Workplaces FOR Women

Work that works for everyone.

"No more tick-box exercises"
Women calling for workplace safety

Australian Government

VICTORIAN TRADES HALL COUNCIL

Acknowledgment of Country

We acknowledge the Wurundjeri people of the mighty Kulin nation; the traditional owners of the land on which VTHC stands. We pay our respects to their elders past and present. This land was stolen and never ceded. This always was and always will be Aboriginal land.

Solidarity Statement

We are union. We stand united as part of a great movement of workers. Our diversity is our strength. Our solidarity is our power. We respect and take care of each other. Prejudice and discrimination – including misogyny, racism, homophobia, and all other hatreds have no place in our movement. We rise together. Today and every day we commit ourselves to achieving justice, fairness, equality, and dignity for all workers. Solidarity forever.

Contents

'No more tick-box exercises':
Women calling for workplace safety.

About this report series

Victorian Trades Hall Council (VTHC) has a deep commitment to advancing workplace gender equality. Supported by the Australian Government, the Workplaces for Women (WFW) Project aims to leverage recent legislative amendments to support the creation of workplaces that are safe, respectful, equal and inclusive for all workers. To understand the unique experiences of workers in male-dominated industries (MDIs), we carried out an online survey (Equality at Work Survey), followed by focus groups and long-form interviews. Our survey collected workers' experiences, predominantly from Victoria, on issues including workplace culture, pay and career progression, caring responsibilities, occupational health and safety concerns and familiarity with workplace rights.

This report is the third in a series of reports that explores the issues faced by women in MDIs. Based on the barriers identified in the first report, "It turns out I'm good at it!": Women's insights from male-dominated industries, this report series takes a closer look at each theme and barrier while also drawing on insights from workers in female-dominated and gender-balanced industries. In doing so, we not only highlight the challenges women face in MDIs but also capture the broader experiences of women workers in Australian workplaces, which are informed by gender norms.

While this report predominantly uses the terms like 'women' and 'men', it does not exclude the experiences of workers with diverse gender identities. Nor does it reduce individual experiences to a simple women-men binary without considering personal backgrounds and intersectional attributes. By addressing barriers to gender equality in Australian workplaces, we believe that we can create workplaces that are accessible, fair and safe for everyone.

The previous reports are available from the QR or weareunion.org.au/w4w_resources

What this report covers

Drawing on data and quotes from workers, this report discusses three of ten barriers to workplace gender equality identified in the first report:

1. Hostile workplace cultures

2. The absence of consideration towards intersecting issues in workplaces; and

3. The absence of prevention, reporting mechanisms and accountability for sexual harassment and gender-based violence

In this report, male-dominated industries (MDIs) include Manufacturing; Transport, Postal and Warehousing; Construction; Electricity, Gas, Water and Waste Services; Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing; Mining; Public Administration and Safety; Wholesale Trade; and Other Services.[1] Female-dominated industries (FDIs) include Education and Training; and Health Care and Social Assistance. All remaining industries are classified as gender-balanced (Balanced) industries in line with the WGEA definition.

Content warning: This report touches on issues that some people may find challenging, such as sexual harassment and gender-based violence. If you need any personal support, you can contact the following:

• 1800 RESPECT | 1800 737 732
  1800respect.org.au

• CASA House | 1800 806 292
  casahouse.com.au

• Rainbow Door | Call: 1800 729 367
  Text: 0480 017 246 | rainbowdoor.org.au

• MensLine Australia | 1300 78 99 78
  mensline.org.au

• Men's Referral Service | 1300 766 491
  ntv.org.au/mrs

• 13YARN | 13 92 76
  13yarn.org.au

• Your Employee Assistance Program (EAP)

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1. We included 'Other Services' in the category of MDIs for the entire analysis, as the respondents in this sector were overwhelmingly concentrated in occupations that are traditionally male dominated.

Equality at Work Survey

Survey Period: 10 June 2025 – 30September 2025

644 valid responses

Gender:

512 Women

109 Men

21 Non-Binary

2 Other

Industry:

107 Transport, Postal and Warehousing

93 Other Services

60 Manufacturing

60 Construction

38 Electricity, Gas, Water and Waste Services

23 Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing

13 Mining

71 Health Care and Social Assistance

27 Professional, Scientific and Technical Services

18 Arts and Recreation Services

61 Education and Training

Respondant location:

597 Vic

20 NSW

13 QLD

14 Other

Interviews:

12 Women

Focus groups:

8 Focus group sessions

41 Women

2 Men

Respondant union membership status:

