally referred to technology-facilitated and verbal harassment, such as asking personal questions or asking the respondent out, which then escalated to physical harassment. None of these respondents reported or even spoke informally about the harassment to their bosses or senior staff members before it escalated.

III When and where the incident(s) of WSH occurred

Fifty-six per cent of our respondents (n=22) reported experiencing in-person harassment at the workplace, while four reported experiencing in-person harassment outside the workplace (e.g. on business trips, at drinks with colleagues and/or clients). Five respondents reported experiencing in-person harassment both at and outside of their workplaces. Three experienced WSH solely through online means (e.g. via text messages). The remaining five respondents experienced WSH both online as well as in-person, at and outside their places of work.

IV Types of perpetrator(s)

The majority of perpetrators were either the respondents' bosses or senior staff members in their organisations (n=25). Of these perpetrators, 16 were line managers while nine were senior staff outside of respondents' departments. Other perpetrators were respondents' colleagues/peers (n=13), clients (n=9), subordinates (n=2), strangers (n=1) and students (n=1).[14]

> ***How would it impact my career? Because he's a supervisor and I'm a journalist. So, I mean, who would HR believe, you know?... He has worked there for, like, 20 over years, while I've been there for, like, only 10 years... There's a difference, you know. Seniority. I was like, who would the company believe?"***
>
> *Jannah*, about her decision whether or not to file a report after being sexually harassed by her supervisor*

These findings differ slightly from the AWARE-Ipsos survey, which found that perpetrators tended to be the respondents' colleagues/peers, followed by senior staff outside of their department, and senior staff within their department. Despite this difference, it is worth noting that WSH is not only perpetrated by individuals holding senior positions in organisations. This finding is supported by a 2012 U.S. study on WSH and power, which suggests that gender, race and class position accord perpetrators with informal power, even if they do not have greater organisational authority than their victims.[15]

[13] "AWARE-Ipsos survey" [14] Some respondents were subject to WSH by multiple perpetrators. [15] Heather McLaughlin, Christopher Uggen and Amy Blackstone, "Sexual Harassment, Workplace Authority, and the Paradox of Power", American Sociological Review 77, no. 4 (2012), journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0003122412451728

Short-term impacts of workplace sexual harassment on women in Singapore

For the purposes of this report, short-term work-related impacts are the day-to-day effects of WSH, such as reduced productivity and impaired relationships with co-workers.

Similarly, short-term financial impacts are the day-to-day costs associated with WSH (e.g. losing out on commissions) and respondents' strategies to cope with its effects, such as seeking out counselling services or doing after-work activities, like retail therapy.

Short-term work-related impacts

Past research has found that common short-term work-related implications of WSH include lowered levels of job satisfaction,[16] absenteeism or presenteeism,[17] deteriorated collegial relationships[18] and lower levels of organisational commitment.[19]

Our findings echo this: The most common immediate/short-term effects of WSH reported by our respondents were lower work productivity (n=34), negatively impacted relationships with colleagues (n=30) and lower job satisfaction (n=23). These effects were experienced as a direct result of the act of harassment. Other impacts faced by our respondents, including ostracism and reputational damage at the workplace or within the industry, resulted from retaliation by perpetrators or co-workers.

Some of these short-term effects can be experienced in conjunction with each other (for example, lower job satisfaction could be cited as a reason for decreased productivity), though each of them may also be experienced in isolation.

Below, we detail our respondents' experiences with each of these effects.

90%
of respondents experienced decreased work productivity

I Decreased work productivity, or "presenteeism"

Decreased work productivity refers to a situation in which one or more employees are unable to perform their tasks as efficiently as they originally did. This was the most commonly cited work-related effect reported by our respondents, with nearly 90% (n=34) experiencing this.

The decrease in work productivity was experienced in part due to absence from work: Seventeen (or 43.6%) of our respondents reported taking paid leave, unpaid leave or medical leave either as a result of actual physical healthcare concerns or as a means to avoid their harassers.[20]

In some cases, decreased work productivity is also experienced as an outcome of "presenteeism", which is defined as the act of coming to work despite illness, injury or anxiety.[21] Presenteeism can stem from a work culture that rewards turning up for work regardless of one's health status. In some cases, individuals exhibit behaviours of presenteeism because they cannot afford to take time off without suffering financial or career-related penalties. For survivors of WSH, feeling compelled to return to work can be detrimental to their well-being as this often means remaining in close proximity to their harassers after their traumatic experiences. The resultant feelings of stress and anxiety can then implicate their ability to concentrate at work and in turn diminish their work productivity.

[16] Darius K.-S. Chan, Chun Bun Lam, Suk Yee Chow and Shu Fai Cheung, "Examining The Job-Related, Psychological, and Physical Outcomes of Workplace Sexual Harassment: A Meta-Analytic Review", Psychology of Women Quarterly 32 (2008). [17] Ibid [18] Heather Mclaughlin, Christopher Uggen and Amy Blackstone, "The Economic and Career Effects of Sexual Harassment on Working Women", Gender & Society 31, no. 3 (2017), europepmc.org/backend/ptpmcrender.fcgi?accid=PMC5644356&blobtype=pdf [19] Chelsea R. Willness, Piers Steel and Kibeom Lee, "A Meta-analysis Of The Antecedents And Consequences Of Workplace Sexual Harassment", Pesonnel Psychology 60, no. 1 (2007). [20] Eleven respondents reported taking paid or unpaid leave, while six took medical leave. [21] Paul Hemp, "Presenteeism: at work—but out of it", Harvard Business Review 82, no. 10 (2004).

After returning to work, several respondents reported experiencing disorientation. They were unable to recall how to go about doing their work. Such experiences are not uncommon: Past research has shown that experiences of sexual violence can cause survivors to experience post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which in turn affects their memory and overall functioning.[22] The lack of sleep resulting from the trauma of WSH also worsened many respondents' ability to concentrate at work.

Moreover, not only does seeing a harasser on a daily basis serve as a constant reminder of the harassment, survivors also have to deal with feelings of uncertainty about when their harassers might strike again. Many respondents said that they became constantly wary of their surroundings, which distracted them from work and affected their productivity.

In some cases, respondents attempted to actively avoid their harassers as a coping strategy. However, in many of these cases, this meant that they were less productive at work as the harasser was the respondent's direct superior or someone with whom they worked closely.

In our research, the decrease in work productivity lasted for an average of 2.8 months, from the point of harassment to the time that our respondents left their jobs or opted for department transfers. The remaining 15 respondents who did not leave their jobs and had to continue working with their harassers reported that they were still experiencing lower productivity at the point of the interview; this had lasted for an average of 4.6 months.

At times, the negative effect of WSH on their work pace and quality was also apparent to respondents' bosses and colleagues:

> ***I just had difficulty functioning at work. It was very obvious to my boss that, like, my mind was somewhere else because when we would clean up after that, I was very slow and it just, like, affected my ability to function. It was just very obvious that I was not present."***
>
> *Rita*, who was harassed by a senior colleague at her part-time work*

59%
of respondents reported lower levels of job satisfaction

II Lowered levels of job satisfaction

Twenty-three of our respondents reported that following the harassment, they had lower levels of job satisfaction as a result of:

i) A lack of faith and trust in management (especially in cases where the harasser was a supervisor or boss),

ii) Feelings of being unsafe at work, and

iii) Reduced commitment to the organisation and the work they were producing.

Job satisfaction is considered to be closely linked to productivity. The lower the job satisfaction, the less productive an employee is likely to be. Many of our respondents shared that following their experience of WSH, they dreaded going to work, which led them to take more leave and/or arrive to work late or leave early. One respondent, Sarah*, also said she became less motivated to do additional work and instead only did the "bare minimum" of what was expected of her.

[22] Barbara Olasov Rothbaum, Edna B. Foa, David S. Riggs, Tamera Murdock and William Walsh, "A prospective examination of post-traumatic stress disorder in rape victims", Journal of Traumatic Stress 5, no. 3 (1992) In Nicole P. Yuan, Mary P. Koss, and Mirto Stone, The Psychological Consequences of Sexual Trauma (Pennsylvania: National Resource Center on Domestic Violence, 2006), vawnet.org/sites/default/files/materials/files/2016-09/AR_PsychConsequences.pdf; Kate M. Scott, Karestan C. Koenen, Andrew King, Maria V. Petukhova, Jordi Alonso, Evelyn J. Bromet, Ronny Bruffaerts, Brendan Bunting, Peter de Jonge, Josep Maria Haro, Elie G. Karam, Sing Lee, Maria Elena Medina-Mora, Fernando Navarro-Mateu, Nancy A. Sampson, Victoria Shahly, Dan J. Stein, Yolanda Torres, Alan M. Zaslavsky and Ronald C. Kessler, "Post-traumatic stress disorder associated with sexual assault among women in the WHO World Mental Health Surveys", Psychological Medicine 48, no. 1 (2018), ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5896282/ ; Lori Haskell and Melanie Randall, The Impact of Trauma on Adult Sexual Assault Victims (Canada: Department of Justice Canada, 2019), justice.gc.ca/eng/rp-pr/jr/trauma/trauma_eng.pdf

> ***[A] lot of the middle management who were on the same level as me didn't really speak to me as much anymore. I wasn't involved in a lot of important things... I was constantly thinking 'How do I get out? Oh, it's so depressing, this place.' I hated coming to work, I tried my best to find every excuse that I could to come in late, leave early, to, you know, whenever there's a holiday coming up, I'd take time off for leave, everything. Yeah. So it's just—any excuse just to be away from that place. I [also] did not give my all, or rather, I did not give more than what was needed. I really am the kind of person who gives a lot more than what I'm asked for. But, when something like this happens, you just kind of don't feel like it anymore."***
>
> *Sarah*, who was sexually harassed by her supervisor and clients, and experienced lowered job satisfaction, decreased work productivity and ostracism from her superiors*

Significantly, research has suggested that the negative work-related effects of WSH extend beyond individual survivors' productivity and job satisfaction. A 2007 study in the U.S. found that ambient sexual harassment—that is, merely observing or hearing about occurences of WSH at one's workplace—predicted heightened stress, lower job satisfaction and lower work productivity.[23] Similarly, a 2017 study conducted in Australia found that witnessing hostile behaviour towards female co-workers, in the form of incivility and sexual harassment, resulted in lower psychological well-being throughout the workplace, which in turn affected productivity.[24]

Moreover, the ostracism that survivors like Sarah* experience from high-power authorities or their own social support networks has been found to result in lower levels of "organisational citizenship behaviors", and therefore higher "interpersonal deviance". [25] Organisational citizenship refers to the commitment employees make to their employers and companies on a voluntary basis, as a result of their loyalty to and trust in their organisations. However, WSH and its effects significantly reduce survivors' desire to stay in organisations and contribute the same levels of dedication and time in their work, as a result of lower job satisfaction. This ultimately leads to interpersonal deviance, which is the deliberate desire to "act out" at work—i.e. engage in behaviour that goes against employers' expectations and generally hinders the organisation.

A literature search has not identified any prior Singapore-based research that has measured levels of job satisfaction as a result of discrimination and/or WSH.

Ultimately, job satisfaction often affects employees' interest in remaining with organisations. The driving forces behind our respondents' decisions to leave their organisations after experiencing WSH will be discussed further in the following section on the long-term career impacts of WSH.

75%
of respondents reported that their relationships with their colleagues soured

III Negatively impacted relationship with colleagues

More than 75% of our respondents (n=30) reported that their relationships with their colleagues soured following their harassment. In many cases, this occurred because respondents became more withdrawn and began to minimise their interactions with colleagues. Several respondents also reported being more fearful of male colleagues in general after experiencing WSH.

Thirteen respondents said that they severed ties with their co-workers because the latter were unsupportive when respondents disclosed their harassment, or confided in them about the impact of the harassment on their work. Such unsupportive responses from colleagues included minimising and/or normalising the incidents of WSH, or making victim-blaming comments suggesting that respondents were somehow responsible for the harassment.

[23] Kathi Miner-Rubino and Lilia M. Cortina, "Beyond Targets: Consequences of Vicarious Exposure to Misogyny at Work", Journal of Applied Psychology 92, no. 5 (2007), citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.512.707&rep=rep1&type=pdf [24] Mimoza Birinxhikaj and Marika Guggisberg, "The wide ranging impact of sexual harassment in the workplace: An Australian pilot study", International Journal of Employment Studies 25, no. 1 (2017). In Deloitte, The economic costs of sexual harassment in the workplace (Canberra: Deloitte, 2019), 33, deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/au/Documents/Economics/deloitte-au-economic-costs-sexual-harassment-workplace-240320.pdf [25] Stephanie E.V. Brown and Jericka S. Battle, "Ostracizing targets of workplace sexual harassment before and after the #MeToo movement", Equality, Diversity and Inclusion 39, no. 1 (2019), 56.

Apart from respondents cutting contact with unsupportive co-workers, their collegial relationships were affected due to ostracism. Past research on job-related effects of WSH has shown that ostracism from co-workers arises due to the perception that a survivor's experience is trivial and that a big deal should not be made of it.[26] Co-workers who believe this do not provide survivors with support and begin to perceive them negatively.

> ***When I walked in [to work], [no] one said hi. Like everybody was just whispering, even my 'friends', and people are like sitting the furthest away from me. Like literally the area around me was empty.This totally changed my attitude towards colleagues, which made colleagues perceive me as this cold person. Initially, I was really friendly and outgoing and you know, I wanted to chat everybody up but later, I turned into this very no-nonsense kind of cold person who wouldn't really talk. And [in media], teamwork is very important. Every day, I'm randomly assigned to [colleagues] and we go out on assignments together maybe like three times a week or four times a week. A lot of producers are actually close to their [team] because you see them so often and I wanted to do that but I was just really afraid of them so I would really just give them my harshest and coldest attitude and people would judge me for that."***
>
> *Kim*, who was verbally harassed by her colleague in her first full-time job*

Eleven of our respondents shared that they had been ostracised specifically after filing reports against their harassers. Such experiences have been echoed in studies conducted overseas: A 2018 national survey conducted in Australia showed that 19% of WSH survivors who filed a formal report or complaint were labelled as trouble-makers, and 18% were ostracised, victimised or ignored by colleagues.[27] Similarly, surveys in the U.K. and U.S. have found that between 20% and 40% of WSH survivors do not make a report to avoid being labelled as a "trouble-maker".[28] Aligned with the research cited above, this stigmatisation of WSH survivors who file formal complaints results from their colleagues' dismissal of the severity of the harassment and the perception that they were "problematic" individuals who were a threat to group cohesion.[29] Such beliefs can have tangible impacts on a survivor's career: A 2019 study conducted in the U.S. found that women who report WSH were seen as less moral, warm and socially skilled, which in turn affected their chances for promotion.[30]

Both the lack of support for survivors of WSH and overt ostracism of those who file a report reinforce a workplace culture that is permissive of acts of violence. Furthermore, this deters other survivors from informally speaking up about their harassment as well as filing reports, as they wish to avoid facing the same social sanctions. Such behaviour feeds into the creation of a hostile work environment.

