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# **Creating Safe Spaces: Confronting Customer Sexual Harassment in Service Industries**

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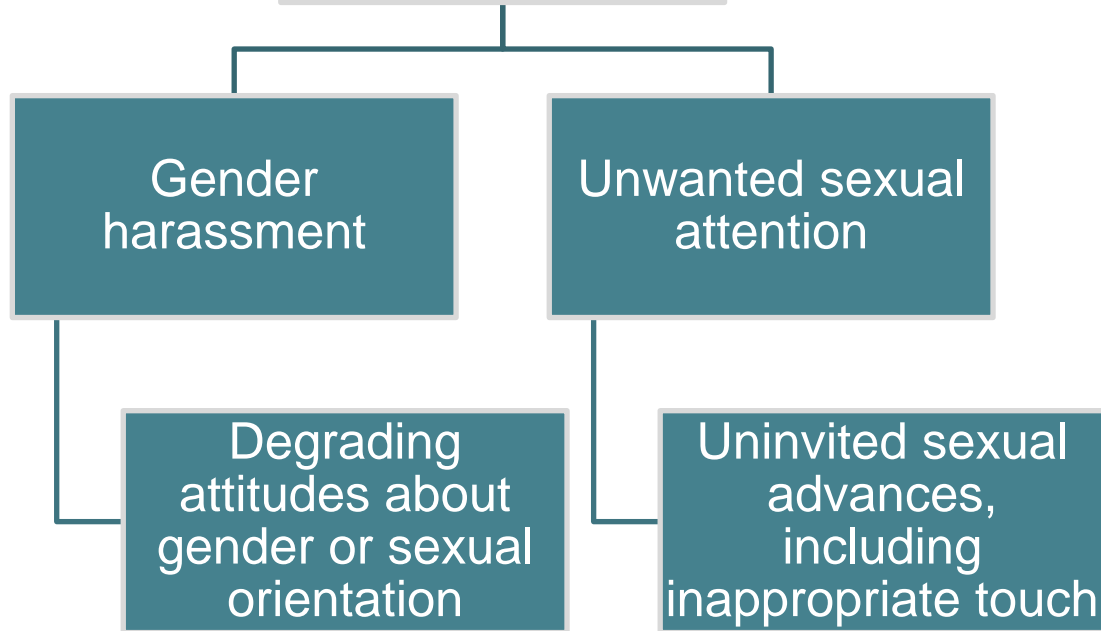


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**Customer  
Sexual  
Harassment**

# Customer Sexual Harassment<sup>1,2</sup>



# Structural vulnerabilities in service industry<sup>3,4</sup>

- Tip-based income
- Customer service philosophy
  - “Customer is always right”
- Other influences:
  - Age
  - Gender
  - Race
  - Organizational Pressure



# Current interventions

Intervention	Problem
Reporting <sup>5</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Unclear process of reporting</li><li>• Fear of retaliation</li></ul>
Bystander training <sup>6</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Coworkers afraid to compromise their earnings</li></ul>
???????	???????



02

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# **Current Project**



# Current Project

- Goal:
    1. Assess current use of **organization-focused interventions**
    2. Identify **weekly patterns** of customer sexual harassment
    3. Identify the **effect of customer sexual harassment** on employee performance and well-being
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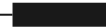
# Interventions

## Organizational Tolerance<sup>9</sup>

**Perceived risk** of reporting

**Consequences** towards the offender

**Seriousness** with which the report will be taken



# Interventions

## Supervisor Preventive Behaviors<sup>7,8</sup>

### **Declarative**

Inform organizational policies and procedures

### **Active**

Monitor high-risk situations

### **Proactive**

Prevent future incidents

## Recruitment

Community and crowdsourcing



## Screening Survey

Inclusion criteria and Email



## Week 1

Long survey (~20 min)



## Week 2-9

Short weekly survey (~10min)



**Final sample size: 244**

Community: 90

Crowdsourcing: 154



# Recruitment

## Community outreach

- Restaurants
- University campus
- Emailing other universities in PNW
- Partnership with ROC

## Crowdsourcing

- Prolific

## Inclusion criteria

- 18+
- Working in the service industry
- Constant interaction with customers and supervisors