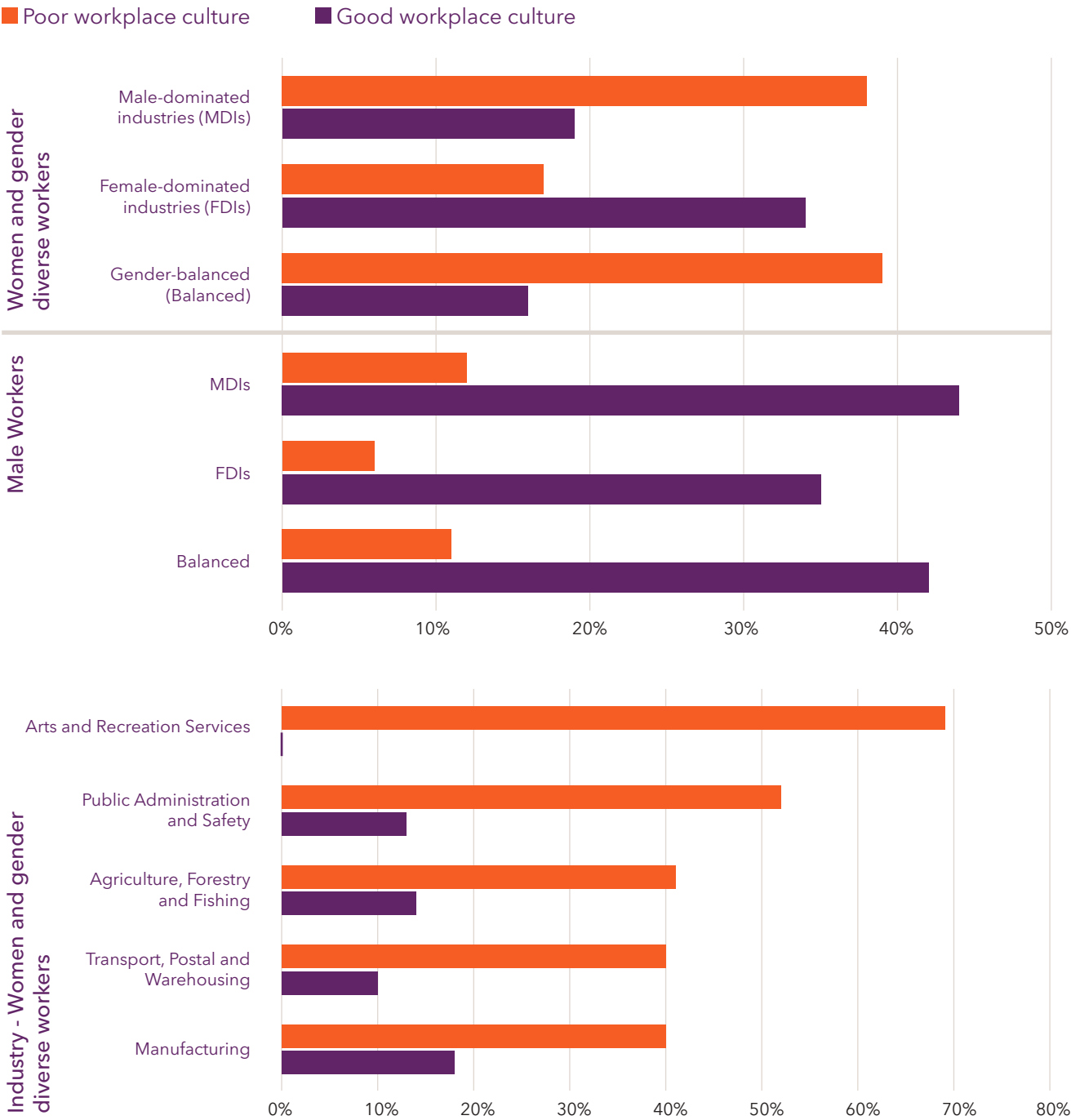**523** Union member

121 Non-union

The benefits of promoting workplace cultures free from gender discrimination

Workplaces with positive cultures retain more women workers.

Workplace culture is gendered. Our survey revealed that women workers report experiencing poor workplace cultures more often than men.[2] Nearly 40% of women in MDIs and gender-balanced industries reported their workplaces had a poor culture. Men generally reported more positive environments across industries, highlighting a gender gap in perceptions and experiences (see the first report). Looking more closely, more than half of women workers in Public Administration and Safety felt they were working in poor environments, and no women or gender diverse workers in Arts and Recreation Services worked in a good workplace culture.

Workplace culture by gender and by industry

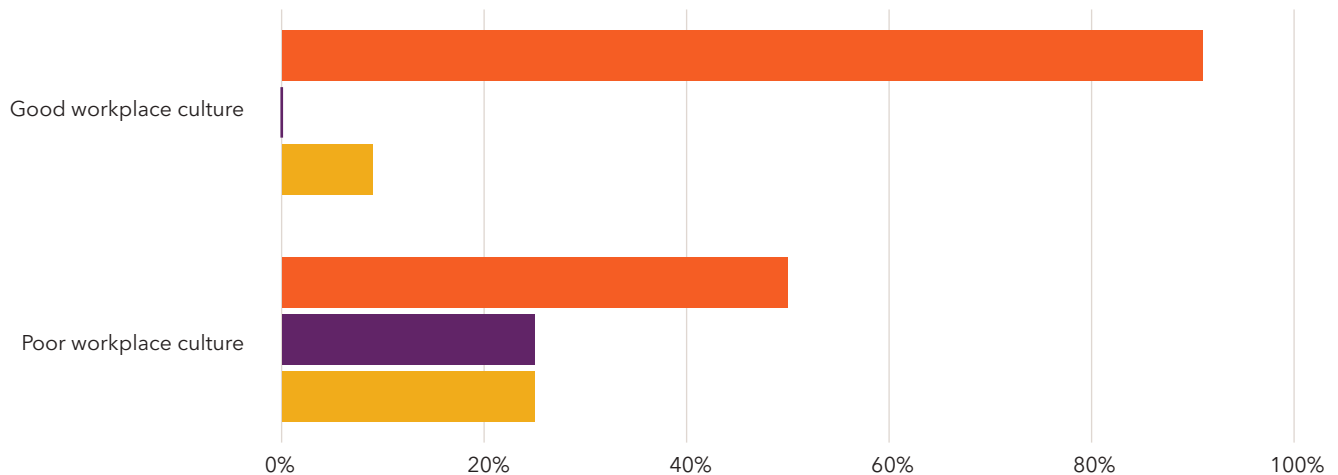■ Poor workplace culture   ■ Good workplace culture

2. In our survey, we defined good workplace culture as 'good company/industry beliefs and values, e.g. issues are dealt with quickly and well', and poor workplace culture as 'company/industry beliefs and values leading to poor work environment'.

Workplace culture matters. Positive workplace cultures encourage workers to stay. Among women workers in MDIs who reported good workplace cultures, more than 90% said they wanted to remain in their current workplace and none wanted to leave. In contrast, half of women experiencing poor workplace cultures were either considering leaving or not sure about their future. Workplace culture influences worker retention and improves industry sustainability. Listening to women's experiences is key to building positive workplace cultures where both women and men feel valued.

Workplace culture and workers' will to stay

■ Want to stay ■ Don't want to stay ■ Don't know

"My bosses have never treated me as if there is anything different about me. I get regular personal development, the exact same promotions as others, above award payments, and they kept me on from a 2nd year Apprentice to qualified for years. They have always treated me with the upmost respect. […] I can see myself doing it for the rest of my life."

- Female Electrician

Change in workplace culture

Workplace cultures towards women are gradually improving.

Workplace cultures, in general, seem to be improving. Workers rated how treatment towards women has changed in their workplace since they started their job. Similar to the above, men tended to rate change in their workplace culture more positively (see the first report). Workers who had been in their current job for more than 10 years reported greater improvement. Women reported

the increase of women in workplaces and in management roles as a sign of progress. Despite improvements made in organisational policies, however, more effective implementation of such measures and stronger understanding of practical strategies to improve gender equality among management and workers are required.