28%
of respondents reported that their work environments turned hostile

IV Hostile work environment

A hostile work environment is typically defined as one that is "intimidating, hostile or offensive" as a result of unwelcomed instances of harassment and discrimination.[31] Eleven of our respondents reported that their work environments turned hostile after they experienced WSH. Some were assigned more work or less work than before; others' salaries were withheld, some were publicly shamed in front of other colleagues, and even subjected to physical violence. Such experiences left our respondents feeling unsafe and highly stressed at work.

[26] Mclaughlin, Uggen and Blackstone, "Economic and Career Effects", 11. [27] Australian Human Rights Commission, Everyone's business: Fourth national survey on sexual harassment in Australian workplaces (Sydney: Australian Human Rights Commission, 2018), 9, humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/document/publication/AHRC_WORKPLACE_SH_2018.pdf [28] "New CareerBuilder Survey Finds 72 Percent of Workers Who Experience Sexual Harassment at Work Do Not Report it", CareerBuilder, CareerBuilder, 19 January 2018, press.careerbuilder.com/2018-01-19-New-CareerBuilder-Survey-Finds-72-Percent-of-Workers-Who-Experience-Sexual-Harassment-at-Work-Do-Not-Report-it; Hannah Markson, Sexual Harassment Report 2018 (U.K.: Ministry of Defence, 2018). In Lorna Adams, Laura Hilger, Emma Moselen, Naomi Morrice, Oliver Gooding and Anya Karadia, Literature review of sexual harassment in the workplace (U.K.: Government Equalities Office, 2021), assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1002872/2021-07-15_Literature_Review_of_Sexual_Harassment_in_the_Workplace_FINAL.pdf [29] S Arzu Wasti and Lilia M Cortina, "Coping in context: sociocultural determinants of responses to sexual harassment", Journal of Personality and Social Psychology 83, no. 2 (2002) ; Brown and Battle, "Ostracizing targets of workplace sexual harassment"; Dulini Fernando and Ajnesh Prasad, "Sex-based harassment and organizational silencing: How women are led to reluctant acquiescence in academia", Human Relations 72, no. 10 (2019), researchgate.net/publication/328215191_Sex-based_harassment_and_organizational_silencing_How_women_are_led_to_reluctant_acquiescence_in_academia [30] Chloe Grace Hart, "The Penalties For Self-Reporting Sexual Harassment", Gender & Society 33, no. 4 (2019), journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0891243219842147 [31] "Harassment", U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, accessed 30 September 2021, eeoc.gov/harassment

To deal with the offensive work environment created by WSH, some of our respondents resorted to physically avoiding the harassers at work as much as they could, perceiving that the harassers were a threat to their safety (n=23). Some changed their physical appearance in hopes of avoiding unwanted attention from their harassers or other male colleagues (n=17).

> ***We usually have company drinks every two weeks. I would try my best not to drink with him, near him. And I would leave early and to the point where—when it was kind of really culminating—I found myself in a lift together with him, and I started having heart palpitations... I physically avoided him to the point where when I found myself being alone with him in a confined space, I [would] panic."***
>
> *Naomi*, who was harassed by her supervisor while holding a senior managerial position*

Hostile work environments were also generally found to be a result of retaliation from the harasser, whether or not the respondent made a formal report. Retaliation, or the fear of it, is broadly defined as actions or behaviours that are harassing in nature enacted by one party against another for resisting or challenging the former. Retaliation can precede or follow the filing of a formal complaint, and has been cited as a major reason for the under-reporting of WSH.[32]

> ***On the face of it he acted like he was my friend, but when I needed his support with, you know, various people in the business, he wouldn't give his support... I guess it impacted the stress I experienced because I needed his alliance with me for various transactions we were doing, and he wouldn't give... I think it was some kind of retaliation [after I called him out on the harassment]."***
>
> *Marina*, who was harassed by her supervisor*

20%
of respondents experienced reputational damage

V Reputational damage

Reputational damage, in our research, could be an effect of WSH, or a means to prevent survivors from calling out harassing behaviours (i.e. confronting harassers or filing official complaints against harassers). The retaliation can be instigated by the perpetrators themselves, or by co-workers and others who are closely aligned to the perpetrators.

The eight respondents who experienced reputational damage found that, following their harassment, their co-workers viewed them as untrustworthy, a threat to the team or poorly skilled at coping with stress.

> ***After I told my boss about what happened, then of course the HR will be like, 'Oh, do you need some time off? You know, we could help you, you know if you need some time off to recover.' Then my boss was [like], 'Oh, are you sure you can take this workload? If you cannot, you can split up some to the team'... So the manager may start to give you less and less work. That might also affect [my] career also... because they may feel that [I] can't cope with it because [I] have this emotional baggage that [I] need to get over, you know. You need to recover from it, you need some time. You can't focus on big projects, or you can't do big projects... I mean it's out of good intentions. It's really to help me. But of course, this will restrict your development in some way."***
>
> *Diana*, who was assaulted by a senior colleague from another department. When she had informed her boss about the sexual harassment, her boss, though supportive of her, was hesitant to assign her a normal workload, which impacted her career advancement. This was due to the perception that Diana was unable to cope and produce high-quality work after the sexual harassment.*

[32] Brown and Battle, "Ostracizing targets of workplace sexual harassment".

Some respondents were also subject to victim-blaming comments when co-workers found out about the harassment. This included one respondent being told that she was ruining the perpetrator's life by speaking up about her experiences. Such judgements not only affected these respondents' reputations at work, but fuelled their stress and anxiety.

The respondents experienced perpetrators and/or colleagues close to the perpetrators spreading inaccurate information about the respondents' work ethic or performance. In some cases, the perpetrator even directly threatened the respondent to coerce them into silence.

VI Short-term work effects not influenced by frequency of WSH, and type of harassment, company or industry

A common misconception about harassment is that a single incident of harassment, irrespective of the form, does not produce the same levels of trauma and distress as repeated incidents. Our research found that respondents, regardless of the number of incidents of harassment experienced, faced the same work-related effects, though the intensity varied from individual to individual. This affirms the need for a working environment and organisational climate that does not tolerate sexist behaviours and attitudes, because the occurrence of even one incident of WSH is detrimental to both the employee and the organisation as a whole.

Our research also did not find any correlations between employment type and type of company and/or industry with work-related effects of WSH. We found that WSH occurred across different industries, but was especially rife in companies with a predominantly male management team. More importantly, respondents in these industries experienced similar work-related effects irrespective of their employment type (i.e. full-time staff, intern, part-time staff or self-employed).

Short-term financial impacts

In our research, short-term financial impacts of WSH came in the form of increased expenditure and lower income. The most commonly reported financial impacts were increased healthcare costs (n=12) and increased spending on self-care activities, such as retail therapy and travelling overseas, which respondents engaged in to cope with their trauma (n=7). Four respondents also saw a decrease in their incomes in the short-term following their experience of WSH.

Many WSH survivors are forced to cope with stress and trauma on their own, with little to no help or monetary compensation from their organisations. The financial burdens they bear are forced upon them, and while not drastic in the short run, these costs interfere with their saving plans, financial goals and, ultimately, economic security across their lifespan.

33%
of respondents sought counselling to help cope with their trauma

I Healthcare costs

Several studies have shown that WSH survivors typically experience psychological effects like depression, burnout, anxiety and PTSD.[33] These effects are especially prevalent amongst those who experience higher frequencies of harassment.[34]

As mentioned in the preceding section, survivors who stay in their jobs may see a dip in their performance and morale due to the mental and physical impacts of WSH. This can in turn translate into significant economic costs for them. Survivors may also take time off work or leave their jobs completely for the sake of their well-being, thus potentially compromising their financial security.

Further costs may be incurred when they seek counselling and/or psychiatric treatments to help them manage their mental health. Thirteen of our respondents sought counselling to help cope with their trauma. Five of these reported that they paid for their counselling; the rest were able to access free counselling services from organisations like AWARE or their own institutions (e.g. schools that provide counselling services for their students). Some used their own networks to seek help from friends without charge.

[33] Dan Cassino and Yasemin Besen-Cassino, "Race, threat and workplace sexual harassment: The dynamics of harassment in the United States, 1997–2016", Gender, Work and Organization 26 (2019), onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1111/gwao.12394; Sara Gale, Irina Mordukhovich, Sami Newlan and Eileen McNeely, "The Impact of Workplace Harassment on Health in a Working Cohort", Frontiers in psychology 10 (2019), ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6543006 [34] Ibid

Apart from requiring treatment to manage their trauma, some of our respondents reported visiting the doctor more frequently after experiencing WSH, due to a decline in their overall physical health. A 2015 study on the health effects of workplace harassment in the U.S. also found that survivors of WSH may develop physical symptoms such as stomach problems, ulcers and other pain disorders such as headaches, lower back pain and neck pain.[35] This was the case for six respondents in our research, with one having to pay for her visits to the doctor herself.

> ***"I didn't know what was going on. I thought that I was having fibromyalgia or something, because it was unexplained. Then I was having chest pains, I was having muscle pains and I thought that it was very off-period for me [and] I paid for it myself."***
>
> *Jill*, who was harassed by the supervisor of her department*

a) Lack of access to paid sick leave

The lack of regulatory protection for self-employed persons means that they end up bearing the costs when they suffer workplace-related injuries of all forms in the course of their work. This was the case for our four self-employed respondents. These respondents reported that they tended to continue working even though they were feeling unwell, and tried to avoid taking time off from work, since their incomes were based on how much time they spent working.

33%
of respondents spent more on leisure activities to relieve stress and anxiety

10%
of respondents became more cautious in their selection of jobs, or took fewer shifts, following WSH, resulting in decline in income

II Increased spending on self-care activities as a coping mechanism

In order to relieve their feelings of stress and anxiety, 13 respondents reported spending more money on leisure activities such as going out with friends, doing retail therapy or attending exercise classes. Though these activities often incur relatively low costs, such expenses can compound into a significant amount over time.

III Lower income

As mentioned, survivors of WSH commonly experience heightened stress and anxiety, which compromises their ability to work and consequently their incomes. Four of our respondents, most of whom were either self-employed or part-time workers, found that experiencing WSH made them more cautious in their selection of jobs or led them to take on fewer shifts to avoid perpetrators, resulting in a short-term decline in their incomes.

[35] Jagdish Khubchandani and James Price, "Workplace Harassment and Morbidity Among US Adults: Results from the National Health Interview Survey", Journal of Community Health 40, no. 3 (2015).

Long-term impacts of workplace sexual harassment on women in Singapore

WSH does not only significantly contribute to barriers to career advancement and representation of women in various industries and leadership positions. It also serves as a patriarchal tool that forces women into a state of financial disempowerment.

Immediate work-related impacts, though short-term, need to be taken seriously because they have long-term consequences. Our research has shown that these short-term effects can eventually push respondents to leave their jobs and/or industries entirely, either voluntarily or by force. The AWARE-Ipsos national survey conducted in 2021 similarly found that of respondents who did not report their experiences of WSH, 16% of women and 9% of men quit their jobs.

For most working individuals, the decision to leave one's job or industry requires thorough consideration and planning e.g. towards securing a new job, or perhaps reaching a certain financial goal before leaving. However, for many of the respondents in our research, time was of the essence. Riddled with stress and trauma, these survivors made potentially life-changing career decisions in a relatively short period of time.

The interruption of a survivor's career after experiencing WSH has negative financial effects. Research has shown that women who leave jobs as a result of WSH often move to jobs of lower quality or with lower pay.[36] Such a pay cut impacts their long-term economic security and they likely ultimately retire with less savings than they would have had they been able to stay on in their jobs.

Long-term career impacts

The effects of WSH often intensify over time. They have a long-lasting impact on a survivor's life and career trajectory, as a result of changes to employment status or career path. The most common long-term career impacts our respondents experienced included:

I Job loss;

II A significant amount of time out of work due to difficulty and fear of re-entering the workforce after losing a job;

III Extended periods of low productivity; and

IV Career disruptions.

I Job loss

Fifty-six per cent (or 22) of our respondents quit their jobs following WSH. Of these respondents, 15 quit primarily because of WSH, while the remaining seven quit for a combination of reasons, including WSH. In addition, two of our respondents were fired from their jobs as a result of the harassment.

38%
of respondents quit their jobs primarily because of their experiences of WSH

a) Resigned from job primarily because of WSH

Thirty-eight per cent (or 15) of respondents quit their jobs primarily because of their experience(s) of WSH. Seven respondents reported that the harassment itself was their main reason for resigning; the remaining respondents said that the effects of the harassment, their negative reporting experiences as well as the retaliation they faced pushed them to leave their jobs. For Naomi*, the decision to quit her job, despite a potential promotion, came after she experienced WSH, retaliation from her harasser and other short-term effects.

[36] Mclaughlin, Uggen and Blackstone, "Economic and Career Effects".

> ***The direction for the company was that I would take over officially as [managing director] in Singapore for 2020 and he would then return to [another country] to run [that] office, [but] I guess what also changed was I went from being a very confident, vocal 'boss lady' to one who really started questioning herself. I really questioned if I could actually do this at all. I really felt very very small. I've never felt this way in my life. [He was] micromanaging, gaslighting me... It was [at the] end of last year when I kind of almost made up my mind that I wanted to leave, because of this situation. I mean, this was a role I had... worked very hard for. I had reached a point where I was managing this company of 25 people. I was slated to take over the whole of [region]. I had to leave the people I hired, groomed, mentored."***
>
> *Naomi*, who was harassed by her supervisor while holding a senior managerial position*

This is a common shared experience for many survivors, who report that leaving their jobs felt like the only way to escape a toxic work climate. Indeed, a 2019 survey of 2,219 working individuals conducted in the U.S. found that one in seven women sought a new job assignment, changed jobs, or quit their jobs after experiencing WSH.[37]

18%
of respondents left their jobs for reasons that included WSH

b) Resigned from job for various reasons, including WSH

Eighteen per cent (or seven) of our respondents left their jobs for various reasons, with WSH being one of them.

Notably, all seven respondents mentioned that the harassment they experienced pushed them to leave their jobs earlier than they had intended. They reported that they had initially planned to stay on in their jobs to:

i) Ensure a steady stream of income whilst they planned the switch, or

ii) Ensure they could pay off their loans or bills.

While these respondents cited the influence of other reasons in deciding to quit, our research argues that their decisions to leave their jobs were not entirely voluntary, as they were the outcome of events or conditions that are "largely beyond the control of the individual worker and thus presumably less governed by worker performance".[38] In other words, the respondents altered their long-term career and financial plans. Those who quit their jobs earlier than they had intended lost out not only on bonuses, but on on-the-job training that would have benefitted them in their subsequent jobs.

Our research found that respondents who made the decision to quit their jobs were mostly holding middle-managerial positions at the time of the harassment and did not have significant financial responsibilities (i.e. contributing to the household, paying off debts and/or hospital bills).