# Demographics\*

## Participants

- 27% from PNW
- 46% tipped wage states
- 32 years old
- 56% women
- 64% white

## Common job titles

- 26% food servers
- 14% housekeepers
- 9% bartenders

\*numbers rounded to nearest decimal

03

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**Findings**

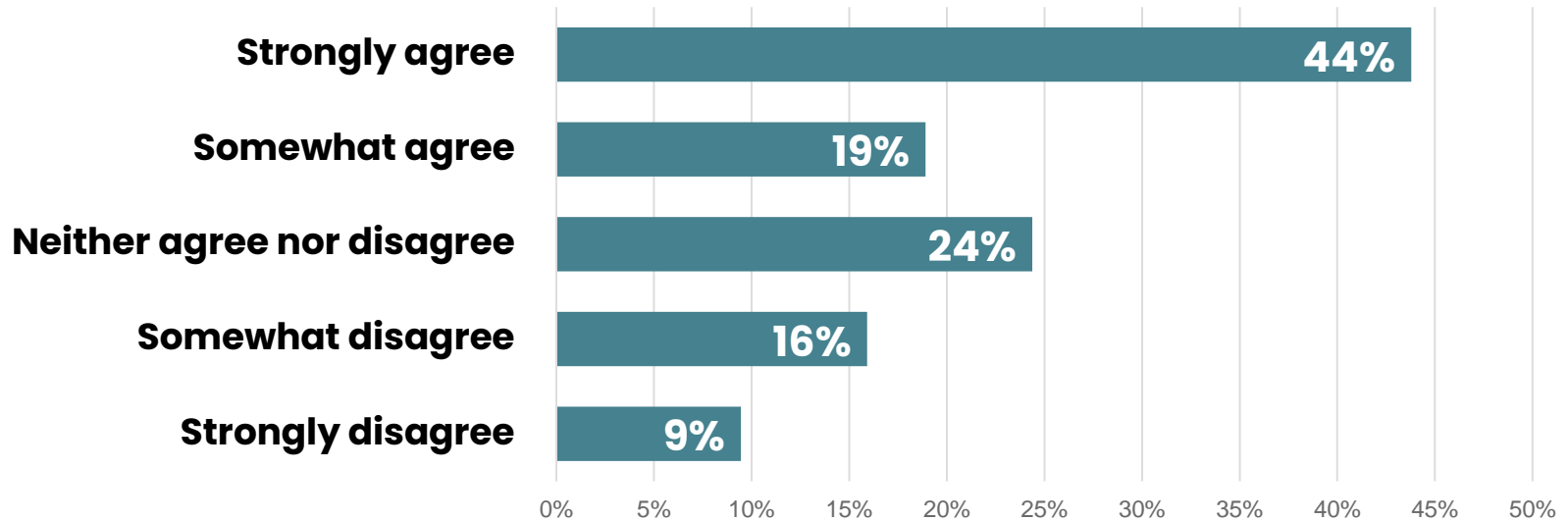
**Goal 1:**

**Assess  
Interventions**



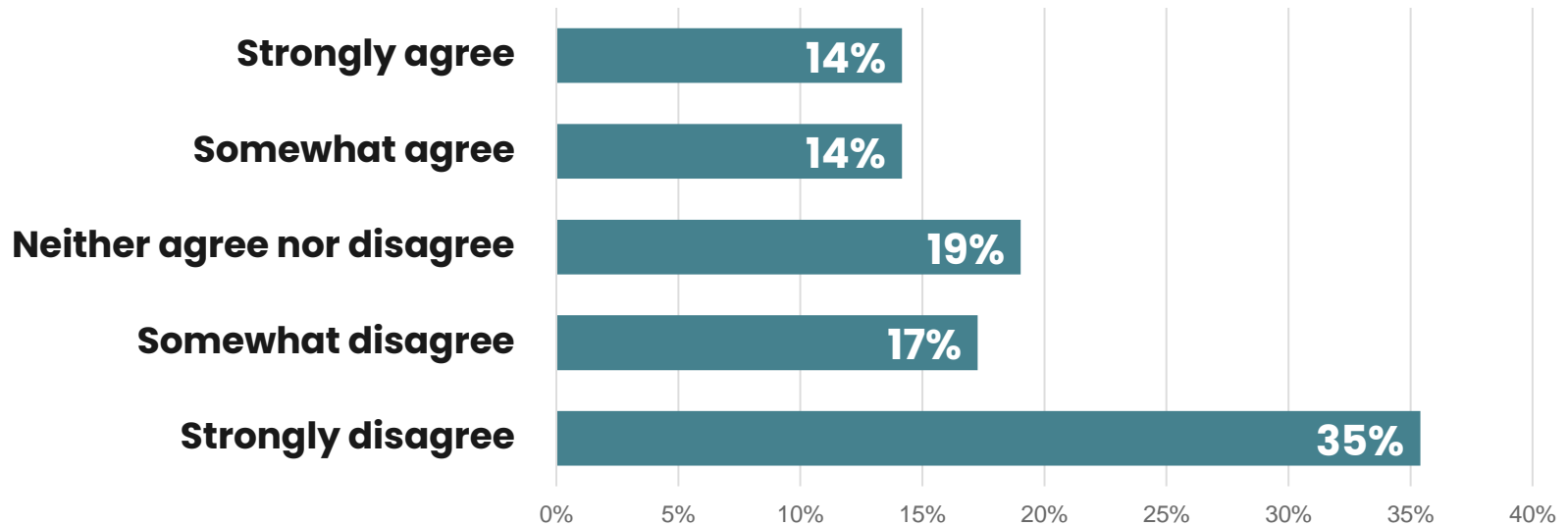
# Organizational Tolerance

**My organization enforces penalties against sexually harassing customers.**



# Organizational Tolerance

**My organization publicizes the availability of formal complaint channels**



# Organizational Tolerance

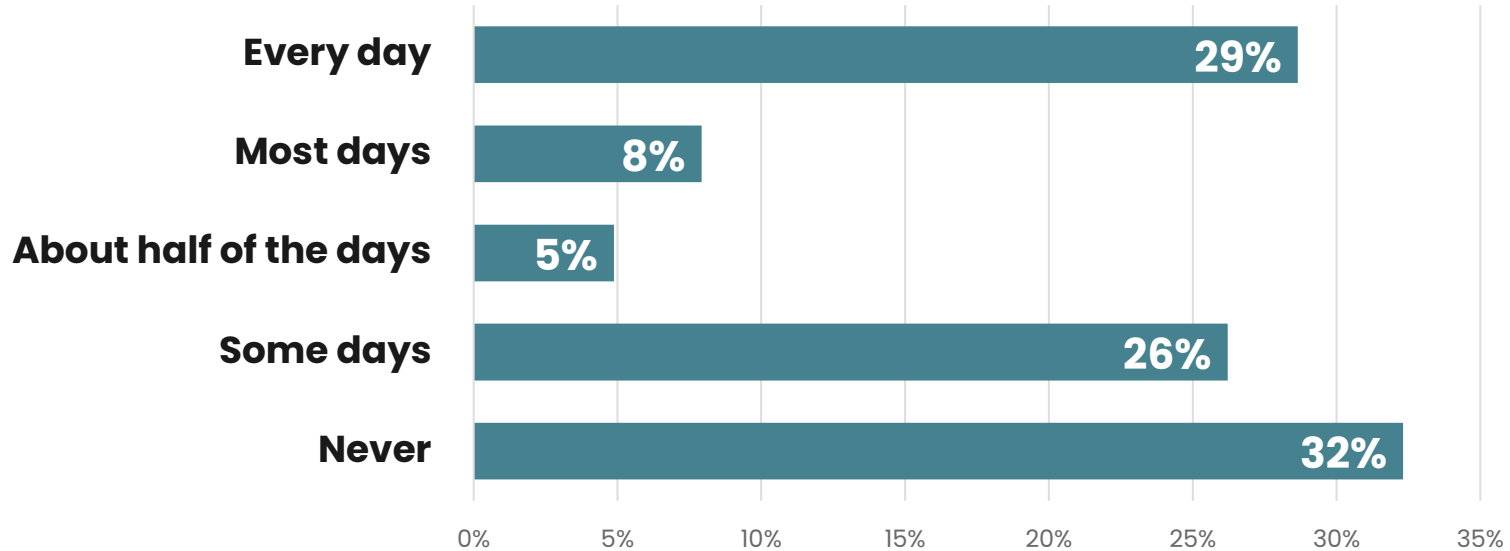