How has the treatment of women in your workplace changed?
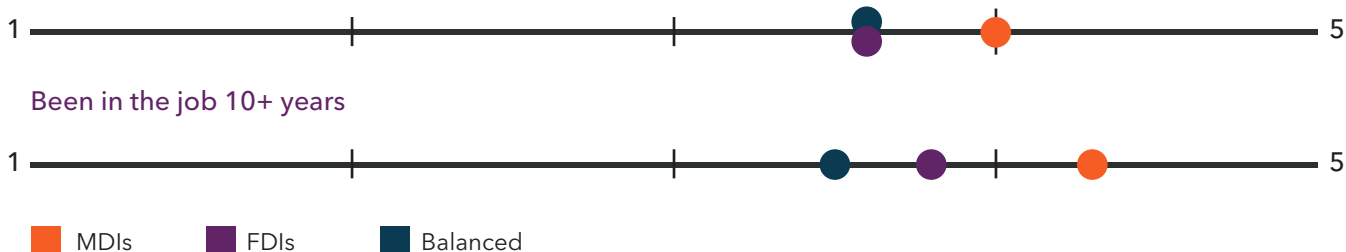*On a scale from 1 (much worse), 3 (hasn't changed) to 5 (Much better).*
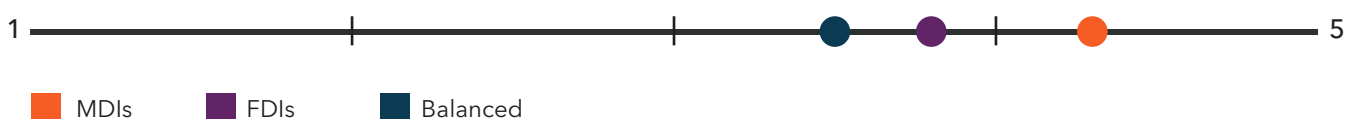
Women and gender diverse workers

Been in the job 10+ years

- MDIs
- Manufacturing
- FDIs
- Balanced
- Transport, Postal and Warehousing

Men workers

Been in the job 10+ years

- MDIs
- FDIs
- Balanced

"'Same ole.' *A lot of people have been here for a long time – [for] 20-30 years, and [they] wouldn't know what a work culture outside of this looks like."*

- Female Construction Worker

"About 16 years ago there was no such thing as equality between genders. Our workplace had worked so hard to promote a better culture for women and there are so many opportunities for us now. And seeing how many females are in upper management roles and extremely senior roles have been amazing."

\- Female Public Administration Worker

"We are moving in the right direction, but the progress is too slow, so interventions (closing the pay gap, more female senior leaders, real flexible working arrangements inc. shared work) that can address the speed of progress would be great!"

\- Female Construction Worker

"There are more females, [and] management seems on board, but the rest need to catch up. It's the people we work with every day that need a mindset change."

\- Female Transport Worker

Barrier:
Hostile workplace cultures against women

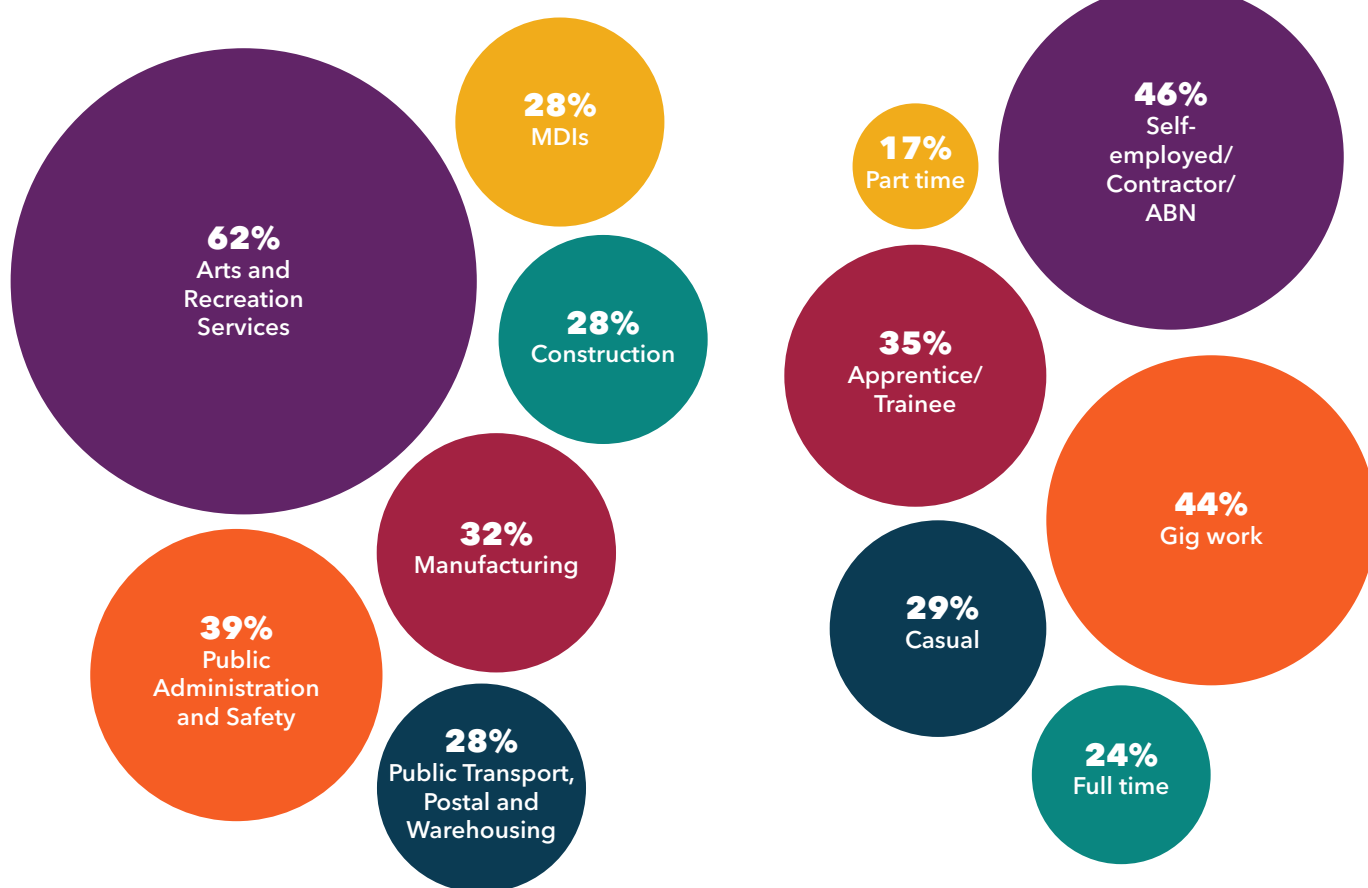## More than one in four women have experienced working in a hostile environment.

Hostile workplace cultures allow sexist and discriminatory practices to be manifested in workplaces, leading to physical and psychological harms and impacts on women. Our survey shows that nearly 30% of women in MDIs have experienced working in a hostile environment. Hostile cultures also persist in gender-balanced industries and FDIs.

Workers who are not in secure full-time or part-time employment are more exposed to hostile environments. Nearly half of women who are self-employed or gig workers have experienced hostility at work. This explains the high percentage in Arts and Recreation Services, where many women respondents were contractors or gig workers.