2 in 17 (12%)
of respondents who filed official reports against their harassers were dismissed from their jobs

c) Dismissed after reporting WSH

According to the 2021 AWARE-Ipsos survey, 16% of female respondents who did not file a report cited a fear of retaliation from their harassers and/or companies as a reason.

Of the 17 respondents of our study who filed official reports against their harassers, two were dismissed from their jobs. Both held relatively junior positions and had less than a year of working experience at the company. Their perpetrators also held more senior positions than them. Such retaliation from companies is not unheard of—a 2018 study conducted in the U.S. found that 64% of more than 9,000 survivors reported losing their jobs after filing complaints.[39]

These figures confirm the legitimate fear of retaliation frequently felt by survivors of WSH, especially those whose positions are more junior than those of their harassers. Due to this concern, many WSH survivors have the perception that there are no resources available to assist them with WSH and/or discriminatory practices.

[37] UC San Diego Center on Gender Equity and Health, Stop Street Harassment, NORC at the University of Chicago, California Coalition Against Sexual Assault (CALCASA), Promundo and RALIANCE, Measuring #MeToo: A National Study on Sexual Harassment And Assault (Place of publication: UC San Diego Center on Gender Equity and Health, 2019), 31, gehweb.ucsd.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/2019-metoo-national-sexual-harassment-and-assault-report.pdf [38] Brand, "The Far-Reaching Impact of Job Loss", 2. [39] "Employer's Responses to Sexual Harassment", University of Massachusetts Amherst, University of Massachusetts Amherst, accessed on 30 September 2021, umass.edu/employmentequity/employers-responses-sexual-harassment

11 in 24 (46%)
respondents who were unemployed as a result of WSH were either unemployed or not seeking employment at the point of interview

II Significant time spent out of work, due to difficulty and fear of entering the workforce after losing a job

Of the 24 respondents who were unemployed as a result of WSH,[40] 13 found a job after quitting, eight reported that they were still unemployed at the time of the interview, and the remaining three respondents were out of work for reasons including taking a break for family matters.

a) Being unemployed or outside of labour force at the time of interview

The eight respondents who were still unemployed at the point of the interview had been unemployed for an average of 6.5 months. One common reason cited for their unemployment was their limited job options due to their severe fear of male colleagues or supervisors.

Moreover, a common struggle they faced in their job searches was the hesitance and inability (due to perceived stigma around WSH) to explain the gaps in their curriculum vitae (CV) that resulted from their harassment and its aftermath. At the same time, research has shown that potential employers were found to perceive prolonged, unexplained gaps in job applicants' CVs as indications of incompetency and a signal of below-average productivity.[41] This challenge was one reason for survivors' inability to secure jobs and, in some cases, reluctance to even apply for jobs. Survivors also had trouble obtaining references from managers and co-workers.

Experts say that survivors tend not to speak about previous experiences of WSH during job interviews because identifying themselves as victims of WSH might result in stigmatisation, which could have detrimental impacts on their career advancement at an organisation.[42]

This, coupled with the damage that the COVID-19 pandemic inflicted upon the job market, heightened the difficulty respondents faced in seeking employment following their harassment.

We also had three respondents who were not actively seeking employment and had been out of work for an average of one year and six months. Their reasons for taking a break from working included deciding to further their studies and choosing to take some time off to heal from the harassment.

13 in 24 (54%)
of respondents who were unemployed as a result of WSH found a job after quitting

b) Finding a job after a spell of unemployment or withdrawal

Out of 13 respondents who found jobs after quitting, 12 took an average of 3.2 months to find their new jobs; the remaining respondent did not specify the period of time she took to find employment. Compared to respondents who were still unemployed at the point of the interview, these respondents took a significantly shorter time to secure re-employment because:

i) They could not afford a prolonged period without income due to financial obligations, and/or

ii) They had started their own businesses and did not have to go through the hiring process.

After experiencing WSH and leaving their jobs, six of our respondents (all of whom had been full-time employees) became self-employed or freelancers. Notably, two of these respondents reported that they chose self-employment because they did not have the confidence to work in an office setting following the harassment.

[40] Twenty-two respondents quit their jobs and two were let go from their jobs. [41] Hart, "The Penalties For Self-Reporting" [42] Ibid

38%
of respondents stayed on in their jobs after experiencing WSH

III Extended periods of low productivity

Approximately 38% (or 15) of our respondents stayed on in their jobs after experiencing WSH. For these respondents, remaining in the same work environment as their harassers led to persistent feelings of stress and anxiety, impeding their work productivity. As mentioned above, the 15 respondents who remained in their jobs had experienced lower productivity for an average of 4.6 months at the point of the interview; in contrast, lower productivity for the respondents who left their jobs or opted for transfers lasted for an average of 2.8 months. Prolonged periods of lower work productivity could have further career implications on survivors, impacting their overall work performance and potentially resulting in retrenchment.

In our research, four respondents who stayed on in their jobs after experiencing WSH were primary breadwinners. We found that the probability of these respondents quitting their job was 10% less than that of those without significant financial responsibilities. Considering their role as primary breadwinners, it stands to reason that such WSH survivors are more likely to endure harassment to avoid potentially jeopardising their jobs; they may also have chosen not to report the harassment to protect their future job prospects. Instead, these survivors were left with no choice but to cope with their trauma on their own as a way to maintain a steady flow of income.

Data from our research suggests that respondents who (i) had less than one year of formal work experience and/or held junior positions (n=3) or (ii) had over 20 years of work experience and/or held senior positions or higher (n=5) at the time of harassment are least likely to quit their jobs and report their harassment. Those with less than one year of experience were generally being harassed by managers or more senior individuals in their companies, and therefore felt powerless to (successfully) take action against their harassers. Additionally, they did not feel confident enough to look for another job because they were not confident about obtaining employment with minimal work experience. On the other hand, some of those with over 20 years of experience reported that they did not quit their jobs in order to protect the careers for which they had worked hard.

Freelancers and self-employed persons face a similar plight. A common misconception is that these workers can easily turn down opportunities that they do not feel comfortable taking on, given that they have more flexibility and do not work for a single employer. However, a 2018 study showed that the stakes of blowing the whistle on a client can be even more severe for freelancers, since these workers may be dependent on that client's fees to keep their business solvent.[43] This was echoed in our research as well: Three of our self-employed respondents reported that they were reliant on their clients to build their reputations in their respective fields and could not afford to lose gigs.

21%
of respondents were unemployed at the point of the interview

IV Experiencing career disruptions

a) Early career effects

Eight of our respondents were unemployed at the point of the interview: Two of these were in the early stages of their careers while the remaining six had more than five years of working experience.

According to a 2019 analysis of sexual harassment charges filed in the U.S., WSH may be most prevalent in the early and middle portions of workers' careers.[44] For many workers in the early stages of their careers, the need to acquire significant working experience is a priority as this allows them to earn a higher salary in subsequent stages. Some also fear that they may not be able to find another job easily given their scant experience. Given this, it is unsurprising that one of the most devastating economic effects of WSH, particularly during the early and middle stages of a woman's career, is job loss and subsequent income insecurity.[45] The same study found that around 35% of the financial stress experienced by WSH survivors in their early 30s could be attributed to job changes as a result of severe harassment.[46] Thus, survivors who leave their jobs are often knocked off course in their careers, which in turn affects both their career trajectory and financial stability.

[43] "Sexual Harassment is Pervasive Among Self-Employed Creatives", HoneyBook, HoneyBook, 25 January 2018, honeybook.com/risingtide/sexual-harassment-report
[44] Deborah J. Vagins and Mary Gatta, Limiting our Livelihood (Washington, DC: AAUW, 2019), files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED606234.pdf [45] Mclaughlin, Uggen and Blackstone, "Economic and Career Effects" [46] Ibid

28%
of respondents experienced a change in their career paths after WSH

b) Leaving the industries in which they had built their careers

One in four (or 11) of our respondents experienced a change in their career paths after WSH. Of these, eight made the switch involuntarily. The remaining three respondents had already been thinking about leaving their industries when they experienced WSH, and decided to do so after the harassment. That said, all three of these reported that they would have stayed on in their jobs longer if the harassment had not occurred. Reasons commonly cited for making a change in career paths include:

i) Removing the risk of meeting or working with the harasser, and

ii) Being forced to leave due to reputational damage in the industry caused by retaliation from the harasser.

Removing the risk of meeting or working with the harasser again

Of the 11 respondents who had switched industries after experiencing WSH, five mentioned that they did so to avoid bumping into their harassers altogether. One respondent left the industry she had been working in for more than five years to seek out a career that she deemed "safer" because she would be able to avoid her harasser, a prominent figure in the industry.

All five respondents said that it would have been relatively easy to seek out jobs in their original fields, but they did not do so out of fear of dealing with their harassers again, even though they would not be working in the same companies. This was the case especially for respondents who worked in relatively small industries.

Being forced to leave due to reputational damage in the industry caused by retaliation from the harasser

Retaliation from the harasser can extend beyond one's place of work. For two of our respondents, their harassers utilised their positions of power to tarnish the respondents' reputations, ultimately making it difficult for them to seek employment at different companies within the same industries. As mentioned, survivors of WSH already have a difficult time dealing with the stigma surrounding harassment. Having their reputations tarnished further only complicates the process of seeking future employment in an industry.

Such retaliatory action has also been experienced by survivors of WSH globally: An analysis of 3,317 reports of WSH in the U.S. found that more than 70% of survivors experienced retaliation, with 15% of these survivors specifically facing slander or damaged reputations at the hands of their perpetrators or employers.[47] Significantly, more than 100 of these survivors specifically reported that the slander resulted in them being blacklisted in their companies or fields.[48]

Long-term financial impacts

54%
of respondents reported a decrease in income as a result of unemployment or working in lower-paying jobs after WSH

I Decrease in income

Out of our 39 respondents, a total of 21 respondents reported a decrease in income as a result of unemployment or working in lower-paying jobs after WSH.

a) Being unemployed or outside the labour force

Of these 21 respondents, 11 reported that they were not generating any form of income due to being unemployed or outside the labour force. To support themselves, these respondents had to tap into their savings and rely on support from their families and/or partners.

On average, these respondents experienced a monthly average loss of $2,777.[49] This loss of income meant that some were unable to afford basic needs such as groceries, and had to make lifestyle changes, e.g. by minimising leisure activities that were helping them cope with their trauma.

[47] Jasmine Tucker and Jennifer Mondino, Coming Forward Key Trends and Data from the TIME'S UP Legal Defense Fund (Washington: TIME'S UP Legal Defense Fund, 2020), 12, nwlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/NWLC-Intake-Report_FINAL_2020-10-13.pdf [48] Ibid [49] This sum was calculated by dividing the total monthly income of all 11 respondents ($30,552) by 11.

b) Lower-paying jobs

Ten respondents who were employed at the point of the interview experienced a decrease in salary. The reasons for this decrease include:

i) Starting their own business,
ii) Becoming a freelancer,
iii) Switching from full-time to part-time employment,
iv) Starting at a more junior professional position at a new company, and
v) Switching career paths.

This finding echoes the reality of many survivors of WSH who may decide that they are no longer "cut out" for a certain field or type of job, opting instead to take up lower-paying jobs that they believe will not carry the same risk of abuse.

Oftentimes, these lower-paying jobs are in "pink collar" industries, which typically involve care-related work and are historically considered to be "women's work". Indeed, many women do genuinely desire to work in "pink collar" occupations. However, our respondents were typically pushed out of male-dominated fields by discriminatory policies and practices that disadvantage women, such as WSH.

Furthermore, starting in a new industry often results in a significant financial loss as one has to take an entry-level (and thus lower-paying) position. This loss of seniority and standing (and associated pay and promotions) is particularly troublesome for women's economic prospects because it may negatively impact their earnings and promotion opportunities later in their careers.

Cumulative effects of workplace sexual harassment

The long-term impacts of WSH on survivors' careers, such as job loss and change in career trajectory, are indelible. Furthermore, if we understand sexual harassment to be a systemic part of our labour market and a component of larger structural inequality faced by women at work, other forms of systemic inequity, such as occupational segregation and the gender wage gap, should be examined in conjunction with the phenomenon.

I Occupational segregation

Occupational segregation, defined as the over-representation or under-representation of a demographic group in specific types of jobs or industries, occurs due to a host of reasons, including WSH. In fact, there may be a cyclical relationship between occupational segregation and WSH, with the former potentially fueling WSH further.

When sexual harassment occurs in workplaces, women are pushed out of jobs or industries, as discussed above. A survey conducted in the U.S. found that 46% of women who experience WSH either leave their jobs or switch careers.[50] With survivors switching careers or taking on more junior roles after leaving their jobs, the gender imbalance in certain fields grows, while the upper rungs of organisational hierarchies also become more male-dominated. Another survey conducted in the U.S. found that 28% of women in male-dominated fields had experienced WSH, compared to 20% of women in female-dominated fields.[51] The relatively high rates of WSH in male-dominated fields indicates an unfortunate cycle: Women quit their jobs due to sexual harassment and leave behind increasingly male-dominated environments where harassment is even more likely to occur.

[50] Edison Research, Sexual Harassment in the Workplace: A Marketplace Survey (U.S.: Edison Research, 2018), 5, edisonresearch.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Sexual-Harassment-in-the-Workplace-metoo-Women-Men-and-the-Gig-Economy-6.20.18-1.pdf [51] Kim Parker, "Women in majority-male workplaces report higher rates of gender discrimination", Pew Research Center, Pew Research Center, 7 March 2018, pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/03/07/women-in-majority-male-workplaces-report-higher-rates-of-gender-discrimination

The growth of male-dominated fields poses further challenges for everyone: both the organisations and the women who are potential entrants or already employed in those fields. Organisations in such fields fail to tap on women's skills and potential, while women lose out on the wages and status available in those jobs. [52] A 2017 report published in the U.S. estimated that 70% of employers in the construction and skilled trades industries (which are male-dominated) had a hard time finding skilled workers, and 60% of positions in manufacturing alone were unfilled due to the growing skills gap.[53] Although women are willing and able to work in these trades, they represent only 10.8% of construction and building inspectors, 3.1% of first-line supervisors of construction and extraction workers, and 2.2% of pile drivers, operating engineers and other equipment operators.[54]

Thus, WSH serves as a significant contributor to barriers to career advancement and representation of women in various industries and leadership positions.

II Gender wage gap

Singapore's unadjusted gender pay gap has hovered around 16% since 2002.[55] This figure captures gendered differences in productive characteristics including age, education, occupation, industry and years of work experience. Apart from these factors, the career impact of WSH may also contribute to the gender pay gap. As illustrated by the 2021 AWARE-Ipsos survey, 16% of women and 9% of men quit their jobs after experiencing WSH. Further, the 2019 survey conducted in the U.S. showed that 14% of survivors leave their jobs, reduce their hours or take significant time off work to cope with the harassment. Additionally, when women holding senior positions leave their jobs and seek employment in lower-paying jobs following harassment, as research has shown, one natural consequence is a decrease in the median monthly salary of women.