## Key takeaways

- Employees report **low organizational tolerance** for customer sexual harassment
- Employees report **lack of formal processes and procedures**, such as reporting and training



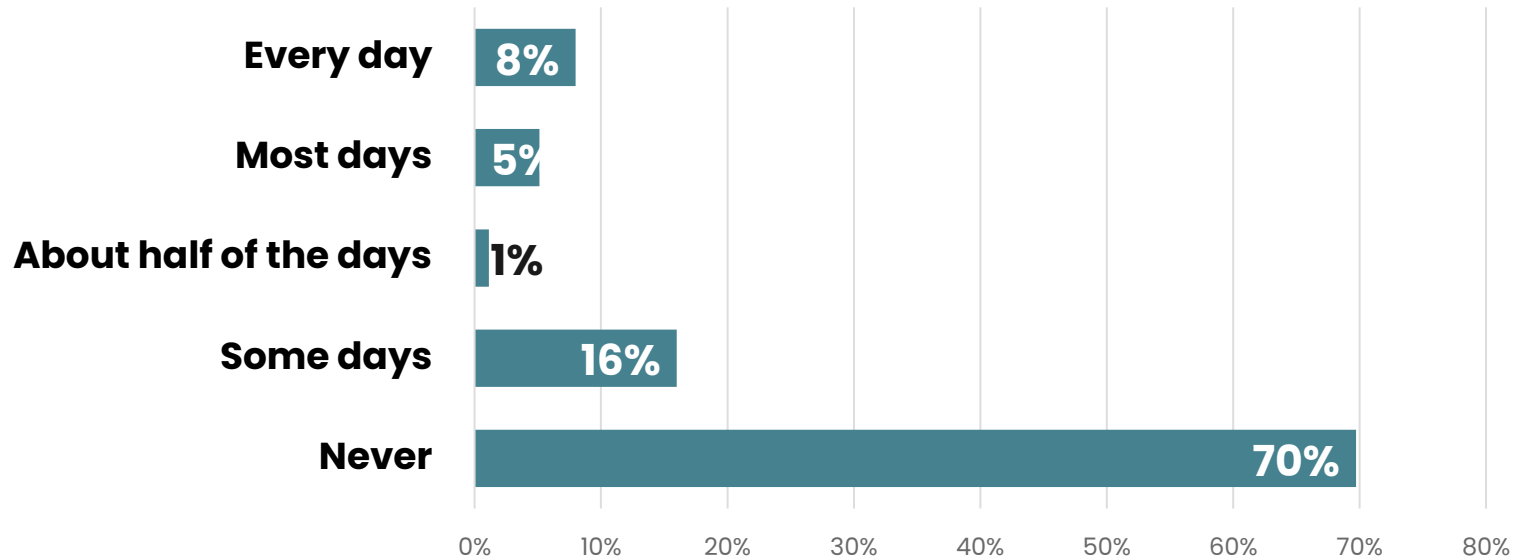
# Supervisor Preventive Behaviors

**My supervisor removes (or tries to remove) disrespectful customers to prevent them from sexually harassing me.**



# Supervisor Preventive Behaviors

**Makes sure I am aware of organizational resources that are available for preventing sexual harassment from customers**



# Supervisor Preventive Behaviors

Key takeaways:

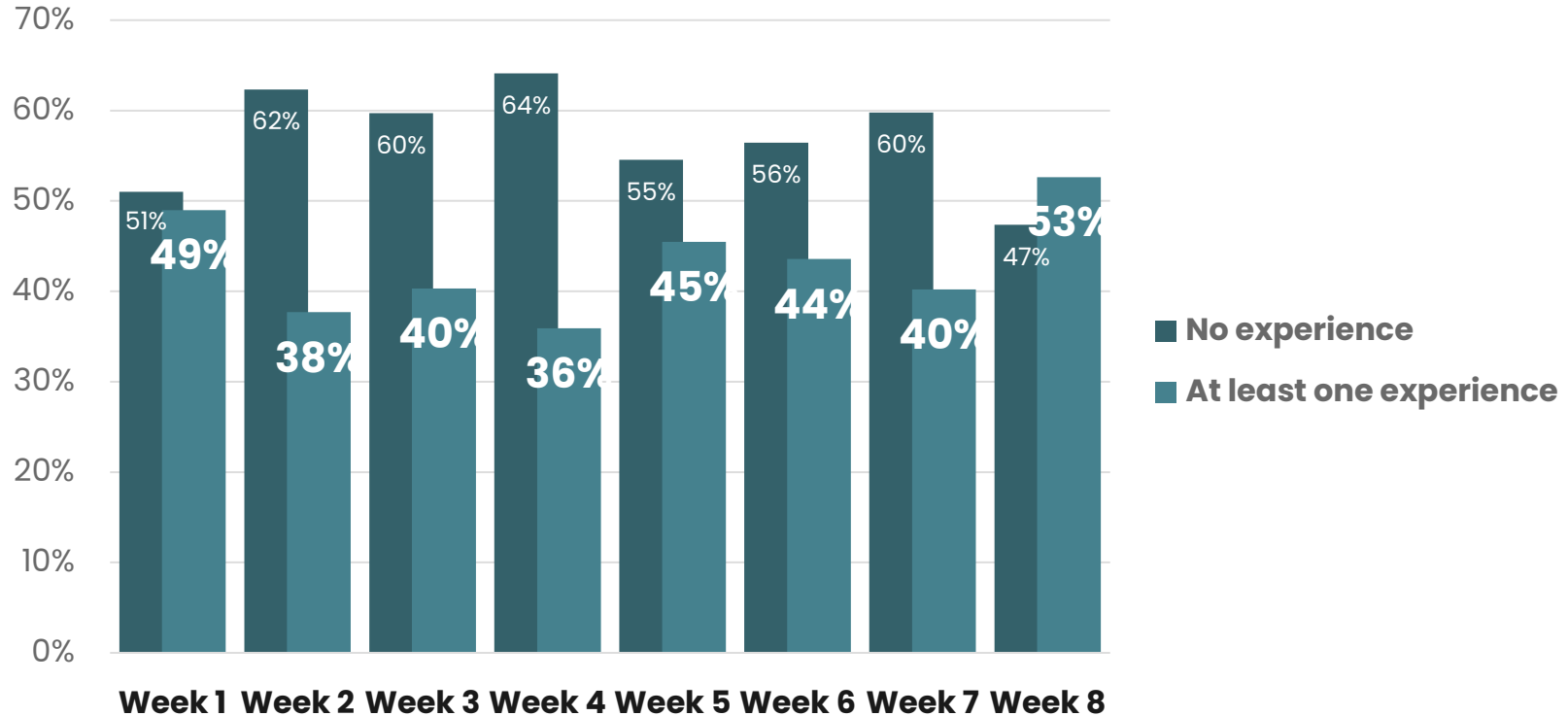
- **Inconsistent reported use** of supervisor preventive behaviors
- Lower reports of **declarative practice** (e.g., raising awareness on policies and procedures)