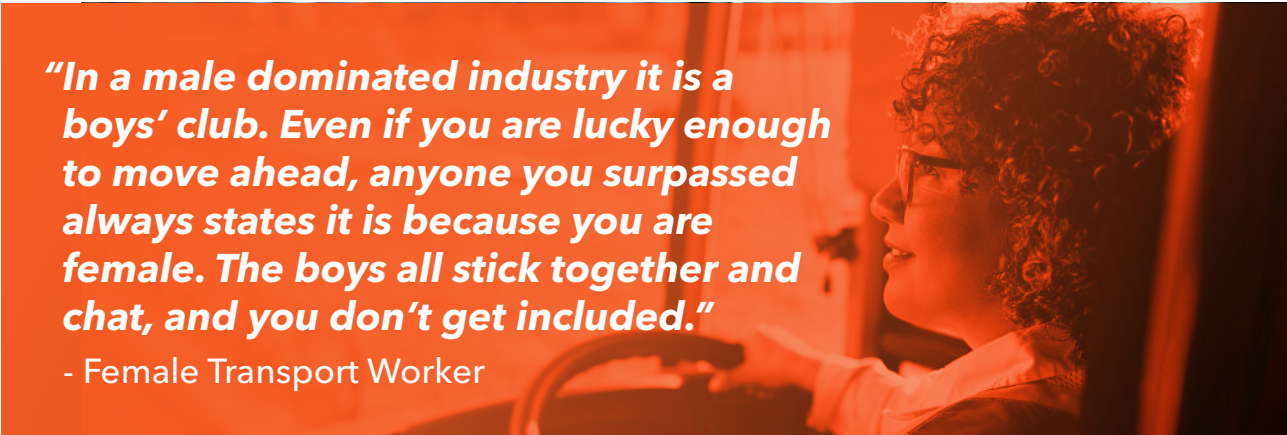## Women's experiences of working in a hostile environment

Industry

Employment type

Industry:
- 62% Arts and Recreation Services
- 28% MDIs
- 28% Construction
- 32% Manufacturing
- 39% Public Administration and Safety
- 28% Public Transport, Postal and Warehousing

Employment type:
- 17% Part time
- 46% Self-employed/Contractor/ABN
- 35% Apprentice/Trainee
- 44% Gig work
- 29% Casual
- 24% Full time

Male-dominated workplaces can be a boys' club.

In MDIs specifically, many respondents reported experiencing a boys' club culture. Women often feel excluded from social interactions and decision-making processes and experience harassment in a closed environment (see also the first report).

"In a male dominated industry it is a boys' club. Even if you are lucky enough to move ahead, anyone you surpassed always states it is because you are female. The boys all stick together and chat, and you don't get included."
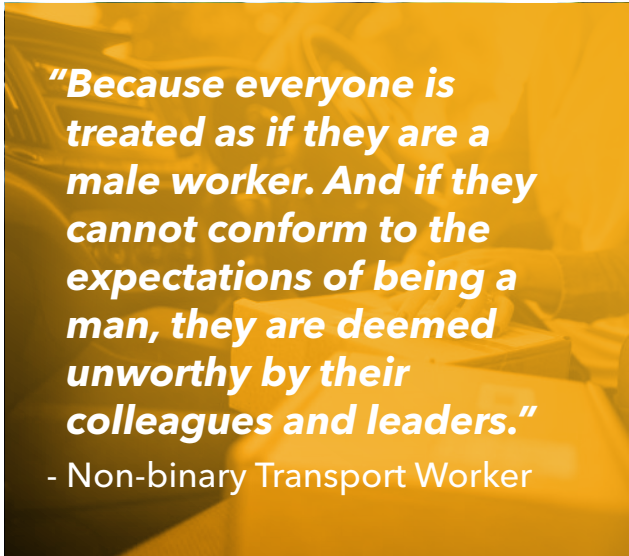
- Female Transport Worker

"I attended a training course for senior management. The trainer was male as were most of the participants.
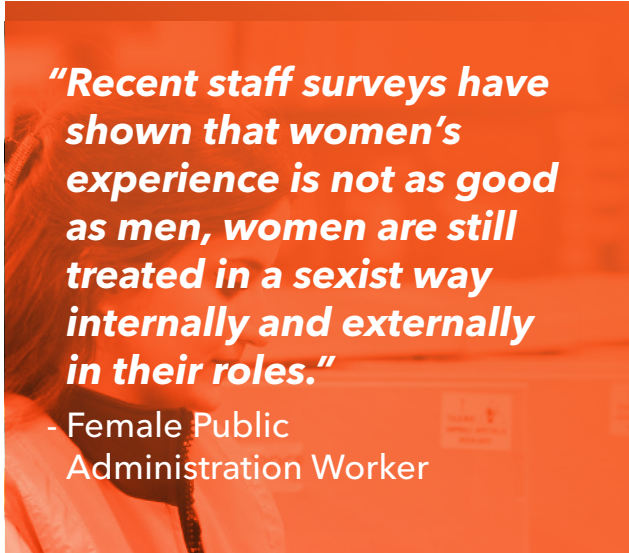
All self-congratulatory, insider jokes and sports bonding. Often examples of good practices were drawn from male sport. When we introduced ourselves, [we] had to say what football team we supported."
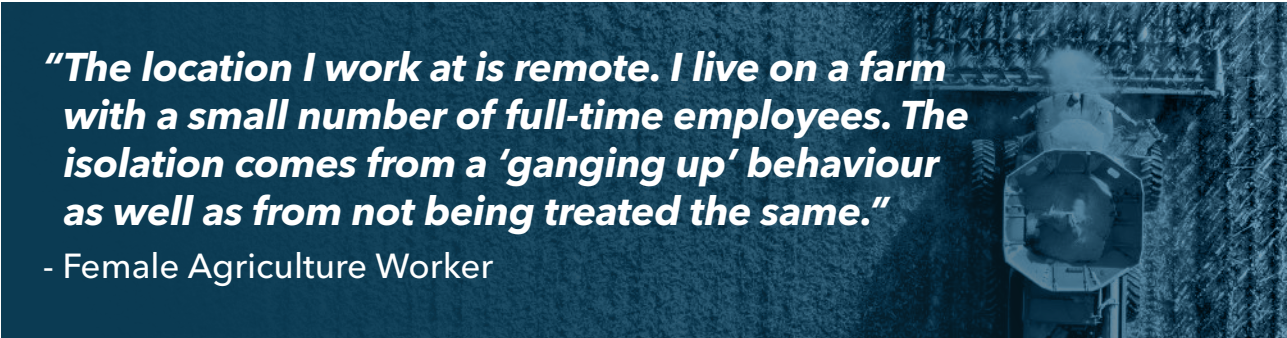
- Female Services Coordinator

"Because everyone is treated as if they are a male worker. And if they cannot conform to the expectations of being a man, they are deemed unworthy by their colleagues and leaders."

- Non-binary Transport Worker

"Recent staff surveys have shown that women's experience is not as good as men, women are still treated in a sexist way internally and externally in their roles."

- Female Public Administration Worker

"The location I work at is remote. I live on a farm with a small number of full-time employees. The isolation comes from a 'ganging up' behaviour as well as from not being treated the same."