As mentioned, women who leave a job due to sexual harassment often move to a job of lower quality and/or lower pay. In the U.S., 26 out of the 30 highest-paying jobs are male-dominated, while 23 out of the 30 lowest-paying jobs are female-dominated.[56] When women—like our 10 respondents who experienced a decrease in income at their subsequent jobs—are pushed into these lower-paying industries, they undoubtedly suffer negative impacts on their short- and long-term economic security.

[52] Olle Folke, Johanna Rickne, Seiki Tanaka and Yasuka Tateishi, "Sexual Harassment of Women Leaders", Daedalus 149, no. 1 (2020), direct.mit.edu/daed/article/149/1/180/27310/Sexual-Harassment-of-Women-Leaders [53] "Seventy-percent of contractors have a hard time finding qualified craft workers to hire amid growing construction demand, national survey finds", Associated General Contractors of America, Associated General Contractors of America, 29 August 2017, agc.org/news/2017/08/29/seventy-percent-contractors-have-hard-time-finding-qualified-craft-workers-hire-amid [54] "Sexual Harassment and Occupational Segregation: The Impact of Sexual Harassment on Women in the Trades", UCLA Center for the Study of Women, UCLA Center for the Study of Women, 15 October 2020, csw.ucla.edu/2020/10/15/sexual-harassment-and-occupational-segregation-the-impact-of-sexual-harassment-on-women-in-the-trades/#easy-footnote-bottom-4-15414 [55] Rachel Phua, "Women in Singapore earn 6% less than men for similar work: MOM study", Channel NewsAsia, Mediacorp Pte Ltd., 9 January 2020, channelnewsasia.com/singapore/women-singapore-earn-6-per-cent-less-than-men-wage-gap-783556 [56] "Men still pick 'blue' jobs and women 'pink' jobs", The Economist, The Economist Newspaper, 16 February 2019, economist.com/finance-and-economics/2019/02/16/men-still-pick-blue-jobs-and-women-pink-jobs

Recommendation 1:

Develop a national legislation in Singapore that deals with workplace sexual harassment

WSH is a form of gender-based discrimination that inflicts psychological, physical, economic and job-related harm onto survivors. However, as demonstrated in this research, not enough is being done to identify and tackle this issue.

Singapore is making laudable steps towards gender equality, as evidenced by the government's 2020-2021 review of gender issues to "promote equality of opportunities for women, as well as what can be done to protect them from sexual harassment, assault and workplace discrimination".[57] Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong announced in his 2021 National Day Rally speech that new legislation will enshrine existing TAFEP guidelines into law, to protect workers against discrimination on the basis of gender and other categories. We welcome these ongoing efforts by the government to improve the state of gender equality in Singapore.

Along with the above, we strongly recommend developing a national legislation to clearly define WSH and compel employers to protect the safety of their employees. This policy should:

01 Include a legal definition of WSH, equipped with illustrative examples

02 Legally compel employers to prevent and manage WSH

03 Ensure protection and access to recourse for all workers, including freelancers and self-employed individuals

04 Mandate the collection and dissemination of data on WSH (e.g. Protection Orders related to workplace harassment)

LEGALLY DEFINE SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND WORKPLACE SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Unsurprisingly, the lack of clarity around what constitutes sexual harassment has significantly inhibited many from accurately identifying harassment, resulting in severe under-reporting. Individuals are unable to ascertain the boundaries with regards to acceptable and unacceptable conduct, in the workplace and elsewhere. This confusion was reflected in the AWARE-Ipsos survey when only one in five stated that they had experienced WSH, but two in five later responded in the affirmative when specific examples of harassment were described to them.[58]

The definition of sexual harassment and WSH needs to be comprehensive and written in accessible language. Multiple studies have shown that when respondents were provided with examples of harassment as opposed to a mere legal definition, more respondents reported that they had indeed been sexually harassed.[59] Additionally, physical harassment was commonly perceived as the only form of harassment that "mattered" or was "severe enough" to warrant an official complaint. However, as demonstrated in the report, all forms of harassment can have dire and long-lasting effects in survivors' lives. It is thus imperative that a comprehensive legal definition of sexual harassment be included in the legislation.

[57] Ahmad Zhaki Abdullah, "Singapore to embark on a review of women's issues in move towards greater gender equality, leading to White Paper next year", Channel NewsAsia, Mediacorp Pte Ltd., 20 September 2020, channelnewsasia.com/singapore/gender-equality-womens-issues-singapore-to-embark-engagements-596861
[58] "AWARE-Ipsos survey" [59] Sara Charlesworth, Paula McDonald and Somali Cerise, "Naming and claiming workplace sexual harassment in Australia", Australian Journal of Social Issues 46, no. 2 (2016).

ENFORCE EMPLOYER LIABILITY FOR WORKPLACE SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Employers must be held accountable for ensuring and maintaining a safe working environment for all employees—an environment free of all forms of discrimination and harassment, including WSH.

Currently, the Protection from Harassment Act (POHA) and the Penal Code are the only legislations that address harassment. However, they do not impose legal duties on the employer. Additionally, the Tripartite Advisory on Managing Workplace Harassment is not legally enforceable. TAFEP currently has in place the Tripartite Guidelines on Fair Employment Practices which requires employers to put in place proper grievance handling procedures. While employers found to be in violation of these Guidelines would have administrative action taken against them, these Guidelines are not legally enforceable.

The Workplace Safety and Health Act (WSHA) states that employers must protect the safety, health and welfare of their staff. Employers are responsible for ensuring that the work environment is safe and that workers are provided with sufficient instruction, training and supervision so that they can work safely. This suggests that employers are indeed liable and responsible for the safety of their employees. Thus, we recommend expanding the WSHA to include WSH and require that employers take reasonable measures to prevent sexual harassment.

Employers in the U.K., via the the Equality Act 2010, are liable for acts of sexual harassment committed by their employees in the course of their employment, even if these were not approved by or known to the employer.[60] Employers have a defence in this situation if they can show that all reasonable steps had been taken to prevent the harassment from occurring.[61]

PROVIDE PROTECTION FOR ALL WORKERS, REGARDLESS OF EMPLOYMENT TYPE

With the expansion of the gig and on-demand economy, the number of freelancers and self-employed individuals in Singapore's workforce will continue to rise. These individuals typically do not have access to recourse in the event that there is a breach in the provisions of their work contracts. Instead, many have to seek help from the Singapore courts, which is expensive and time-consuming.[62]

In countries such as the U.S., Title VII holds employers responsible for ensuring that they have fair employment practices in place for all workers. That is, the employer will be liable for harassment by non-supervisory employees or non-employees over whom it has control (e.g. independent contractors or customers on the premises) if it knew, or should have known, about the harassment and failed to take prompt and appropriate corrective action.

There is a need to safeguard the well-being of freelancers by ensuring that their working environment is free from discrimination and harassment. We strongly recommend imposing an obligation to do so for all workers, irrespective of employment type.

Minimally, the government should:

i) Upgrade the Tripartite Advisory on Managing Workplace Harassment into legally enforceable Guidelines to clearly communicate the consequences of non-compliance, and

ii) Track the number of companies that have adopted the Tripartite Advisory on Managing Workplace Harassment, to ensure that companies are doing their best to prevent WSH.

[60] "Sexual Harassment In The Workplace, Part 1 – The Equality Act 2010, What Does It Cover And How Does It Work? (UK)", National Law Review, National Law Review, 10 September 2019, natlawreview.com/article/sexual-harassment-workplace-part-1-equality-act-2010-what-does-it-cover-and-how-does [61] Ibid [62] "Greater support proposed for gig economy workers in Singapore", CIPD, CIPD Asia Ltd., 29 November 2017, cipd.asia/news/gig-economy-workers-singapore

Recommendation 2:

Adopt ILO Convention 190 on Violence and Harassment

In 2019, Singapore abstained from a new International Labour Organisation (ILO) convention, which recognised the liability of employers in ensuring that every employee, "regardless of contractual status, enjoys working conditions that are free from violence and harassment".[63] The convention also proposed that ratifying countries would be expected to ensure the effective investigation of cases of workplace violence and harassment.

Singapore was one of six countries that abstained from voting for the convention. (One in three of all eligible ILO members—consisting governments, workers and employers—voted against the convention, abstained or did not vote.[64]) According to an MOM spokesperson, the tripartite partners—comprising MOM, the National Trades Union Congress (NTUC) and Singapore National Employers Federation (SNEF)—found that "the scope of the Convention was cast very broadly".[65] This was because proposed measures under the Convention included domestic violence in workplace risk assessments, which the tripartite partners believed would "expand workplace safety and health well beyond the workplace remit".[66]

In response to a Parliamentary question on Singapore's decision to abstain from voting, then Minister of Manpower Josephine Teo noted the government's policy "to only consider adopting or ratifying conventions which are in Singapore's interests and with which our laws and policies can fully comply", implying that adopting this convention would contravene this.[67] Minister Teo added that the government would nonetheless "continue to partner the ILO to promote decent work", and that it has "put in place practical measures to eliminate workplace violence and harassment".[68]

Minister Teo further posited that workplace harassment is not a "pervasive issue" in Singapore because a "very small percentage" of the complaints TAFEP receives each year has to do with workplace harassment.[69] She said that workplace harassment is "quite specific to certain employers, certain types of work arrangements" and that TAFEP would "follow up" with those cases.[70]

However, as the 2021 AWARE-Ipsos survey has demonstrated, WSH is a prevalent issue faced by workers across various fields, professional positions and employment types. AWARE saw 210 cases of workplace harassment of women in 2020, 54 of which involved WSH. (In comparison, TAFEP handled only 80 cases of workplace harassment between January 2019 and October 2020, a period of almost two years. About one in five were related to sexual harassment.[71])

We strongly recommend that Singapore adopt the ILO convention and extend the measures for those employed by organisations to cover those who fall outside of that category as well. There is an urgent need to recognise the prevalence of workplace (sexual) harassment in the country, mandate that employers foster safe working environments for all, and protect the rights of all workers—all of which fall under the ILO convention.

63 "Disappointing that Singapore abstained from global pact on violence at work", AWARE, AWARE, 28 June 2019, aware.org.sg/2019/06/disappointing-that-singapore-abstained-from-global-pact-on-violence-at-work **64** "Singapore's Abstention From Vote on International Labour Organization's Convention on Workplace Violence and Harassment", Singapore, Parliamentary Debates, Thirteenth Parliament, 5 August 2019, sprs.parl.gov.sg/search/fullreport?sittingdate=5-8-2019. **65** Yuen Sin, "Minister Teo cites "concerns about overreach" in abstaining from voting for ILO treaty against workplace harassment", The Straits Times, Singapore Press Holdings Ltd. Co., 6 July 2019, straitstimes.com/singapore/work-harassment-pact-too-broad-for-spore-to-sign-mom **66** Ibid **67** "Singapore's Abstention From Vote on International Labour Organization's Convention on Workplace Violence and Harassment" **68** Ibid **69** Ibid **70** Ibid **71** "Written Answer by Mrs Josephine Teo Minister for Manpower to PQ on Update on Setting Up of Referral Process for TAFEP with Oversight of Workplace Harassment Cases", Ministry of Manpower, Ministry of Manpower, 4 January 2021, mom.gov.sg/newsroom/parliament-questions-and-replies/2021/0104-written-answer-by-mrs-josephine-teo-minister-for-manpower-to-pq-on-referal-process-for-tafep

Reporting workplace sexual harassment

As illustrated in the preceding section, WSH has significant negative implications on survivors' careers and financial situations. Yet, many are unwilling to file formal reports to HR or the police. In this section, we highlight our respondents' experiences with reporting and explore the factors that influence survivors' decisions to report.

Of our 39 respondents, 22 did not file complaints with official channels[72] for reporting. This is consistent with our experience working with survivors at SACC, where 7 in 10 survivors do not file official complaints. Such rates of under-reporting are also witnessed globally: One study in the U.S. found that 70-90% of women who experience workplace harassment do not report it to their employers; a similar figure was reported in a 2016 study conducted in the U.K.[73]

Amongst our respondents, the most common reasons for not reporting their experiences of WSH include the fear of retaliation (n=17) and the fear of not being believed (n=15). Studies on the reporting behaviours of WSH survivors also suggest that reporting is influenced by:

i) Survivors' perception of organisational tolerance of sexual harassment;[74]

ii) The ability to identify harassment;[75] and

iii) The identity of the perpetrator.[76]

Additionally, research suggests that reporting has the potential to cause harm to survivors as well, because it can "magnify the pernicious effects of the experience of sexual harassment itself".[77] This is especially the case when the reporting process is perceived to be adversarial and hostile, lacking confidentiality, more invested in protecting employers from liability than protecting or assisting complainants, and a potential cause of isolation or reprisal from the workgroup.[78]

Survivors who were subjected to adversarial grievance procedures reported experiencing worse career, mental health and health outcomes than those who did not file reports. According to a 2016 U.K. report, 16% of respondents who reported their cases to their employers were subsequently treated worse.[79] Negative reporting experiences may not only force survivors to leave their jobs, but deter other survivors from filing a report as well.

In our own study, the majority of our respondents' harassers ultimately suffered no consequences or sanctions at the workplace (n=40).[80] Thirty-one of these perpetrators did not suffer consequences because the survivors decided not to report the harassment, while the remainder were not subject to sanctions as complaints were dismissed by official channels of reporting.

[72] In our research, we define this as the organisation's HR department, labour unions, the police, the Tripartite Alliance for Fair and Progressive Employment Practices, the Ministry of Manpower and the Tripartite Alliance for Dispute Management. [73] Trades Union Congress, Still just a bit of banter? Sexual harassment in the workplace in 2016 (London: Trades Union Congress, 2016), tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/SexualHarassmentreport2016.pdf; Ana Avendaño, "Sexual Harassment in the Workplace: Where Were the Unions?", Labor Studies Journal 43, no. 6 (2018). [74] Louise F. Fitzgerald, Michele J. Gelfand and Fritz Drasgow, "Measuring Sexual Harassment: Theoretical and Psychometric Advances", Basic and Applied Social Psychology 14, no. 4 (1995). [75] Louise F. Fitzgerald, Vicki J. Magley, Fritz Drasgow and Craig R. Waldo, "Measuring Sexual Harassment in the Military: The Sexual Experiences Questionnaire (SEQ—DoD)", Military Psychology 11, no. 3 (1999).3 [76] Maria K Friborg, Jørgen V Hansen, Per T Aldrich, Anna P Folker, Susie Kjær, Maj Britt D Nielsen, Reiner Rugulies, Ida E H Madsen, "Workplace sexual harassment and depressive symptoms: a cross-sectional multilevel analysis comparing harassment from clients or customers to harassment from other employees amongst 7603 Danish employees from 1041 organizations", BMC Public Health 17, no. 675 (2017), ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5611567 [77] Krista Lynn Minnotte and Elizabeth M. Legerski, "Sexual harassment in contemporary workplaces: Contextualizing structural vulnerabilities", Sociology Compass 13, no. 12 (2019). [78] Paula McDonald, Sara Charlesworth and Tina Graham, "Developing a framework of effective prevention and response strategies in workplace sexual harassment", Asia Pacific Journal of Human Resources 53, no. 1 (2015). [79] Trades Union Congress, Still just a bit of banter? [80] The number of perpetrators is greater than that of survivors in our study as some of our respondents were harassed by more than one person at work.