# Goal 2:

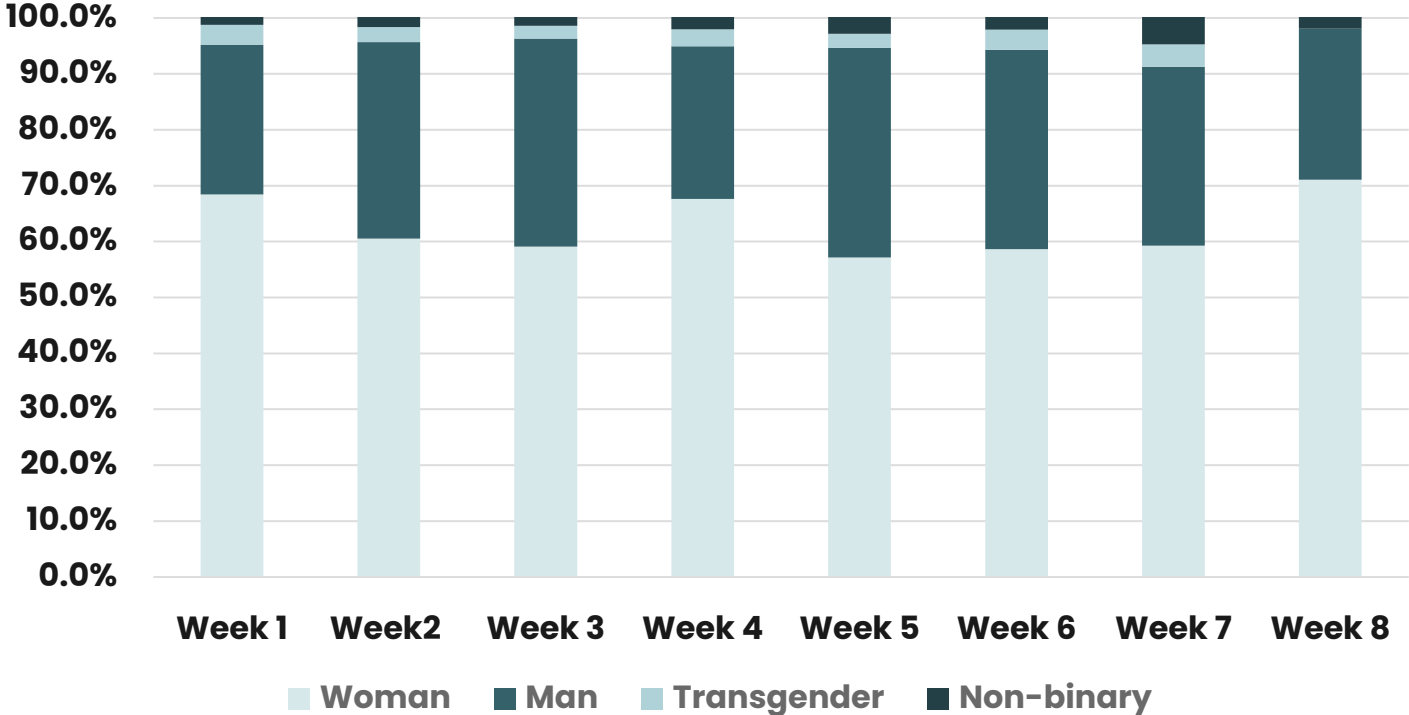
**Weekly Patterns  
of Customer  
Sexual  
Harassment**