- Female Agriculture Worker

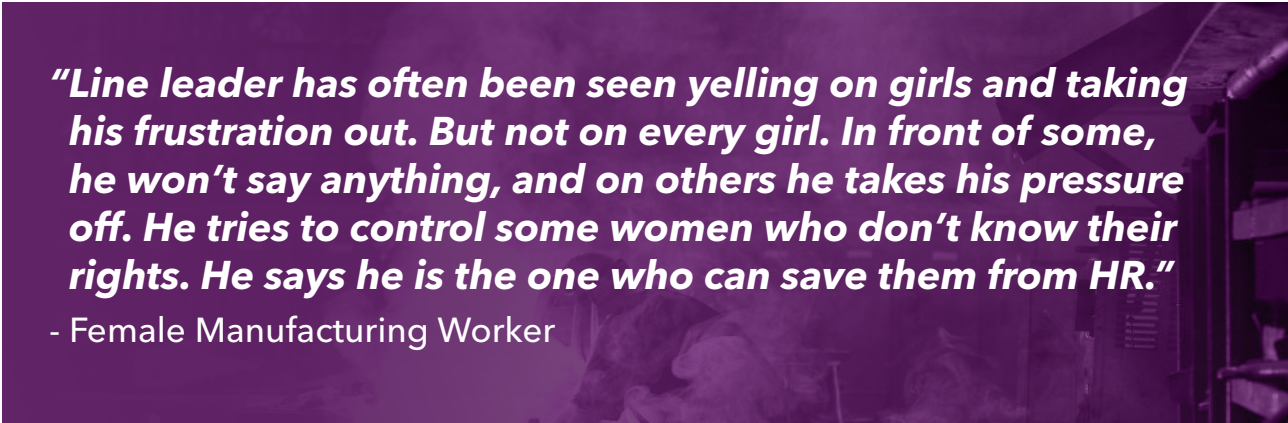## Workplace bullying is common in many workplaces.

Workplace bullying, defined as repeated unreasonable behaviour directed at an employee or a group of employees that creates a risk to health and safety, is another common experience workers face. Global data shows that Australia, along with New Zealand, has the highest reported experience of violence and harassment at work. Nearly one in two workers have experienced physical, psychological, or sexual violence and harassment. Furthermore, almost 80% of those who have experienced psychological violence and harassment – such as insults, threats, bullying or intimidation – have experienced it multiple times.[3]

Under the *Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004 (Vic) (OHS Act)*, employers have a legal duty to eliminate risks to health and safety of workers, both physically and psychologically as far as reasonably practicable. Workers may also apply to the Fair Work Commission for a stop bullying order under the *Fair Work Act 2009 (Cth)*. However, many workers, regardless of the gender characteristics of the workplace, have experienced being bullied at work by co-workers, management or customers who abused their power and took advantage of their attributes such as gender, race and ethnicity.

> *"On a few occasions I was bullied by current or past co-workers to the point I was in hysterical tears. Being a casual, I couldn't afford to leave work, so I had to stay."*
> - Female Manufacturing Operator

> *"Line leader has often been seen yelling on girls and taking his frustration out. But not on every girl. In front of some, he won't say anything, and on others he takes his pressure off. He tries to control some women who don't know their rights. He says he is the one who can save them from HR."*
> - Female Manufacturing Worker

> *"When I was harassed and bullied […], I felt high levels of stress, anxiety and severe weight loss. The fear of even leaving my house to go into the office really took its toll on me."*
> - Female Public Administration Worker

> *"It's relentless undermining of decisions and unsavoury comments about women. Exclusion because we're female. Trying to protect us, ironically, when dealing with unwell clients, as if we're not skilled enough. And don't even start me on racism!"*
> - Female Nurse

3. Lloyd's Register Foundation, "Safe at work? Global experiences of violence and harassment."

Women feel unsafe, isolated, and powerless in hostile workplaces.

Hostile environments expose workers to risks of physical and psychological injuries. 40% of women said they have felt unsafe in their workplaces. The top five industries were predominantly male-dominated industries. It is also notable that more than 60% of Arts and Recreation Services workers have felt unsafe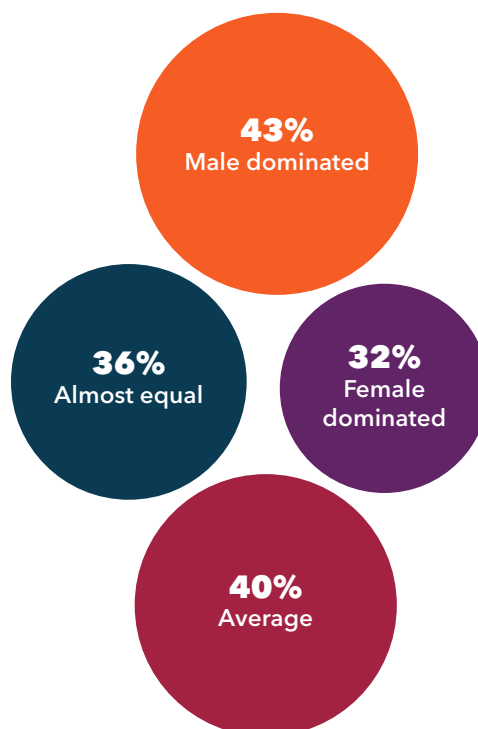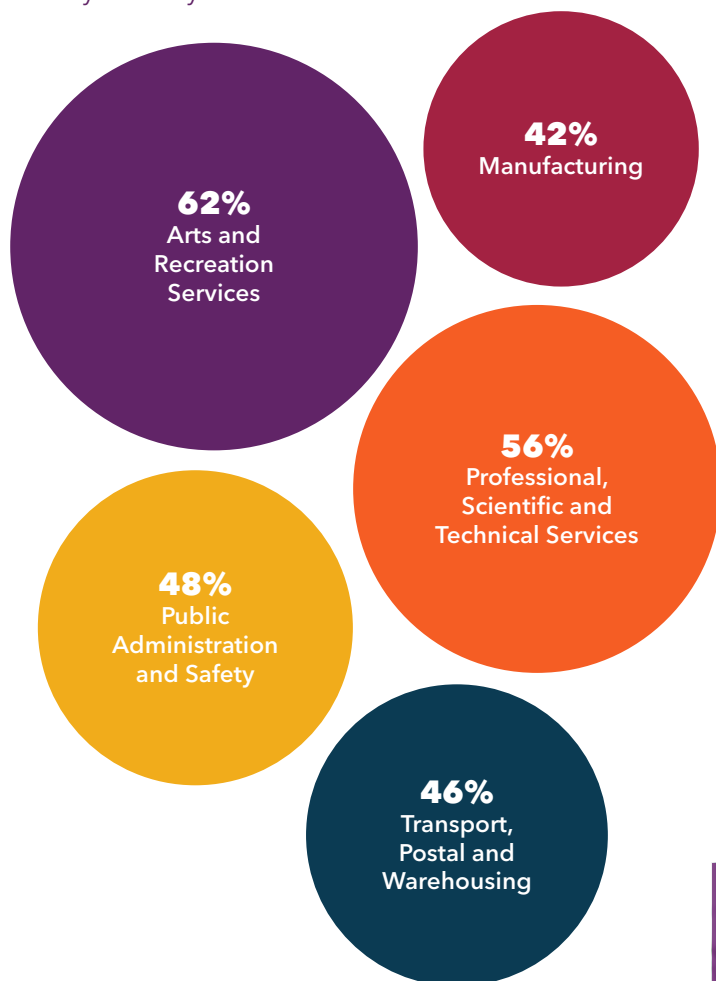. Across workplaces with different gender compositions (regardless of industry), more women workers feel unsafe in male-dominated workplaces. While some described hostile working environments, including sexual harassment and bullying, others highlighted unsafe practices and the nature of the work itself as contributing factors.