Reporting experiences

I Filing a complaint with HR

Out of the 17 respondents in our study who reported their experiences of harassment, 12 had filed official complaints with HR. Seven of these respondents had a negative experience with HR, including:

i) Being discouraged from filing police reports to protect the companies' reputations;

ii) Being pressured to settle the harassment internally for the same reason; or

iii) Having their experiences dismissed—i.e. minimised or not believed.

These are troubling findings. Within organisations, HR is meant to function as a neutral entity that ensures the safety of workers and conducts necessary investigations into any allegations filed.

> ***They wanted to investigate what happened but the HR director that spoke to me on the phone... she actually said she didn't believe what I said. She said 'Oh, you're the only one that talked about it' and she wanted me to explain myself in front of a committee... and she didn't allow me to bring anyone with me. And over the phone, I said, 'You're really making me feel very uncomfortable by saying that I'm the only one. Yes, I'm the only one that reported but there are people who also... they were touched and they choose not to say anything because they were bonded and they just wanted to get over with the bond period.'"***
>
> *Jill*, who was harassed by the supervisor of her department. When she reported her harassment to HR, the HR staff dismissed her experience and did not take into account the trauma inflicted by her harasser.*

For respondents who filed a formal complaint against their perpetrators, the majority of cases resulted in the perpetrators facing no sanctions for the harassment they committed (n=9). It can be inferred that this was because of the harassers' relatively higher positions of power in their companies (as the majority of them were the respondents' bosses or seniors). This also suggests that the respondents who did file reports had their experiences dismissed by the official channels of reporting, and were made to cope with the harassment by themselves.

II Filing a police report

In our research, nine respondents filed police reports. Majority of the cases reported to the police involved physical forms of WSH; some involved online and verbal sexual harassment. This contrasts with the cases reported to HR, which typically involved verbal sexual harassment. This difference might have arisen due to the perception held by respondents and authorities that physical sexual harassment is the more "severe" form of harassment, and that survivors of physical harassment will have a higher chance of being believed and taken seriously.

Five respondents had filed official complaints to both HR and the police. Of these, three filed their complaints simultaneously while the other two filed complaints to HR first, followed by the police. These respondents typically filed a police report after they went to HR to gain an additional sense of personal safety.

> ***[When] I made the report, it was to a male police officer... I don't think they really understand how women feel... he was just saying, 'Oh, sorry ah, miss. Maybe because [the perpetrator] is a Westerner, so to them it's normal.' And I just feel like it's very dismissive... I didn't actually get, like, a formal update from the police. When I left, they did say they would update me, but they didn't."***
>
> *Melissa*, who was harassed by her boss. She filed a report with the police after higher-ups at her company failed to take action on her internal complaint. Even then, she had a negative experience with the authorities.*

Reasons for not reporting

I Fear of retaliation

In our research, fear of retaliation from the harasser and/or the company was the most commonly cited reason for not reporting harassment (n=17). Out of these respondents, 12 reported that the perpetrator was someone more senior than them, and had the ability to gravely affect the respondent's reputation, work environment and career progression, even if they chose to leave the company. The inhibiting effect of the fear of retaliation on reporting was also observed in a 2019 survey of over 4,000 young people in the U.K., which found that 25% of young women would be reluctant to report WSH for fear of losing their jobs; 19% also said that they would be reluctant to report WSH for "fear of being given fewer hours".[81]

These fears are not unfounded: Of the 17 respondents who filed official complaints, five experienced retaliation from their organisations and/or perpetrators, which ultimately resulted in four of them leaving their job. For instance, Naomi*, one of the five respondents who had experienced retaliation, reported that in the months after she complained to her boss, her work environment "became way, way, way more hostile. Deadlines were shortened from what would normally be two weeks to three days".

Such retaliation has been experienced by other working women in Singapore, as exemplified by a WSH survivor who alleged on social media in 2020 that she had been issued a "soft warning" from her employers at the National University of Singapore (NUS) and the East Asian Institute (EAI) after filing a report against her harasser.[82] She stated that she was also "admonished" by EAI to stay away from other female colleagues who had similar experiences of harassment. It is unsurprising, then, that many survivors choose to remain silent about their harassment.

Further, the 2020 review of over 3,000 reports of WSH in the U.S. found that 72% of respondents who filed reports against their perpetrators experienced some form of retaliation, the most common being retrenchment.[83] Other forms of retaliation included being given poor performance evaluations, having work products or behaviour scrutinised, or being treated poorly at work in other ways.[84] Research also found that while the fear of retaliation was a major reason for the under-reporting of WSH for almost all survivors of harassment, it was especially so for minority groups.[85] Migrant workers, for example, were fearful of threats of termination and deportation as a result of reporting harassment.[86]

II Fear of not being believed

Apart from the fear of retaliation impeding survivors from reporting, 15 respondents also cited that they feared that no one would believe them. Out of these respondents, 10 reported that they were relatively new to their companies and had been working there for less than five years. This relatively short duration of employment, coupled with their harassers' relatively senior positions, further deepened these survivors' perceptions that their word would not be taken seriously or that they might even be blamed for the harassment.

The respondents further expounded that their harassers being well-liked by other staff made it even more difficult for them to feel safe and confident in reporting the harassment. This ties in to our 11 respondents' experiences of hostility and ostracism after they filed reports against their harassers.

[81] "1 in 4 young women fear being fired for reporting sexual harassment", Young Women's Trust, Young Women's Trust, 14 October 2019, youngwomenstrust.org/media-centre/1-in-4-young-women-fear-being-fired-for-reporting-sexual-harassment [82] Charlotte (@Chary19513), "I am Charlotte, current staff at East Asian Institute, National University of Singapore. I was sexually harassed by former Director Zheng Yongnian in 2018...", Twitter, 7 August 2020, mobile.twitter.com/Chary19513/status/1291765279668580353?s=19 [83] Tucker and Mondino, Coming Forward [84] Ibid [85] Brown and Battle, "Ostracizing targets" [86] Elizabeth Kristen, Blanca Banuelos and Daniela Urban, "Workplace Violence and Harassment of Low-Wage Workers", Berkeley Journal of Employment and Labor Law 36, no. 1 (2015).

Three respondents mentioned that a lack of evidence contributed to their perception that they would not be believed, should they choose to file a report. This was the case for Eileen*, a respondent who experienced WSH outside of her office, without any witnesses present:

> ***The reason why I didn't report it was because this was done in a bar. Right? It was a bar at 3 or 4 o'clock in the afternoon. Even the bartender who was serving me a glass of water at that point in time was turned away, getting the glass of water, so nobody saw it. It would be my word against his. So, if it came to that, I don't think I would have much of a case."***
>
> *Eileen*, who was harassed by her colleague at a bar during a work-related meeting*

Research has associated the fear of not being believed with poor organisational practice and work environments.[87] In organisations that seem to tolerate harassment and broader gender inequality, survivors' experiences are often dismissed while harassers are protected so as not to jeopardise a company's reputation.[88] Many survivors are also treated unjustly upon disclosure to HR, while priority is placed upon protecting those in power.[89] The impact of consistently poor organisational climates on the persistence of WSH will be discussed further in Section 3 (Organisational characteristics that allow WSH to persist).

III Risk of negative stereotyping

Negative stereotypes that harm survivors of sexual violence include that they are "trouble-makers", "weak", "over-sensitive" and "unable to take a joke".

Seven of our respondents cited their fear of being negatively perceived and jeopardising their careers as being a reason for not reporting their harassment. A 2019 study on the penalties of reporting found that women often choose not to report WSH, or even consciously identify unwanted sexual interactions as WSH, in part to avoid a perceived stigma that would come with denoting oneself as a target of sexual harassment.[90]

> ***For as long as I worked there, no one talked about it, no one spoke to HR. If anyone said anything, they were classified as being 'complaining'... I'd seen that in real life, because when I would go out for drinks with my bosses, for example, they would talk about women who had said things in this negative light... Which then, you know, messaged to me that I shouldn't say anything."***
>
> *Marina*, who was harassed by her supervisor. She was discouraged from filing a report after hearing first-hand the comments from her colleagues about other women who had filed complaints against their harassers.*

IV Reporting not being "worth it"

Four respondents did not file reports because they did not think that undergoing the reporting process would be "worth it". It is worth noting that three of these respondents were students who had taken on temporary, part-time jobs to support themselves. Having minimal job security, temporary workers have a compelling economic interest in maintaining silence in the face of harassment, rendering them both extremely vulnerable to WSH and powerless to combat it.[91]

[87] McLaughlin, Uggen and Blackstone, "Sexual Harassment, Workplace Authority" [88] Ibid [89] "Tackling sexual harassment at UN 'on the back burner', says former executive", The Guardian, Guardian News & Media Limited, 22 December 2020, theguardian.com/global-development/2020/dec/22/sexual-harassment-at-un-on-the-back-burner-says-former-executive [90] Hart, "The Penalties For Self-Reporting" [91] Lindsey Joyce Chamberlain, Martha Crowley, Daniel Tope and Randy Hodson, "Sexual Harassment in Organizational Context", Work and Occupations 35, no. 3 (2008), researchgate.net/publication/251759482_Sexual_Harassment_in_Organizational_Context

Interestingly, research has also found that employees holding precarious or temporary jobs feel less invested in those forms of work than employees engaged in career-oriented employment. Where reporting sexual harassment was concerned, they may feel that it is simply not "worth it" because the work itself is not "worth it".[92]

Personal perceptions of WSH also shape an individual's propensity to report the harassment, in that some survivors choose to file official reports only when the harassment is perceived to be "severe" or pervasive, and when the harasser is a co-worker rather than a supervisor.[93] In other words, survivors who are subjected to non-physical forms of harassment by their peers may not feel that filing complaints is "worth it" because of the misconception that such forms of harassment do not have major detrimental effects.

> ***To me, touching is harassment, but there's other more serious things, so if [survivors] actually, like, go through a more serious kind of harassment, they should go to the police. I mean, they should go hospital and police."***
>
> *Carrie*, who was harassed by her supervisor and chose not to file an official complaint*

A study on WSH reporting behaviours also found that some survivors exhibited higher intention to report hostile environment sexual harassment (i.e. WSH that creates an intimidating, abusive working environment) as opposed to quid pro quo sexual harassment (i.e. pressure to perform sexual favours in exchange for some type of employee benefit, such as a promotion, raise or job retention).[94] Perpetrators of the latter are usually senior members of the workplace, which may explain the greater hesitation to report.

V Timing of harassment

Two respondents in our study who had experienced WSH towards the end of their notice periods faced difficulties in reporting the harassment because HR no longer regarded them as staff. These respondents were told that they were no longer protected under their companies' policies. Without such employer liability, they were forced to resort to self-managed tactics to cope after their experiences of WSH.

VI Working experience and stage of career

Targets of WSH are typically young or in junior positions, including interns, who fear that their reputations would be damaged and that they would experience significant difficulty finding jobs if they report harassment.[95]

As mentioned, our study found that respondents with less than one year (n=28) and over five years of work experience (n=2) were least likely to report their harassment. Those with less than one year of experience were generally harassed by managers or more senior individuals in their companies, and therefore felt powerless to take action against their harassers.

On the other hand, respondents with over five years of experience did not want to report the harassment in order to protect the careers that they had already built. Women holding such positions are potential targets for sexual harassment arguably because they may have more to lose than more junior women, in terms of workplace status and the perceived legitimacy of their leadership. Thus, while our general data revealed that most respondents did not file official complaints, it's notable that out of the eight respondents holding positions higher than middle management, five did not report the harassment.

[92] Laura K. Brunner and Maryanne Dever, "Work, Bodies and Boundaries: Talking Sexual Harassment in the New Economy", Gender, Work & Organisation 21, no. 5 (2014). [93] Anna-Maria Marshall, "Idle Rights: Employees' Rights Consciousness and the Construction of Sexual Harassment Policies", Law & Society Review 39, no. 1 (2005). [94] Lu-Ming Tseng, "Blowing the whistle on workplace sexual harassment: Examining the role of harasser status and types of sexual harassment", Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: An International Journal 33, no. 6 (2014). [95] "Tackling sexual harassment at UN"

While the dynamics involved in reporting WSH may differ across levels of experience, all employees, no matter their positions, are vulnerable to WSH. Companies therefore need to develop policies that provide effective protection and support for all employees.

Factors that influence the decision to report

I Reactions of first responders

In the context of sexual violence, first responders are individuals to whom survivors first disclose their harassment and/or assault. Research has repeatedly shown that receiving a supportive response upon disclosure can help survivors cope both in the short and long term, while negative reactions can worsen survivors' trauma.[96] In addition, reactions to initial disclosure attempts can influence survivors' decisions to file reports, where negative responses from first responders have been found to be a barrier to reporting.[97]

In our research, 10 respondents reported speaking informally to senior staff members in their organisations about the harassment; another four spoke informally to their colleagues. Fourteen also spoke to their family and/or friends outside of work.[98]

a) First responders at work

Of the 10 respondents who spoke to a boss or senior staff member informally about the harassment, seven spoke directly to their line managers, while the rest spoke to senior staff members outside of their department.

Those who chose to speak to their managers did so for reasons that included:

i) Having a good impression of their managers;

ii) Already having established relationships with their managers; or

iii) A lack of formal reporting procedure (as far as respondents were aware), which meant that speaking informally to their managers seemed like the only way to bring the harassment to light internally.

The three respondents who chose to speak informally to senior staff outside of their departments did so for the following reasons:

i) Their harassers were their managers;

ii) The senior staff member was the only person available to them at that point in time (e.g. if the harassment had occurred on a business trip); or

iii) They did not have faith in their management teams due to negative prior experiences.

According to a 2012 study on workplace authority conducted in the U.S., supervisors' advanced education and training likely increase their overall legal consciousness and understanding of sexual harassment.[99] As a result, supervisors are often responsible for fostering professional work environments free of harassment and discrimination, and may be more likely to recall sexualised workplace interactions and to label such experiences as harassment. Survivors may thus seek validation and acknowledgment of their experiences by speaking informally to supervisors.

