

Is the Guest *Always* Right?

Sexual Harassment in Vancouver Hotels

AUGUST 2019

“On one occasion, I had a VIP guest I was serving reach his hand up my skirt, holding onto my upper inner thigh and not letting me go. I felt humiliated. When I told management what happened they said they did not want to offend the guest, and told me to keep serving him.”

- JESSE PERRY-HUSON, RESTAURANT SERVER AT HOTEL GEORGIA

Vancouver welcomes millions of visitors from across the globe with a well-deserved reputation for hospitality. A 2017 British Columbia Chamber of Commerce survey ranked tourism as the most significant sector over the next decade. Women make up the majority of the hospitality workforce in Vancouver, many of whom are women of color.

Although tourism is a significant economic engine for the province, it can be hazardous for female staff. A new survey of nearly 200 workers at five downtown Vancouver hotels reveals an alarmingly high rate of women reporting sexual harassment and other inappropriate guest behavior and a disturbing lack of response from management. In the age of #MeToo—this serious issue should be urgently addressed.

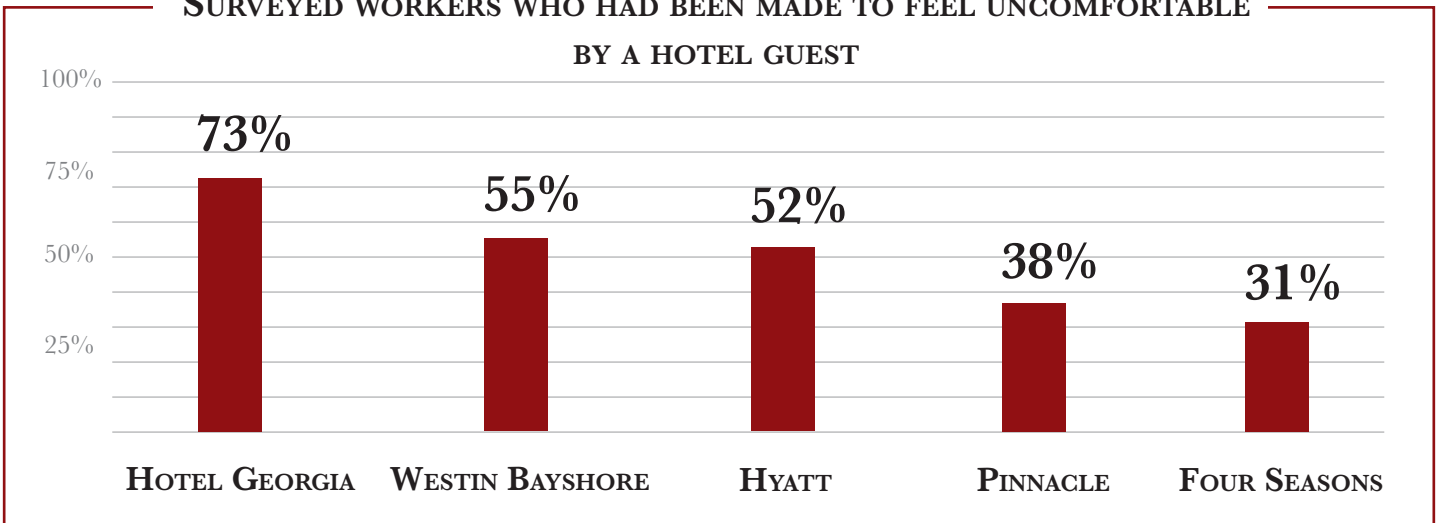
FINDINGS

The survey asked respondents about their experience with guest behavior and sexual harassment. Participants were asked if a guest

has ever done something to make them feel uncomfortable or unsafe. Some of the key takeaways were the following:

- In three out of five hotels, more than 50% of respondents answered yes when asked if a guest has ever done something to make them feel uncomfortable.
- The highest rates of harassment-like behavior reported were from the Hotel Georgia.
- The Hotel Georgia had the highest proportion of surveyed workers who had been made to feel uncomfortable at 73%, followed by the Westin Bayshore (55%) and the Hyatt (52%).
- In addition, 49% of surveyed workers at both the Westin Bayshore and the Hotel Georgia reported guest behavior that made them feel unsafe, followed by 40% of workers at the Hyatt.