Women's experiences of unsafety by industry and workplace gender composition

Women and gender diverse workers who "felt unsafe":
- by industry   - by workplace gender composition

62%
Arts and Recreation Services

42%
Manufacturing

56%
Professional, Scientific and Technical Services

48%
Public Administration and Safety

46%
Transport, Postal and Warehousing

43%
Male dominated

36%
Almost equal

32%
Female dominated

40%
Average

"The feeling of something could come off badly, I think women entirely understand the gut feeling."
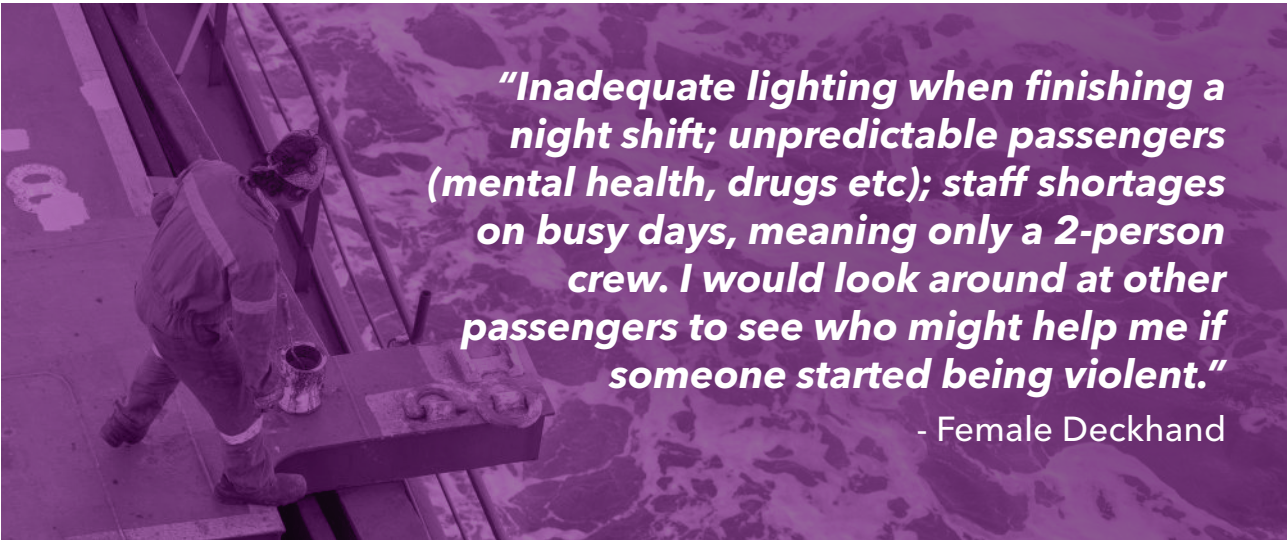- Female Electrical Technician

"Drinking is a big part of the culture, and I don't like staying after work (which is expected) around people with those views about women."
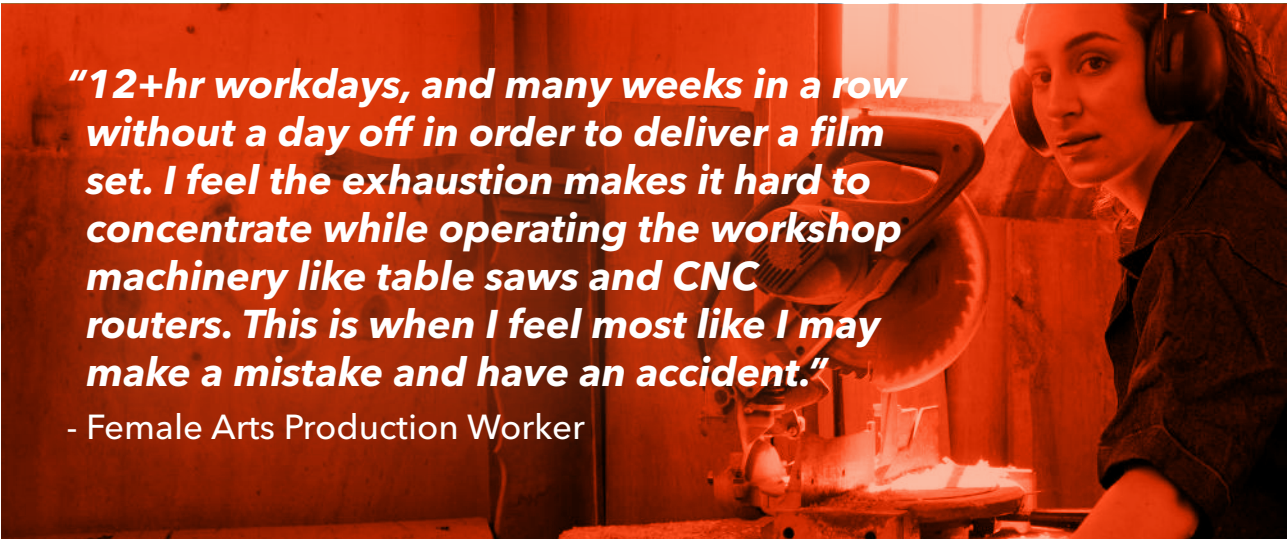- Female Sales Worker

> "A lot of gendered violence in the work we do, and this is exacerbated by unsafe management."
> - Female Health Care Practitioner

> "Inadequate lighting when finishing a night shift; unpredictable passengers (mental health, drugs etc); staff shortages on busy days, meaning only a 2-person crew. I would look around at other passengers to see who might help me if someone started being violent."
> - Female Deckhand