[96] Courtney E. Ahrens, Rebecca Campbell, N. Karen Ternier-Thames, Sharon M. Wasco and Tracy Sefl, "Deciding Whom to Tell: Expectations and Outcomes of Rape Survivors' First Disclosures", Psychology of Women Quarterly 31, no. 1 (2007).; Lucy Maddox, The role of shame, self-blame and PTSD in attrition of rape cases: victim and police perspectives (D.Clin.Psy. Thesis) (London: University College London, 2008), discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/1444319/1/U591621.pdf; Sarah E. Ullman, Talking about Sexual Assault: Society's Response to Survivors (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2010). In Dehnad Hakimi, Thema Bryant-Davis, Sarah E. Ullman, and Robyn L. Gobin, "Relationship Between Negative Social Reactions to Sexual Assault Disclosure and Mental Health Outcomes of Black and White Female Survivors", Pschological Trauma 10, no. 3 (2018), ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5468506; Scott D. Easton, Leia Y. Saltzman and Danny G. Willis, "Would You Tell Under Circumstances Like That?: Barriers to Disclosure of Child Sexual Abuse for Men", Psychology of Men & Masculinity 15, no. 4 (2014). In Scott D. Easton, "Childhood Disclosure of Sexual Abuse and Mental Health Outcomes in Adulthood: Assessing Merits of Early Disclosure and Discussion", Child Abuse & Neglect 93 (2019), ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6545143 [97] Courtney E. Ahrens, "Being Silenced: The Impact of Negative Social Reactions on the Disclosure of Rape", American Journal of Community Psychology 38 (2006), ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1705531 [98] In some instances, some respondents spoke to people both within and outside of their workplaces. [99] McLaughlin, Uggen and Amy Blackstone, "Sexual Harassment, Workplace Authority"

Informal responses from colleagues or higher-ups[100]	Filed a formal complaint		Did not file a formal complaint	
	Spoke to higher-up	Spoke to colleague	Spoke to higher-up	Spoke to colleague
Supportive	3	0	1	1
Unsupportive	1	1	5	2
Total no. of respondents	**5**		**9**	

Of the 10 respondents who spoke informally to their bosses or senior staff members in the organisations, four received supportive responses which included their managers offering to bring the harassment up with HR on the survivors' behalf, or to speak to the harassers. The remaining respondents were unsupported and discouraged from filing formal complaints (e.g. their managers were dismissive or lackadaisical in escalating the case to higher-ups or HR). Out of the six respondents who were discouraged from filing an official complaint, only one eventually proceeded with filing the complaint.

Notably, half (or three) of the respondents who received unsupportive responses had spoken to female bosses or senior staff members. These respondents expressed shock at the lack of empathy towards their disclosures; they had expected that, as women themselves, these managers would likely understand their plights. Disappointingly, these experiences are not unique: Several respondents who did not report also mentioned that they chose not to do so because their female managers were typically dismissive of cases of workplace harassment and discrimination. Many women, especially those working in male-dominated industries, often (consciously or not) accept masculine cultural norms and act like "one of the boys", and resultantly contribute to the normalisation of such a culture.[101] Women holding leadership positions may deem harassment and discrimination to be "part and parcel" of climbing the corporate ladder (though such thinking should not excuse their dismissal of such cases).

With reference to the table above, it is apparent that informal responses from colleagues and higher-ups significantly influence respondents' decisions to make formal complaints. This is demonstrated by the high percentage of respondents who received negative responses from their colleagues and/or higher-ups and did not end up filing formal complaints against their harassers.

Additionally, seven respondents did not speak to anyone informally about the harassment. Generally, the reasons most commonly cited for not speaking to anyone informally about harassment were sexist or toxic work environments (n=5) and male-dominated management (n=7). None of these respondents filed a report against their harassers. This suggests that if respondents do not feel comfortable talking about the harassment informally in their workplaces, they are unlikely to move forward and file formal complaints against their harassers. This also further emphasises the importance of an organisational climate that is supportive of survivors of discrimination and harassment, and is intolerant of acts that perpetuate gender inequality.

Therefore, it is important for employers to encourage survivors to come forward by fostering a work environment that adopts a zero-tolerance approach to WSH and is supportive of survivors.

[100] I.e. responses that respondents received from their colleagues and higher-ups when they disclosed the harassment they experienced [101] Paula McDonald and Sara Charlesworth, "Workplace sexual harassment at the margins", Work Employment & Society 30, no. 1 (2015).

b) First responders outside of work

As shown in the table below, our respondents were similarly more likely to file formal complaints about harassment when they received supportive, positive responses from friends and family.

Responses from friends and family	Filed a formal complaint	Did not file a formal complaint
Supportive	5	2
Unsupportive	0	7

This suggests that support systems outside the workplace are also important in influencing respondents' reporting decisions. That said, it seems that responses from respondents' informal support systems at work were overall more influential than responses outside of work in encouraging respondents to file formal complaints.

II Access to HR and/or other official channels of reporting

Approximately 31% of our respondents did not have a HR person or department in their workplaces. Out of these 12 respondents, only two filed official complaints against their harassers, suggesting that the presence of and access to HR influences a survivor's propensity to report WSH.

According to a 2015 U.S. study on workplace violence faced by low-wage workers, restaurant workers said that the absence of a HR department at their workplaces meant that they did not know how to report violence, or whether they even could, due to unawareness about formal policies or grievance procedures. These workers had no other employees with management authority to whom they could report incidents of harassment perpetrated by their managers.[102]

Aside from the absence of reporting channels and uncertainty around how to file complaints, a lack of access to HR and/or other channels of reporting is sometimes interpreted as a lack of protection for survivors. This was the case for the seven respondents in our study who did not speak to anyone about their harassment, due to their fear of retaliation or other negative outcomes in their personal and professional lives. Five of those respondents did not even have access to HR and/or official channels of reporting, anti-harassment policies or official grievance procedures due to the nature of their work.

[102] Kristen, Banuelos and Urban, "Workplace Violence"

Recommendation 3:

Mandate that employers create a well-defined sexual harassment policy that includes examples of prohibited behaviour

Twelve of our respondents reported that the organisations in which they were harassed did not have a HR person or department. Meanwhile, 32 respondents were unaware of whether their organisations had sexual harassment policies in place, or if so, what they were.

> ***No, there wasn't any protocol in that company. I [was the HR person] but I did not [deal with any sort of complaints about harassment while at the company] ... because actually that company is really quite new. When I joined them they only have, like, three people."***
>
> *Carrie*, who was harassed by her supervisor and did not report the harassment*

There is currently no data available on the proportion of companies in Singapore with dedicated HR departments or policies for tackling workplace discrimination.

AWARENESS

Employers should establish that their organisations have zero tolerance towards behaviours, such as WSH, that threaten a safe working environment. A well-defined WSH policy should include the following elements:

01 Examples of behaviours and actions that constitute sexual harassment,

02 A department or team responsible for handling such cases,

03 A protocol that details the steps individuals can take when filing complaints,

04 A comprehensive grievance procedure that ensures confidentiality,

05 Protection measures, and

06 Steps for remediation.

Our research showed that respondents experienced work-related impacts as a result of both WSH and the reporting process. When survivors distrust grievance procedures, the probability of them filing reports decreases, which only adds to the problem of under-reporting of WSH.[103] Our findings proved that the adversarial grievance process itself can harm survivors significantly, making it more likely that women will leave their jobs and ultimately reducing female management. There is, thus, an urgent need for organisations to ensure reporting processes that are comprehensive, just and conducted by individuals who have gone through gender-sensitivity training and are equipped to deal with the complexities of WSH.

[103] Frank Dobbin and Alexandra Kalev, "The promise and peril of sexual harassment programs", Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences 116, no. 25 (2019), researchgate.net/publication/333604170_The_promise_and_peril_of_sexual_harassment_programs

Microsoft, for example, revamped its HR practices after an email chain complaining about discrimination and harassment spread through the company. It is working towards employing HR professionals to enhance their competency in dealing with complaints of harassment.[104] Microsoft also created a new Employee Advocacy Team that will focus exclusively on assisting employees going through workplace investigations, including helping employees understand the process, guiding them through investigations and following up after investigations are finished to check in on the employees involved. This is coupled with the establishment of new guidelines for discipline for bad behaviour.

Merely developing a corporate policy and preventive mechanism on WSH is insufficient—all employees need to be educated on WSH and the measures and policies aimed at tackling this issue. Thus, we also recommend that these policies be actively communicated to both new and current employees on a regular basis so as to ensure a level of awareness amongst employees about the expectations of maintaining a safe working environment.

Without knowledge and awareness of what sexual harassment constitutes and the way it plays out in organisations, reporting is less likely to occur, thereby fueling gender inequalities.

EDUCATION

Education on workplace harassment behaviours is also pertinent in fostering a positive organisational climate. As education involves the nurturing of "critical thinking and understanding", and training involves learning to comply with "black/white rules and regulations", the two should be used in tandem to guide decision-making and institutional processes.[105]

Education on WSH is needed because the general public remains relatively unaware of major aspects of the frequency, consequences and dynamics of sexual violence, despite recent sociopolitical movements such as the #MeToo movement.[106]

Such initiatives are already being implemented in countries like Canada, where the Justice Partnership and Innovation Programme (JPIP) funds campaigns to better inform workers about their rights and resources if they are sexually harassed, particularly targeting hospitality, service and male-dominated industries where WSH is rife.

[104] Jordan Novet, "Microsoft is revamping its HR practices after an email chain complaining about discrimination and harassment spread through the company", CNBC, CNBC, 15 April 2019, cnbc.com/2019/04/15/microsoft-ceo-nadella-announces-new-hr-investigation-policies.html [105] Jennifer J. Freyd and Alec M. Smidt, "So you want to address sexual harassment and assault in your organization? Training is not enough; Education is necessary", Journal of Trauma & Dissociation 20, no. 5 (2015). [106] Ibid

Recommendation 4:

Require employers to implement compulsory and regular gender-sensitive training in the workplace

Organisational culture has been identified as a significant contributor to not only the prevalence of WSH, but the dismissal of complaints as well. In our study, the majority of respondents had knowledge of other cases of WSH within their organisations at the time of their own harassment. This implies that work environments whose safety is not well-maintained will likely see rampant cases of WSH—and, consequently, high turnover rates, as those who experience harassment typically end up leaving their jobs. Furthermore, as demonstrated in the report, managers and senior staff in the company are typically the first point of contact for most respondents who wish to make reports or to speak informally about the harassment in confidence. Thus, it is paramount that all employees, especially those in managerial roles, are properly trained and actively work towards establishing environments that are inclusive and conducive for work.

TRAINING SHOULD BE MANDATORY

Some scholars posit that making WSH training mandatory may not be effective, as it may lead employers to only carry out such interventions as a symbolic effort to avoid legal liability. In the U.S., the Equal Employment Opportunities Commission (EEOC) requires that employers provide effective training, on top of preventive or corrective opportunities, for them to be relieved from liability.[107]

Mandatory training has already been implemented in countries such as South Korea and the U.K. In 2018, South Korea made new amendments to the Labor Standards Act (LSA) in 2018 involving mandated annual sexual harassment prevention training.[108] In the U.K., the #ThisIsNotWorking campaign, which demands "a new, easily enforceable legal duty requiring employers to take all reasonable steps to protect workers from sexual harassment and victimisation", saw the introduction of penal consequences for employers that do not comply with measures, such as mandatory training, that are required to prevent harassment.[109]

TRAINING SHOULD COVER ALL EMPLOYEES, CONSULTANTS, INTERNS AND VOLUNTEERS

Some have observed that universal training, which covers "all sites and all hierarchical levels", has been beneficial in tackling the problem.[110] It allows for a change in organisational cultures and can lead to greater recognition and understanding of sexual harassment.[111]

This is already the case for a few provinces in Canada, such as New Brunswick, where employers are obliged to implement training programmes for each employee and each supervisor responsible for an employee, in respect of the codes of practice established.

[107] Mark V. Roehling and Jason Huang, "Sexual harassment training effectiveness: An interdisciplinary review and call for research", Journal of Organisational Behavior 39, no. 2 (2018). [108] "South Korea's New Workplace Harassment Laws", Ogletree Deakins, Ogletree Deakins, 31 October 2019, ogletree.com/international-employment-update/articles/november-2019/south-korea/2019-10-31/south-koreas-new-workplace-harassment-laws [109] "This is Not Working – the Answer? One Consultation, Please (UK)", National Law Review, National Law Review, 7 August 2019, natlawreview.com/article/not-working-answer-one-consultation-please-uk [110] Myrtle P. Bell, Mary E. Mclaughlin and Jennifer M. Sequeira, "Discrimination, Harassment, and the Glass Ceiling: Women Executives as Change Agents", Journal of Business Ethics 37 (2002). [111] McDonald, Charlesworth and Graham, "Developing a framework"

TRAINING SHOULD BE CONDUCTED REGULARLY

Previous studies have indicated that regular training sessions help combat WSH, especially when conducted in the long term.[112] Multiple sessions may also be more useful in combating WSH than single sessions, as the latter do not allow sufficient time to address the nuances of sexual harassment and sexual assault.[113] A 2010 study on the effectiveness of training practices found that providing a myriad of post-training activities, such as refresher courses to maintain the knowledge and skills gained in training, led to a lower perceived frequency of WSH complaints.[114] Research also suggests that such training should be conducted during induction, in compliance management programmes and before employees depart on international assignments.[115]

WHEREVER POSSIBLE, TRAINING SHOULD BE CONDUCTED IN PERSON

According to a 2016 report by the EEOC in the U.S., training that was conducted in person and lasted longer than four hours produced a more positive effect; conversely, short and virtual training had less of an impact.[116] Training that required interaction between participants also worked better than straight lectures. Participants learned more from training led by their supervisors or external experts, and less when the leader was a colleague without direct authority over their day-to-day work. Additionally, past research on the effectiveness of sexual harassment training demonstrates that such training contributes to the prevention or reduction of sexual harassment when conducted in accordance with science-based training principles, and when the organisational context is supportive of the training efforts.[117]

Several established companies are also working towards incorporating regular and compulsory training to foster safer and more conducive workplace environments. Bloomberg, for example, announced new mandatory sexual harassment training in early 2020, following "highly positive feedback" from the more than 1,200 participants who took its optional harassment training in 2019. This mandatory training goes hand-in-hand with the company's zero tolerance policy.[118]

It is our strong opinion that such training will empower employees to call out unacceptable behaviour, such as WSH.

[112] Bell, Mclaughlin and Sequeira, "Discrimination, Harassment, and the Glass Ceiling" [113] Freyd and Smidt, "So you want to address sexual harassment" [114] Elissa L. Perry, Carol T. Kulik, Jennifer Bustamante and Frank D. Golom, "The impact of reason for training on the relationship between "Best Practices" and sexual harassment training effectiveness", Human Resource Development Quarterly 21, no. 2 (2010). [115] Kirti Nandavanam Shivakumar, "Prevention of "Sexual Harassment" at the Workplace-Can Training Help?", SIBM Pune Research Journal XIX (2020), researchgate.net/publication/339507834_Prevention_of_Sexual_Harassment_at_the_Workplace-Can_Training_Help [116] Chai R. Feldblum and Victoria A. Lipnic, Select Task Force on the Study of Harassment in the Workplace (Washington, DC: U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2016), eeoc.gov/select-task-force-study-harassment-workplace [117] Roehling and Huang, "Sexual harassment training effectiveness" [118] Lauren Hirsch, "Bloomberg's company announces new mandatory sexual harassment training", CNBC, CNBC, 25 Februrary 2020, cnbc.com/2020/02/25/bloomberg-lp-announces-mandatory-sexual-harassment-training.html

Recommendation 5:

Increase the procedural satisfaction of those reporting sexual harassment

Due to the lack of any legal requirements for training or internal policies against WSH, many of our respondents had negative experiences of reporting harassment internally.