## Percentage of Personal Customer Sexual Harassment experiences

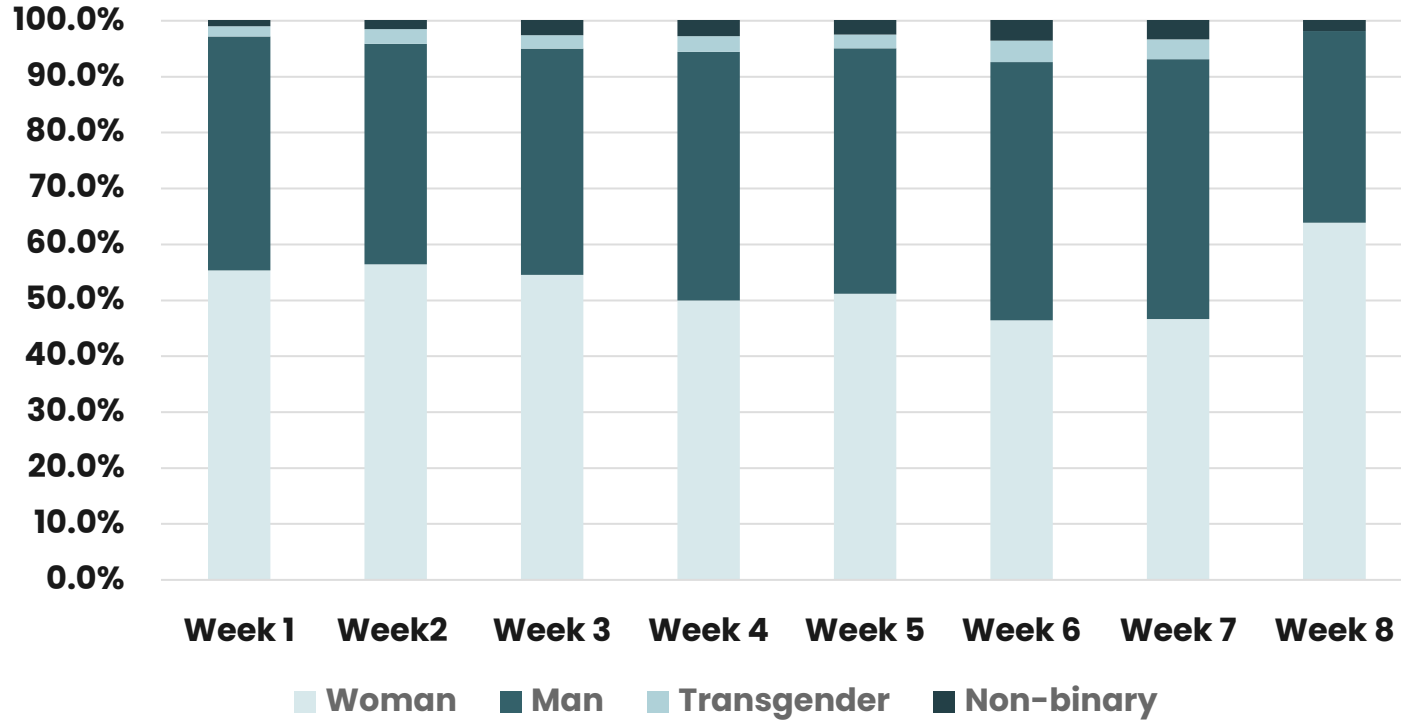




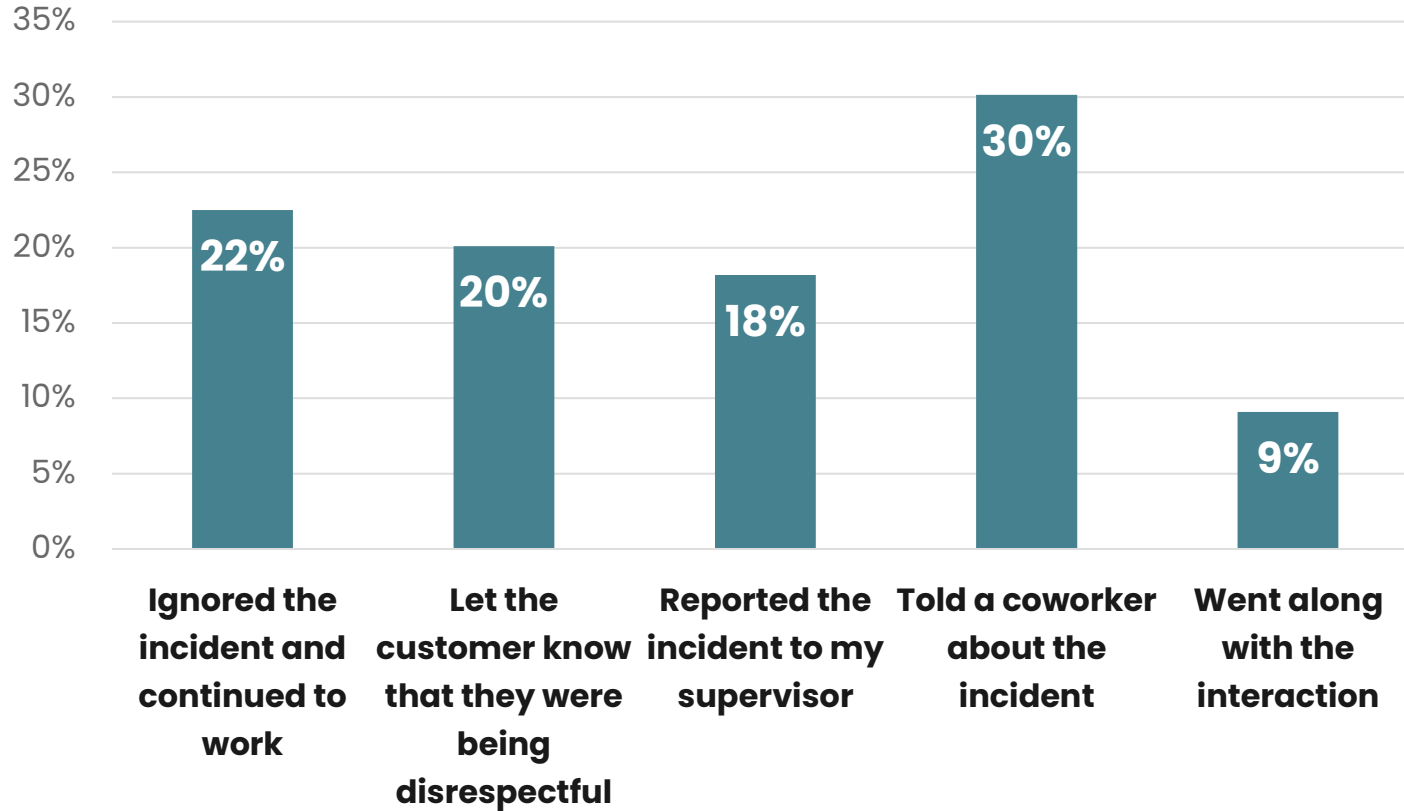
# Personal Experiences of Customer Sexual Harassment by Gender



## Witnessed Customer Sexual Harassment by Gender



## Reactions to Personal Customer Sexual Harassment



# Weekly customer sexual harassment

- Number of experiences **differs across weeks**
- More commonly **reported by women**
- Targets are more likely **to cope on their own** (less likely to report to supervisors)



# Goal 3:

**Impact of  
Customer Sexual  
Harassment**

# Impact of Customer Sexual Harassment

- **Weekly experiences** of customer sexual harassment accounted for:
  - Higher **instigated incivility** towards customers
  - Higher **anxiety symptoms**
  - Higher **turnover intention**
  - Higher **depressive symptoms**



# Key takeaways

- Customer sexual harassment impacts **employee performance and well-being**
- Weekly findings from growth curve models are **consistent with cross-sectional studies**