> "12+hr workdays, and many weeks in a row without a day off in order to deliver a film set. I feel the exhaustion makes it hard to concentrate while operating the workshop machinery like table saws and CNC routers. This is when I feel most like I may make a mistake and have an accident."
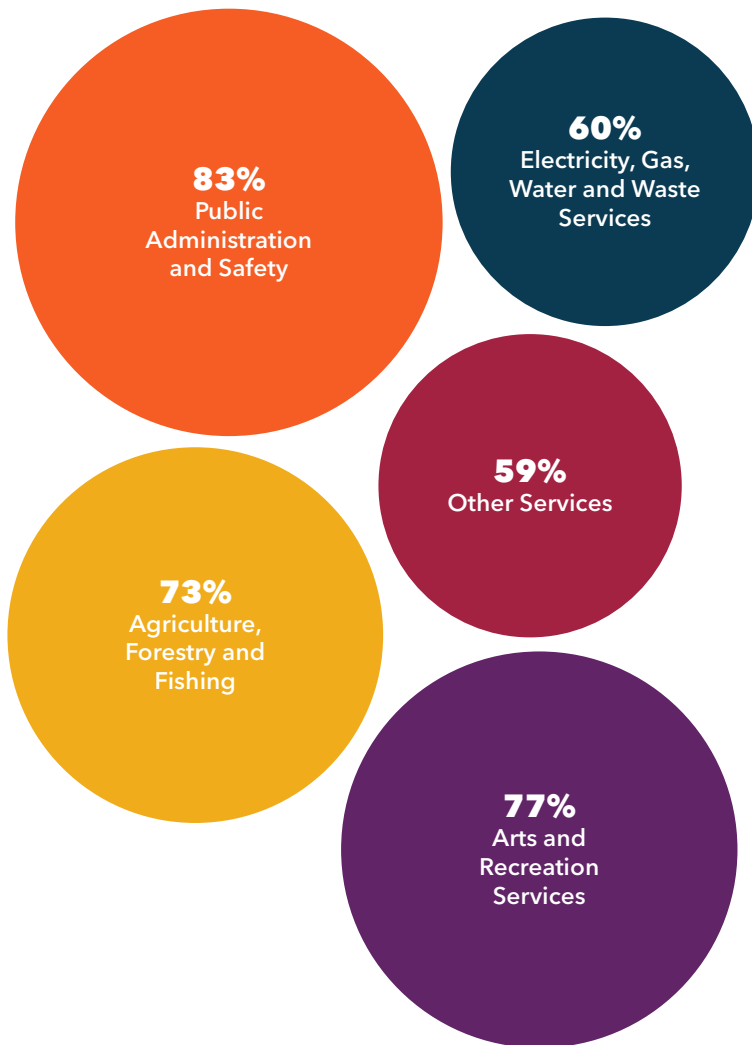> - Female Arts Production Worker

Hostile workplace cultures also isolate women. Nearly 60% of women are feeling isolated in their workplace. While male-dominated work environments certainly contribute to women's feelings of isolation, almost half of women in female-dominated and gender-balanced workplaces also reported feeling isolated. Being the only or one of few women in the workplace, women are excluded from social activities or receive less support than their male co-workers do. Being on different employment arrangements also increases isolation. Apprentices, contractors and gig workers are much more likely to feel isolated than workers in full-time and part-time work.

Women's experiences of isolation by industry and workplace gender composition
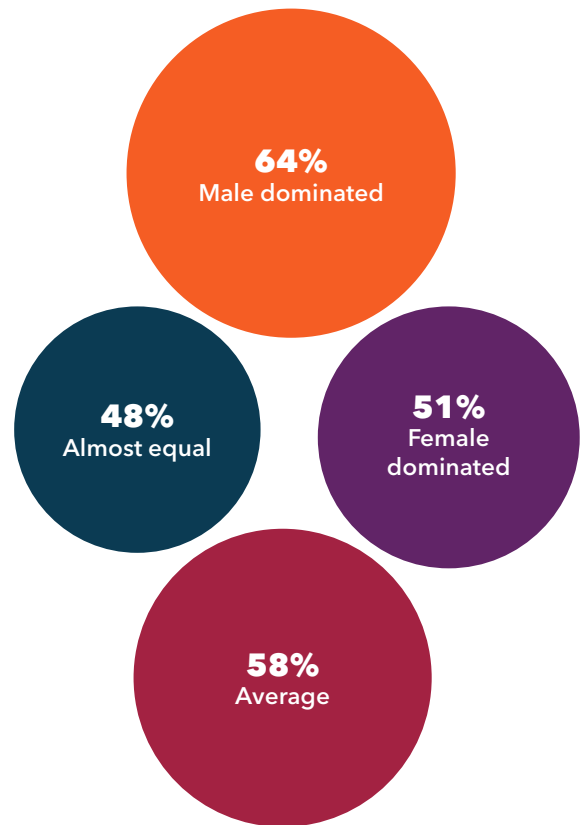
Women and gender diverse workers who "felt isolated":
- by industry
- by workplace gender composition

83%
Public Administration and Safety

60%
Electricity, Gas, Water and Waste Services

59%
Other Services

73%
Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing

77%
Arts and Recreation Services

64%
Male dominated

48%
Almost equal

51%
Female dominated

58%
Average

"[In] a team of 30+, I am the only female. I have in 4 years never worked with another woman on the tools. It's lonely and friendless being the only woman. Excluded from all group chats and talked [to] not far too often."
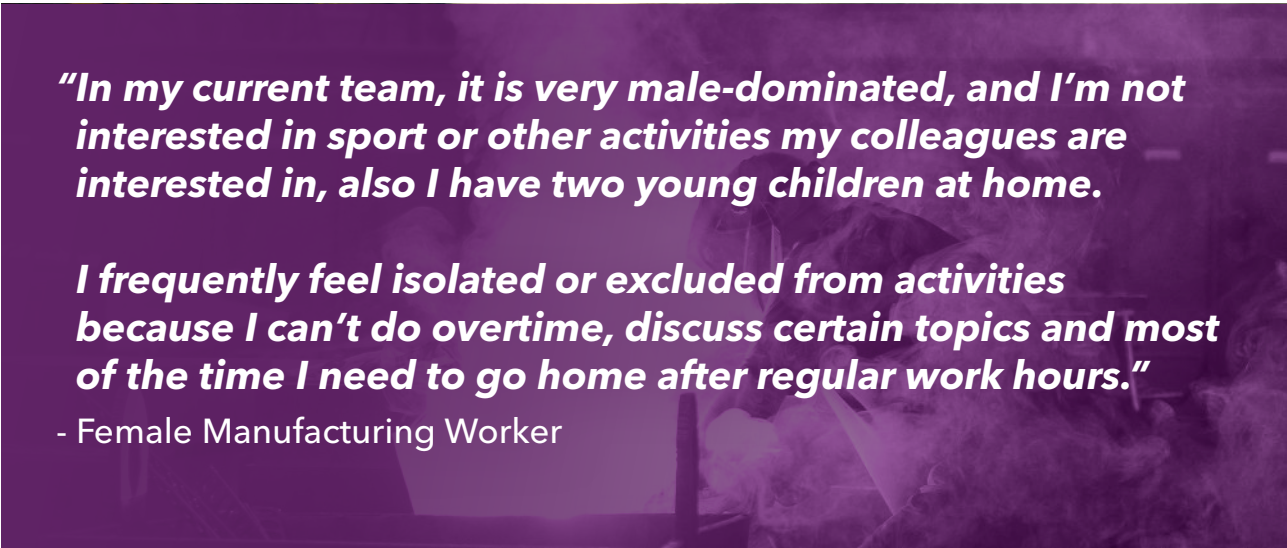
- Female Apprentice Electrical Fitter