Thirteen respondents said that their workplaces did not have a HR person or department to whom they could report the harassment, and as a result, the cases that were formally reported were often handled inappropriately and insensitively.

Currently, TAFEP suggests that employees who have grievances should have channels to file complaints or seek advisory, preferably within a specific period of time, to their supervisors or HR departments. TAFEP will assist these employees even after a period of time has passed since the incident. The supervisors or HR departments should then conduct investigations and come up with decisions within a certain period of time from the time of complaint.[119] We understand that the requirement for complaints to be filed early may stem from the need to address workplace harassment as quickly as possible, and/or to not render any ensuing investigations more difficult by letting too much time lapse between the experience of workplace harassment and the report-filing. However, as aforementioned, survivors often do not report their experiences of sexual harassment immediately (if at all), because they fear career and financial impacts. Moreover, based on our research and experience working with survivors at WHDA and SACC, survivors require time to process the overwhelming feelings of shock, anxiety, guilt and shame after experiencing sexual violence. In order to acknowledge the myriad reasons why survivors may not file reports immediately, we suggest that TAFEP either clearly indicate the reasons for recommending a specific period of time, or remove the suggested time period entirely.

In 2019, it was reported that 1,200 employers in Singapore had signed the Tripartite Standard on Grievance Handling, covering 520,000 workers (or one in seven of all workers in Singapore).[120] These employers made up only 0.4% of all business entities in Singapore in 2019.[121] While this research does not assume that the remaining companies do not have policies put in place, there is still no guarantee that they do: In response to a 2019 Parliamentary question, then Senior Parliamentary Secretary for Manpower Low Yen Ling said that the Ministry was also not tracking the number of companies that implement the measures suggested in the Tripartite Advisory on Managing Workplace Harassment as advisories are "meant to provide further guidance for employers and employees".[122]

[119] Tripartite Alliance for Fair & Progressive Employment Practices, Grievance Handling Handbook (Singapore: Tripartite Alliance for Fair & Progressive Employment Practices, 2018), tal.sg/tafep/-/media/TAL/Tafep/Employment-Practices/Files/Grievance-Handling-Handbook_2018.pdf [120] "Written Answer by Mrs Josephine Teo to PQ on adoption of eight Tripartite Standards by employers", Ministry of Manpower, Government of Singapore, 2 September 2019, mom.gov.sg/newsroom/parliament-questions-and-replies/2019/0902-written-answer-by-mrs-josephine-teo-to-pq-on-adoption-of-8-tripartite-standards-by-employers [121] "Topline Estimates For All Enterprises And SMEs", Department of Statistics Singapore, Government of Singapore, 30 Jul 2021, tablebuilder.singstat.gov.sg/table/TS/M600981 [122] "Oral Answer by Ms Low Yen Ling, Senior Parliamentary Secretary for Manpower, to Parliamentary Question on the Tripartite Advisory on Workplace Harassment", Ministry of Manpower, Government of Singapore, 8 May 2019, mom.gov.sg/newsroom/parliament-questions-and-replies/2019/0508-oral-answer-by-ms-low-yen-ling-sps-for-manpower-to-pq-on-the-ta-on-workplace-harassment

Recommendation 6:

Provide protection to both survivors and witnesses of workplace sexual harassment

Currently, the Tripartite Standard on Grievance Handling encourages employers to have processes to manage grievances and protect complainants' confidentiality.[123] However, this Tripartite Standard is not legally enforceable. TAFEP also has in place the Tripartite Guidelines on Fair Employment Practices which requires employers to put in place proper grievance handling procedures, including protection from retaliatory behaviour. However, these are also not legally enforceable. Complainants therefore continue to risk facing retaliation from their employers upon reporting their harassment. Similarly, witnesses of harassment are vulnerable to retaliatory behaviour as there are also no existing mandatory protections in place for them. There may be protection available if the retaliation is in the form of dismissal (under the Tripartite Guidelines on Wrongful Dismissals); however, as our research demonstrates, retaliation can take many forms and is not restricted exclusively to dismissal.

As mentioned, five respondents experienced retaliation not just from their harassers, but from their employers, for speaking up about their harassment after an internal investigation. Additionally, the 17 respondents who did not file complaints cited fear of retaliation as a significant factor deterring them from doing so.

Thus, we recommend that employers ensure protection from retaliation for both survivors and witnesses of WSH—as a means of not only communicating their zero-tolerance approach to harmful work behaviour, but of encouraging employees to call out and report such behaviours.

In South Korea, the Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) Act prohibits disadvantageous measures being taken against victims or complainants. Such disadvantageous measures include dismissal or demotion; disciplinary actions; not assigning work or other duties; discrimination against the victim via performance assessments or exclusion from incentives, raises or other privileges; restricted opportunities for education or training; and bullying or ostracism. The EEO Act also provides protections for employees who witness or otherwise become aware of sexual harassment in the workplace. Strict new confidentiality obligations would also be imposed on any person investigating a complaint, receiving a report or participating in the investigation of a complaint. This gives complainants of WSH confidence to come forward with their experiences, helps to eradicate the problem of under-reporting and holds perpetrators accountable for their actions.

Similarly, in the U.K., survivors of sexual harassment are protected from being treated unfavourably because they have either rejected sexual harassment, or been forced to submit to it. This is in addition to the prohibition of employers from subjecting someone to a detriment (i.e. disadvantaging them) because they have alleged or intend to allege that sexual harassment has taken place, or provided evidence and information in relation to a complaint.

In July 2021, MOM announced the formation of the Tripartite Committee on Workplace Fairness to strengthen the government's efforts to tackle workplace discrimination and uphold workplace fairness.[124] Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong also announced during his 2021 National Day Rally speech that the TAFEP guidelines would be enshrined into law.[125] Along with these efforts to strengthen the country's anti-discrimination employment framework, we hope the new legislation will clearly spell out how employers must protect complainants and witnesses of WSH from retaliation.

[123] "Tripartite Standards", Tripartite Alliance for Fair & Progressive Employment Practices, Tripartite Alliance for Fair & Progressive Employment Practices, accessed on 3 November 2021, tal.sg/tafep/getting-started/progressive/tripartite-standards [124] "Formation of Tripartite Committee on Workplace Fairness", Ministry of Manpower, Government of Singapore, 27 July 2021, mom.gov.sg/newsroom/press-releases/2021/0727 [125] Jalelah Abu Baker, "NDR 2021: Singapore to enshrine into law workplace anti-discrimination guidelines", Channel NewsAsia, Mediacorp Pte Ltd., 30 August 2021, channelnewsasia.com/singapore/ndr-2021-anti-discrimination-law-tafep-pm-lee-2143101

Organisational characteristics that allow workplace sexual harassment to persist

Several organisational-level factors predict the likelihood of the occurrence of sexual harassment. Our research found that:

I Male-dominated management and/or organisations,

II Poor organisational climate,

III The absence of HR departments or policies targeted at handling WSH, and

IV Organisations that thrive on sexualised customer interactions

create fertile ground for WSH to occur repeatedly.

I Male-dominated teams or male-dominated management

Increased rates of harassment have been associated with organisations in which male employees significantly outnumber female employees. For example, a 2014 study on organisational strategies to reduce sexual harassment found that organisations particularly prone to sexual harassment and abuse tended to be male-dominated, hierarchical in nature and generally forgiving of discriminatory behaviour.[126]

In our research, 17 respondents had experienced WSH while working in male-dominated teams; 24 also worked in companies with male-dominated management. This correlates with existing research about the high prevalence of WSH in male-dominated work environments—e.g. the 2017 survey in the U.S. which showed that 28% of women working in male-dominated industries had personally experienced WSH, compared to 20% of women in female-dominated industries.[127]

Past research has shown that men in male-dominated occupations sometimes defend gendered forms of privilege and protect the borders of the occupation by making women feel unwelcome—often using WSH as a tool.[128] They may view women working in traditionally male settings as threats to masculine role identities and male bonding, reinforcing a tendency to target women, who are highly visible as a result of their low numbers.[129]

However, this is not to say that WSH does not take place in female-dominated industries. After all, even within industries or companies with majority female employees, men often still hold most positions of power. It is therefore fair to say that gender equity concerns lie not just in the composition of teams, but also the leadership of companies.

[126] Nicole Buchanan, Isis H. Settles, Angela Hall Michigan and Rachel O'Connor, "A Review of Organizational Strategies for Reducing Sexual Harassment: Insights from the U. S. Military", Journal of Social Issues 70, no. 4 (2014), researchgate.net/publication/269419623_A_Review_of_Organizational_Strategies_for_Reducing_Sexual_Harassment_Insights_from_the_U_S_Military [127] Parker, "Women in majority-male workplaces" [128] Minnotte and Legerski, "Sexual harassment in contemporary workplaces" [129] James E. Gruber, In the Company of Men: Male Dominance and Sexual Harassment. (Boston, Massachusetts: Northeastern University Press, 2005), repository.library.northeastern.edu/downloads/neu:m0409v585?datastream_id=content

Every employee has an impact on an organisation's direction, but leadership has by far the largest and most direct effect on company culture, which revolves around employee engagement, environment, atmosphere and the success of a company and its clients. In the context of combatting WSH, leaders have the agency to increase the number of women in male-dominated workplaces to balance gender ratios, promote more women to visible positions of leadership and enhance equity in the power men and women have within the organisation.[130] Furthermore, research has found that female managers tend to be less tolerant of sexual harassment (and other discriminatory behaviours) and respond more positively to such complaints.[131] While this may not apply to every female manager—as testified by some of our respondents—survivors might feel more comfortable confiding in a manager of the same sex, so having a more gender-balanced workplace affords survivors access to such managers who may be able to support them.

II Poor organisational climate

Previous international research has concluded that organisational climate has the strongest correlation with sexual harassment of all the antecedents that have been tested.[132]

We define a poor organisational climate as one where other cases of workplace bullying and/or harassment exist, the work culture is toxic (i.e. hierarchical and sexist) and complainants are dismissed and punished. Other studies have also described poor organisational climate as one where:

i) Survivors are punished for complaining, perpetrators are not appropriately punished for harassment and complaints are not taken seriously,[133]

ii) Leaders model harassing behaviours or indicate disregard for policies[134] and

iii) Survivors of harassment are not protected from retaliation upon filing complaints.[135]

Studies have also shown that women who believe that their organisations are tolerant of sexual harassment are less likely to file formal grievance or report their harassers.[136]

A 2020 study coined the term "sexual harassment fatigue" to explain the helplessness, anger or emotionless state that result from continuous sexual harassment.[137] This study found that organisations that were tolerant of sexual harassment were associated with higher levels of sexual harassment fatigue.[138] This can partially explain many respondents' minimisation of their own experiences of WSH, as well as the dismissiveness and inaction of bystanders at the workplace: Being in an environment that is permissive of harassing behaviour results in the normalisation of such behaviour, and generates a collective sense of desensitisation. Similarly, another study argued that employees are more likely to identify and address harassment as unacceptable, outlier behaviour when their workplaces encourage mutual respect, instead of featuring abusive modes of interaction.[139] Ultimately, this normalisation of harassing behaviour in hostile work environments likely affects reporting rates.

LGBTQ+ respondents in our study also reported facing discrimination owing to their gender identity and sexual orientation, in addition to WSH. Such behaviour included, in one case, speculating publicly about the respondent's sexual orientation at work, when there had been rumours of LGBTQ+ individuals within the same field being laid off after coming out. This finding was also echoed in a 2015 U.S. study that indicated that up to 41% of LGBTQ+ workers surveyed had been verbally or physically abused in the workplace. In particular, nearly 90% of transgender workers surveyed reported experienced workplace harassment.[140]

[130] Lilia Cortina and Jennifer L. Berdahl, Sexual Harassment in Organizations: A Decade of Research in Review (California: Sage, 2008), researchgate.net/publication/242457845_Sexual_Harassment_in_Organizations_A_Decade_of_Research_in_Review [131] Bell, Mclaughlin and Sequeira, "Discrimination, Harassment, and the Glass Ceiling" [132] Willness, Steel and Lee, "A Meta-Analysis of The Antecedents" [133] Charles L. Hulin, Louise Fitzgerald and Fritz Drasgow, Organizational influences on sexual harassment (California: Sage, 1996). In M. S. Stockdale (Ed.), Sexual harassment in the workplace: Perspectives, frontiers, and response strategies. [134] Louise Fitzgerald, Charles L. Hulin and Fritz Drasgow, "Antecedents and consequences of sexual harassment in organizations: a test of an integrated model", Journal of Applied Psychology 82, no. 4 (1997). [135] Chamberlain, Crowley, Tope and Hodson, "Sexual Harassment" [136] Cortina and Berdahl, Sexual Harassment in Organizations [137] Jessica L. Ford and Sonia R. Ivancic, "Surviving organizational tolerance of sexual harassment: an exploration of resilience, vulnerability, and harassment fatigue", Journal of Applied Communication Research 48, no. 2 (2020), researchgate.net/publication/339935166_Surviving_organizational_tolerance_of_sexual_harassment_an_exploration_of_resilience_vulnerability_and_harassment_fatigue [138] Ibid [139] Suzanne B. Goldberg, "Harassment, Workplace Culture, and the Power and Limits of Law", American University Law Review 70 (2020), scholarship.law.columbia.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3734&context=faculty_scholarship [140] Kristen, Banuelos and Urban, "Workplace Violence and Harassment"

III Absence of a HR department or policies targeting workplace harassment

Twelve of our respondents reported that their workplaces did not have a HR person or department, as they either worked in small businesses or were self-employed. None of these 12 filed official complaints against their harassers.

Regarding their organisations' policies targeting workplace discrimination and/or harassment, more than 80% (or 32) of our respondents either said that they were unaware of these policies or that their organisations did not have such policies in place.

As mentioned, the fear of retaliation was the most common reason that deterred respondents from filing reports. This can be attributed to the absence (or lack of awareness) of policies that protect employees from retaliation. Research has shown that formal grievance procedures and policies, even when they do not target sexual harassment in particular, signal an organisation's willingness to exercise social control and intolerance towards harassment.[141] This message is conveyed to potential perpetrators of sexual harassment as well as survivors. Moreover, workplaces with policies may more extensively regulate relationships among employees at all levels, thus increasing constraint and lessening opportunities for sexual harassment.[142] Generally, benefits of formal processes include the possible imposition of sanctions, the tracking of serial perpetrators and clear organisational accountability for continued transgressions.[143]

IV Reliance on sexualised customer interactions

Organisations that thrive on sexualised customer interactions are typically contemporary workplaces, especially in the service industry, where sexualised performances may sometimes be considered part of the job.[144] Eleven of our respondents worked in such organisations, with five being in the service industry and the remaining holding client-facing roles. While these sexualised interactions may not appear compulsory in formally prescribed documents, the informal pressures on women in these industries still have a real impact on their behaviour at work.