**SURVEYED WORKERS WHO HAD BEEN MADE TO FEEL UNCOMFORTABLE
BY A HOTEL GUEST**



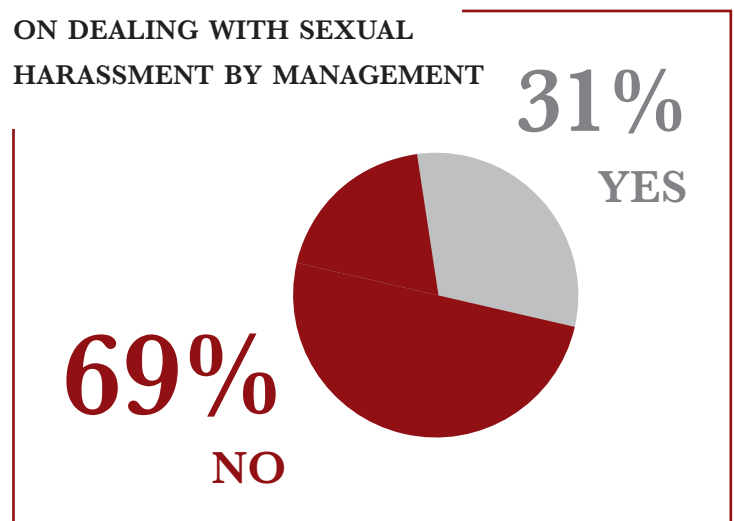
Workers were also asked about behaviours that amount to sexual harassment: guests answering the door **naked or exposing themselves**; guests making **unwelcome sexual jokes, comments or questions**; guests showing **sexual texts, pictures** or other materials to workers; and guests attempting to **touch workers**.

- 67% of surveyed workers at the Hotel Georgia reported that a guest had made an unwelcome sexual joke, comment or question, followed by 47% at the Westin Bayshore.
- The Hotel Georgia also had the highest proportion of workers who reported that a guest had touched or tried to touch them in an unwelcome way (56%), followed by 27% at the Westin Bayshore.

The surveyed workers from the Hotel Georgia reported the highest rates of sexual harassment of three of the four types identified in the survey. In relation to sexual comments and touching, more than half of surveyed Hotel Georgia workers had experienced these behaviours at least once.

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SURVEYED WORKERS WHO RECEIVED ANY TRAINING ON DEALING WITH SEXUAL HARASSMENT BY MANAGEMENT



Despite these high levels of sexual harassment across the sector, 69% of all surveyed workers had never received any training on dealing with these behaviours by management, and 37% indicated never reporting the guest behavior to management.

The findings of the survey support recent accounts from women working at several area hotels, including the Hotel Georgia, who have spoken out about being sexually assaulted by male guests. Women workers from the Hotel Georgia filed a complaint with the BC Human Rights Tribunal.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Moving forward there are a number of recommendations for the tourism industry.

Similar to actions taken recently in other cities like Seattle and Chicago, hospitality employers should take the following steps to protect female staff:

- 1. PANIC BUTTONS:** Provide all frontline staff with panic button security devices.
- 2. GUEST BAN:** Ban guests that have sexually harassed an employee.
- 3. WHISTLEBLOWER PROTECTION:** No retaliation against employees who come forward.

The City of Vancouver is currently studying ways to regulate at the municipal level potential changes to improve the safety of women in the hospitality industry. We suggest that the province take a similar approach and study ways it can ensure the safety of workers in one of BC's most important industries.

SURVEY METHODOLOGY

This report details the key findings of research conducted with hotel workers in five Vancouver hotels on their experiences of guest behavior and sexual harassment at work. The data are from a questionnaire survey, which was administered online and in person by UNITE HERE Local 40 during July 2019. The survey was made up of eight questions covering guest behavior, training and the responses of management to sexual harassment by guests. The survey included a definition of sexual harassment from the Supreme Court of Canada.

The workers who participated in the survey were employed at the Westin Bayshore, Four Seasons, Hyatt and Pinnacle Hotels and the Hotel Georgia. A total of 190 workers took part in the survey: housekeepers; restaurant servers, hostesses and bartenders; room service servers; cooks; and banquet servers. The majority of those surveyed had roles that involved direct interaction with guests, either in hotel rooms or in the public areas of the hotels.

The data were analyzed with help from the SFU Morgan Centre for Labour Research at Simon Fraser University. It should be noted that the number of respondents at each hotel varied: the highest participation rate was from the Westin Bayshore (51 surveys), followed by the Hyatt (48) and Hotel Georgia (45), Pinnacle (34) and Four Seasons (13). Over 98% of the participants from all hotels were women.

UNITE HERE Local 40 represents 6,000 hospitality workers across British Columbia, including those at the 5 downtown hotels involved in this survey.