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**Future  
research**

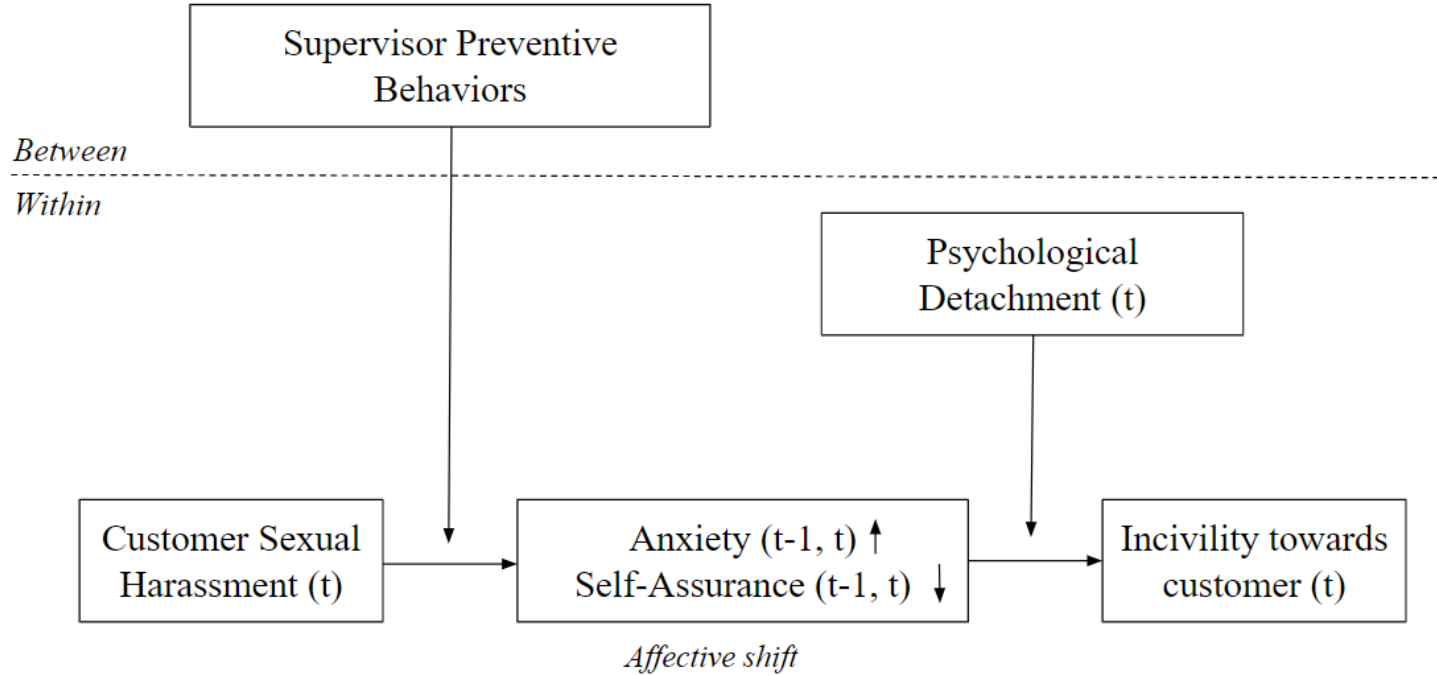


# Future studies

- **Establish importance** of supervisor preventive behaviors and organizational intolerance
- Identify **other potential interventions**



# Dissertation



# Thank you!

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- **Craig Gabriel**, Finance and Budget Manager
- **Lindsay Pysson**, Managing Director UW Chemical Engineering
- **Nancy J Simcox**, Associate Teaching Professor