A 2013 study found that female respondents were often expected to "perform" their sexuality when interacting with clients in a formal work setting. This sexualised imagery was often seen as a commodity in these roles, whereby women were forced to manipulate it to their advantage.[145] Similarly, in our research, some respondents who experienced harassment from clients felt that they had to put themselves in vulnerable situations where professional boundaries were blurred, such as after-work drinks. This was in order to secure deals that were important to their companies and careers, as well as to cultivate good relationships with clients. In such situations, the client's experience is often prioritised; meanwhile, women are often objectified and expected to flirt as part of the "service" encounter, allowing unwanted sexual attention from customers to flourish.[146]

[141] Charles W. Mueller, Stacy De Coster and Sarah Beth Estes, "Sexual Harassment in the Workplace Unanticipated Consequences of Modern Social Control in Organizations", Work and Occupations 28, no. 4 (2001), researchgate.net/publication/233793079_Sexual_Harassment_in_the_WorkplaceUnanticipated_Consequences_of_Modern_Social_Control_in_Organizations [142] Chamberlain, Crowley, Tope and Hodson, "Sexual Harassment" [143] Buchanan, Settles, Michigan and O'Connor, "A Review of Organizational Strategies" [144] Minnotte and Legerski, "Sexual harassment in contemporary workplaces" [145] Valerie Caven, Scott Lawley and Jocelyn Baker, "Performance, gender and sexualised work: Beyond management control, beyond legislation? A case study of work in a recruitment company", Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: An International Journal 32, no. 5 (2013), researchgate.net/publication/262859643_Performance_gender_and_sexualised_work_Beyond_management_control_beyond_legislation_A_case_study_of_work_in_a_recruitment_company [146] Ibid

Recommendation 7:

Foster a work environment that has zero tolerance towards sexual harassment

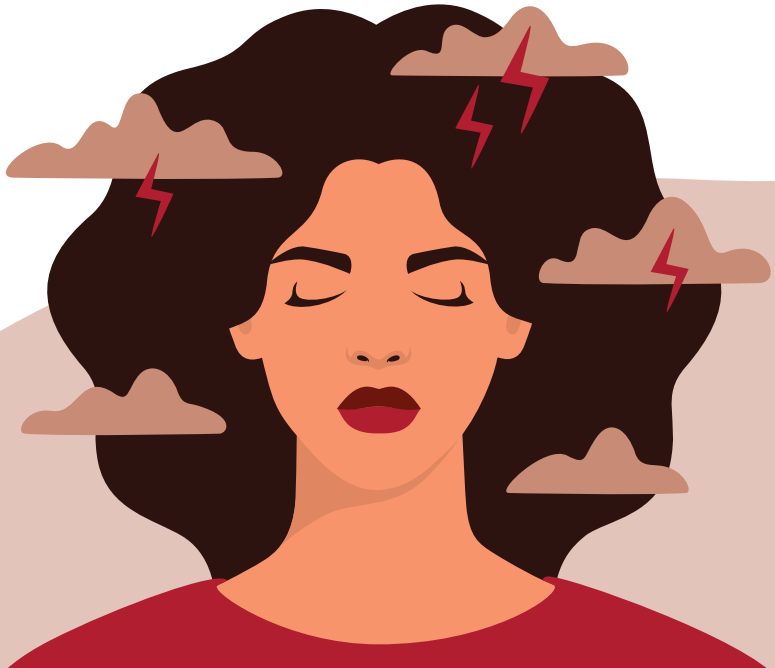
Our research demonstrates that an organisational climate that communicates tolerance of sexual harassment or other workplace discrimination behaviours serves as a prominent contributor to risk of WSH.

At the workplaces of a majority of our respondents, there had been other cases of workplace harassment and discrimination. This suggests that a poor organisational climate may create a vicious cycle, allowing WSH not only to occur, but to thrive.

There is an urgent need for employers and organisations alike to take a stand against workplace harassment and discrimination, and act on this stand. Perpetrators of harassment should be held accountable for their actions and sanctioned for their behaviours, irrespective of their professional positions or the time they have dedicated to a company.

Aside from being a moral obligation, fostering a safe working environment also helps increase organisational commitment and, ultimately, reduce turnover rates. When employees find themselves in a conducive environment, and develop a sense of trust in management, they are more committed to producing work of the highest quality. Thus, organisations benefit from a positive climate from an economic perspective as well.

To ensure that organisations are moving towards the right direction, we strongly recommend that organisations conduct regular, anonymous climate surveys to gauge workplace culture and identify areas that require improvement. They can do this either by themselves or with the assistance of experts from external organisations.



Recommendation 8:

Enhance support for women's career progression

ACTIVE LEADERSHIP

Those holding positions of power and influence in organisations are expected to set the tone and provide social cues for employees regarding appropriate conduct. Passive leaders, however, are detrimental to organisations, being unlikely to punish or correct problematic behaviours such as WSH. This not only silences survivors but lets perpetrators get away without consequence.

Evidence also suggests that passive leadership is associated with increased levels of interpersonal conflict, workplace incivility and bullying.[147] Employees who work under a passive manager are more likely to observe and perceive hostile interactions among co-workers. This then fosters more aggressive types of interpersonal interactions (such as sexual harassment) because employees tend to look to how their co-workers are treated for information about behavioural norms at work.[148]

Thus, organisations should identify and train passive leaders to exercise active leadership, exemplified by, for example: showing concern for the kinds of interpersonal treatment employees receive, sensing potential sexual harassment incidents, and intervening in a timely manner.[149] Organisations should educate their managers to encourage civil, respectful interactions among employees. For instance, providing training programmes focussing on ethical leadership will be beneficial because this type of leadership is found to decrease bullying and workplace incivility.[150]

GENDER RATIO

In 2020, the overall proportion of women leaders rose to 33% in Singapore.[151] However, this rise was accompanied by a drop in women across operational C-suite roles from 2019, with the proportion of female CEOs falling five percentage points, to 6%, and female CFOs falling nine percentage points, to 32%.[152] This was below Southeast Asia's aggregate of 38%.[153] Further, the largest 100 primary-listed companies on SGX achieved a 17.6% participation rate of women on boards in 2020, a 1.5 percentage points increase from the previous year.[154] Workplace gender ratio, defined as the gender composition in the workplace with whom individuals interact on a day-to-day basis, has been shown to influence the prevalence of sexual harassment.[155] Additionally, a raft of studies have shown that harassment flourishes in workplaces where women have little power and men dominate in management.[156] Reducing power imbalances can, thus, change the workplace culture because women are less likely than men to harass. When women are under-represented in organisations, they are more likely to experience WSH.

[147] Junghyun Lee, "Passive leadership and sexual harassment: Roles of observed hostility and workplace gender ratio", Personnel Review 47, no. 3 (2018), researchgate.net/publication/323231372_Passive_leadership_and_sexual_harassment_Roles_of_observed_hostility_and_workplace_gender_ratio [148] Ibid [149] Ibid [150] Jeroen Stouten, Elfi Baillien, Anja Van den Broeck, Jeroen Camps, Hans De Witte and Martin Euwema, "Discouraging Bullying: The Role of Ethical Leadership and Its Effects on the Work Environment", Journal of Business Ethics 95 (2010), researchgate.net/publication/256038014_Discouraging_Bullying_The_Role_of_Ethical_Leadership_and_Its_Effects_on_the_Work_Environment [151] "Women in Singapore advance their presence in boardrooms", Consultancy.asia, Consultancy.org, 8 March 2021, consultancy.asia/news/3978/women-in-singapore-advance-their-presence-in-boardrooms [152] Ibid [153] Dylan Loh, "Women in management: Southeast Asia improves but Singapore slips", NIKKEI ASIA, Nikkei Inc., 7 March 2020, asia.nikkei.com/Economy/Women-in-management-Southeast-Asia-improves-but-Singapore-slips [154] Rei Kurohi, "More women in S'pore named to boards in public, private and people sectors", The Straits Times, Singapore Press Holdings Ltd. Co., 12, April 2021, straitstimes.com/business/more-women-in-spore-named-to-boards-in-public-private-and-people-sectors [155] Stouten, Baillien, Van den Broeck, Camps, De Witte and Euwema, "Discouraging Bullying" [156] Bell, Mclaughlin and Sequeira, "Discrimination, Harassment, and the Glass Ceiling"

According to previous research, women managers are more likely to lead from "the center of a network of interrelated teams" and less likely to adopt a traditional command hierarchy. They therefore have a greater propensity to receive information about and be more responsive to sexual harassment and discrimination.[157] Having more women managers may also improve the efficacy of sexual harassment training programmes, as they are more likely to believe harassment complaints and respond favourably to training.[158] Furthermore, a higher percentage of women leaders may be correlated with higher satisfaction and retention of other managerial women, who can shape future policies that promote greater diversity and intolerance of sexual harassment.[159]

In India, the Prevention of Sexual Harassment at the Workplace (POSH) Act calls for not less than half of the "internal committee" members to be women. This move confirms the need for diverse perspectives as well as the recognition of issues such as WSH and gender-based discrimination.[160]

We strongly urge companies to mandate that at least one-third of their board and senior management positions be filled by women who practice active leadership.

[157] Ibid [158] Dobbin and Kalev, "The promise and peril" [159] Bell, Mclaughlin and Sequeira, "Discrimination, Harassment, and the Glass Ceiling" [160] Sayantani Saha, Archita Mohapatra, Preetha Soman, Ajay Singh Solanki and Vikram Shroff, Prevention of Sexual Harassment at the Workplace (POSH) (Delhi: Nishith Desai Associates, 2020), nishithdesai.com/fileadmin/user_upload/pdfs/Research%20Papers/Prevention_of_Sexual_Harassment_at_Workplace.pdf

Why should employers care about workplace sexual harassment?

This report has highlighted the financial and career impacts experienced by survivors of WSH, including the two most commonly cited work-related impacts—a decrease in productivity and job satisfaction. Unsurprisingly, it was also found that the majority of respondents left their jobs as a result of harassment, either voluntarily or not. This means that employees were not performing as well or as efficiently as they would have, because they were: no longer working in conducive, safe environments, unable to work well with others due to harassment's negative impact on collegial relationships, and less enthusiastic and committed to their roles and companies.[161] A high turnover rate means higher vacancies, a shrinking workforce and a loss of skills and knowledge carefully honed over time. Thus, the perception that WSH is an individual problem that does not concern employers is fallacious—the impacts that survivors face also translate to significant costs to an organisation.

The costs that organisations and employers typically incur as a result of WSH, as well as the mishandling of cases pertaining to harassment, are monetary in nature. Though lower productivity is not immediately quantifiable, it has been shown that sexual harassment costs an average of $22,500 per employee in the long run.[162]

Should an employee seek legal recourse and sue their employer or organisation for WSH, organisations would expect to channel financial resources into legal fees resulting from litigation. In the U.S., it was reported that sexual harassment charges filed with the EEOC had cost organisations and harassers $46 million, excluding monetary damages awarded through litigation in 2015.[163] Although employers are currently not held accountable for failing to ensure safe working environments for their employees in Singapore, this statistic is still relevant. At least three of our respondents sought legal recourse against their harassers. While the parties involved had to pay out-of-pocket for legal fees, all of them were periodically absent from work to attend court proceedings and investigations over a significant period of time, ultimately disrupting work. Taking the average amount of $22,500 as a basis, should there be two employees involved (i.e. survivor and harasser), it would cost the organisation at least $45,000 as a result of the decrease in work productivity.

Additionally, public knowledge of cases of WSH will indisputably lead to significant reputational damage to the organisation. Such a perception would be felt by potential employees (who would be hesitant to apply for a position in the organisation), as well as clients and investors. Clients and investors would be less inclined to engage with organisations that have a negative public image. For instance, when allegations surfaced in 2020 that Dee Kosh, a Singaporean celebrity, had propositioned minors for nude pictures and sexual favours, several major brands were reported to have ended partnerships with him because they did not "tolerate any form of harassment".[164] When clients and investors pull out of partnerships or hesitate to engage in business transactions, organisations lose out on profits from professional opportunities and may even suffer plunges in their stock prices.[165]

Though significant financial losses serve as ample reason for organisations to take WSH seriously, the long-lasting emotional, physical, mental, career and financial damage that survivors of harassment suffer should be alarming enough for employers, even though this does not come with a price tag. Employers must ensure that the least their employees get in return for the work they produce is a safe environment—and not long-lasting trauma and stress arising from harassment, coupled with stigma and other changes for the worse in their lives.

[161] Willness, Steel and Lee, "A Meta-Analysis of The Antecedents" [162] Ibid [163] Mclaughlin, Uggen and Blackstone, "Economic and Career Effects" [164] Natasha Meah, "Major brands distance themselves from YouTuber and DJ Dee Kosh amid more police reports alleging sexual harassment", TODAY, Mediacorp Pte Ltd., 18 August 2020, todayonline.com/singapore/major-brands-distance-themselves-youtuber-and-dj-dee-kosh-amid-more-police-reports [165] Daniel Hemel and Dorothy Shapiro Lund, "Sexual Harassment and Corporate Law", Columbia Law Review 1583 (2018), papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3147130

Conclusion

WSH remains a persistent problem in Singapore. While several measures have been introduced to address the issue, there are noticeable limitations to these measures, and a clear need to step up our efforts in tackling WSH.

The government has mentioned that the Ministry of Manpower's policy is to "revoke the work pass privileges of egregious offenders, such as employers who fail to provide a safe environment for employees or refuse to improve their grievance handling processes".[166] MOM has yet to do this, however, because "all employers engaged by TAFEP on workplace harassment matters have been cooperative and receptive" and there has been "no need for TAFEP to escalate actions to MOM".[167] While this may be true of those cases reported to TAFEP, the fact remains that WSH (and sexual violence in general) is severely under-reported: Based on the 2021 AWARE-Ipsos survey as many as 70% of survivors choose not to file reports for various reasons.[168] This means that a significant proportion of survivors continue to grapple with the career and financial impacts of WSH, not to mention the emotional trauma, without adequate support. There is an urgent need for both the government and organisations to view WSH seriously, and enforce the necessary policies and measures to put a stop to the sexual violence that continues to plague the country's workforce.

We hope that the recommendations proposed in this report will be considered and potentially adopted so as to ensure that WSH, and other forms of sexual violence, will be adequately addressed and minimised.

[166] "Written Answer by Mrs Josephine Teo to PQ on Watchlist for Workplace Harassment", Ministry of Manpower, Government of Singapore, 18 February 2020, mom.gov.sg/newsroom/parliament-questions-and-replies/2020/0218-written-answer-by-mrs-josephine-teo-to-pq-on-watchlist-for-workplace-harassment [167] "Written Answer by Minister for Manpower Mrs Josephine Teo on Workplace Sexual Harassment", Ministry of Manpower, Government of Singapore, 5 April 2021, mom.gov.sg/newsroom/parliament-questions-and-replies/2021/0405-written-answer-by-minister-on-workplace-harassment [168] "AWARE-Ipsos survey"

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