# Thank you!

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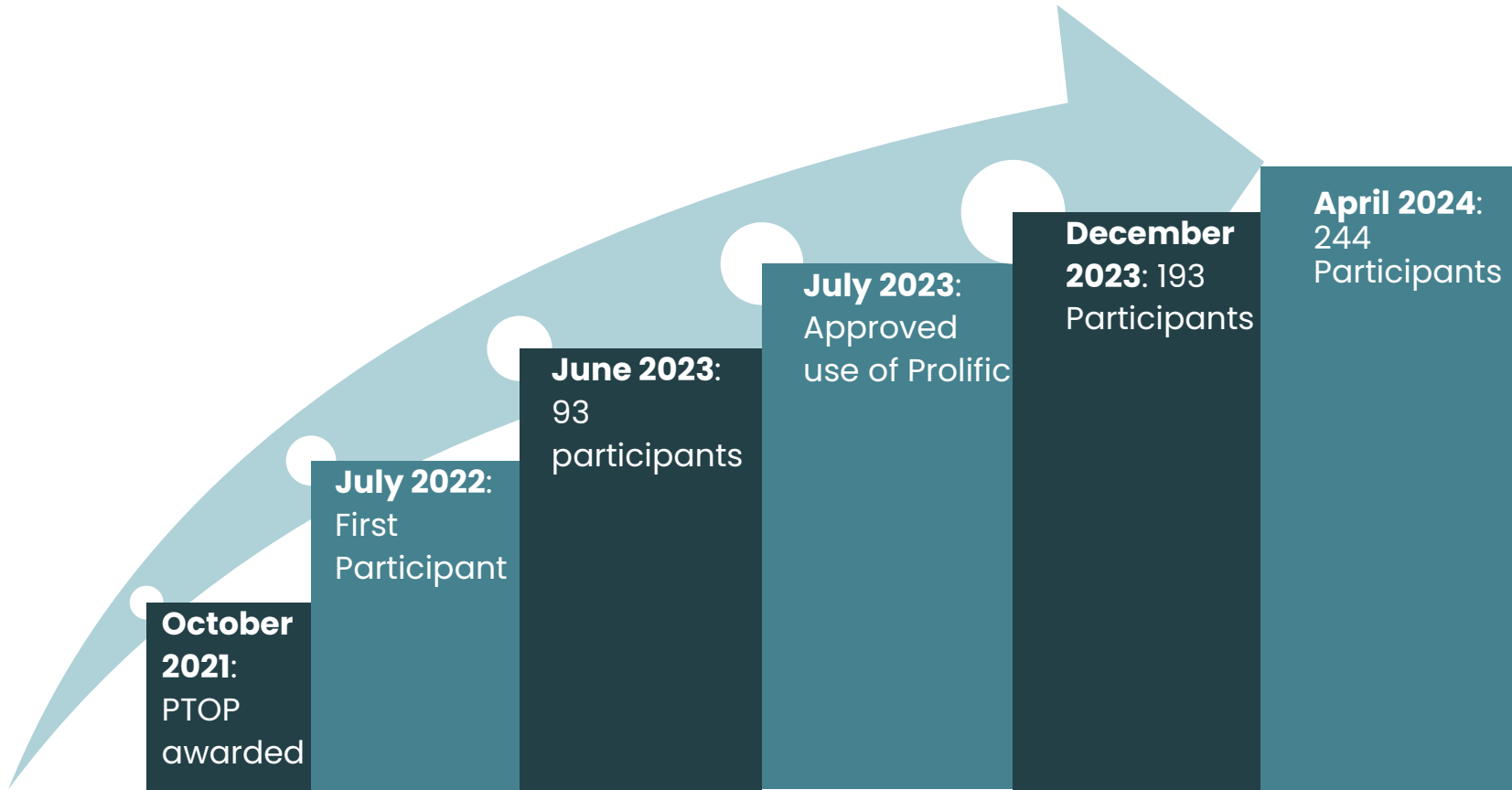
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# Appendix

Add the findings from SIOP submissions and thesis



**October  
2021:**  
PTOP  
awarded

**July 2022:**  
First  
Participant

**June 2023:**  
93  
participants

**July 2023:**  
Approved  
use of Prolific

**December  
2023:** 193  
Participants

**April 2024:**  
244  
Participants



# Sexual Harrassment Supervisor Preventative Behaviors

## **Declarative practice**

1. Makes sure I am aware of organizational resources that are available for preventing sexual harassment from customers.
2. Asks me if I understand organizational policies on preventing sexual harassment from customers.
3. Asks me if I understand organizational processes for preventing sexual harassment from customers.

## **Active practice**

4. Pays attention to customers with high risk of sexual harassment.
5. When necessary, removes (or tries to remove) disrespectful customers to prevent them from sexually harassing me.
6. Gives me advice for effectively working with specific customers that are likely to sexually harass an employee.
7. Steps in to diffuse an uncomfortable situation to prevent sexual harassment from customers.

## **Proactive practice**

8. Demonstrates effective ways to communicate with customers to avoid sexual harassment.
  9. Assigns me with customers with whom I worked well in the past.
  10. Assigns me tables or parties based on my capacity (e.g., experience, skills).
  11. Denies service to customers who have sexually harassed an employee in the past.
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# Scale Adaptation

SMEs adapted items from APSB-P scale



Pilot study: 23 restaurant employees



Item generation (1 new item)



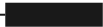
CFA: 93 restaurant employees



# SPB growth curve model

Significant fixed effect on anxiety,  $\gamma_{01} = -.12, p < .05$

Significant fixed effect on positive affect,  $\gamma_{01} = .27, p < .00$



# Org Tolerance growth curve model

Significant fixed effect on positive affect,  $\gamma_{01} = .18, p < .00$



# Organizational Tolerance

1. My organization enforces penalties against sexual harassers.
2. Customers at my organization who sexually harass others usually get away with it. (R)
3. Sexual harassment is not tolerated at my organization.
4. Senior leadership makes honest and reasonable efforts to stop sexual harassment.
5. Actions are being taken at my organization to prevent sexual harassment
6. My organization has a specific office which investigates complaints regarding sexual harassment.
7. My organization publicizes the availability of formal complaint channels.
8. During the last 12 months, I have had training on my organization's policies on sexual harassment.
9. During the last 12 months, I have had training on procedures for reporting sexual harassment.
10. My organization provides sexual harassment awareness training for employees.

# CSH growth curve model

- Significant fixed effect on **instigated incivility**,  $y_{20} = .15, p < .00$
- Significant fixed effect on **anxiety**,  $y_{20} = .21, p < .00$
- Significant fixed effect on **depression**,  $y_{20} = .16, p < .00$
- Significant fixed effect on **turnover intentions**,  $y_{20} = .31, p < .00$