"Breaking through the usual barriers in any workplace is difficult, but walking into a room full of men that have already judged you before you've opened your mouth is tough. Especially when you need to be trained on new equipment initially, you have to rely on your co-workers. If they don't train you thoroughly or correctly it makes you look incompetent."

- Female Transport, Postal and Warehousing Technician

> *"I'm the first female electrician they've ever hired. I've had to be my own role model for a long time."*
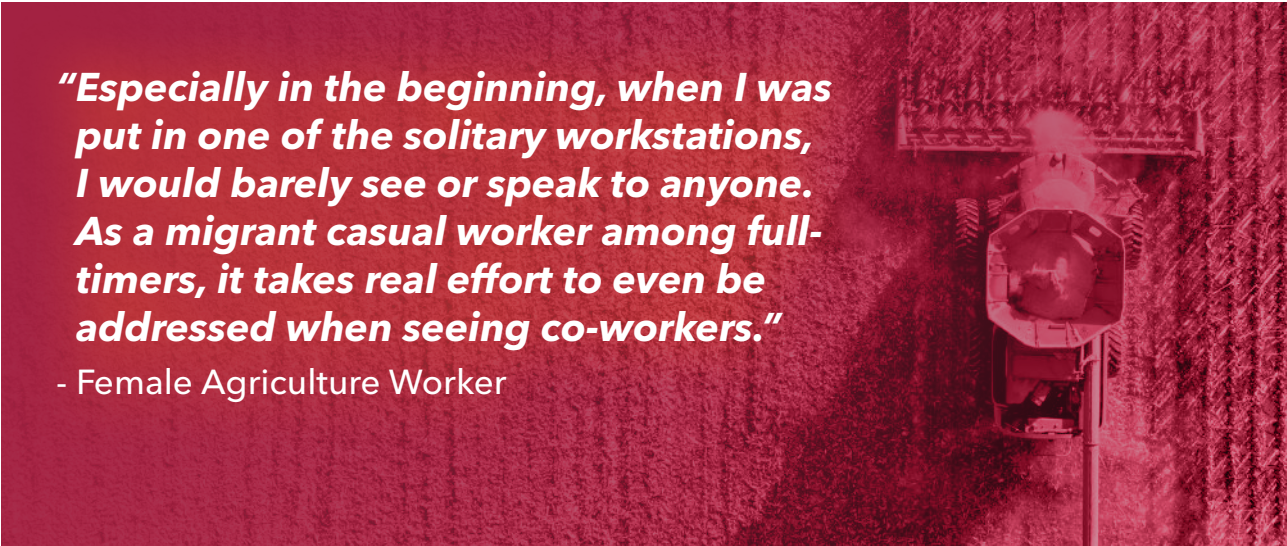>
> - Female Electrician

> *"In my current team, it is very male-dominated, and I'm not interested in sport or other activities my colleagues are interested in, also I have two young children at home.*
>
> *I frequently feel isolated or excluded from activities because I can't do overtime, discuss certain topics and most of the time I need to go home after regular work hours."*
>
> - Female Manufacturing Worker

> *"Especially in the beginning, when I was put in one of the solitary workstations, I would barely see or speak to anyone. As a migrant casual worker among full-timers, it takes real effort to even be addressed when seeing co-workers."*
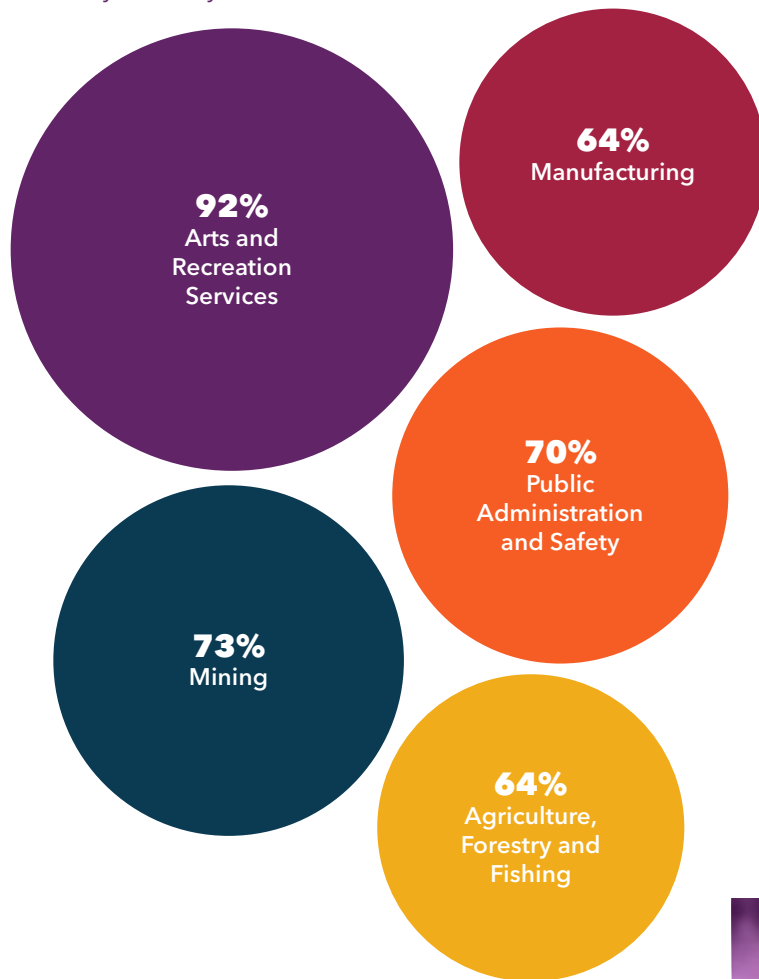>
> - Female Agriculture Worker

In hostile environments, women feel less confident to speak up or make change. Nearly 60% of women reported feeling powerless, mainly because of their male-dominated management, co-workers and employers who remain hesitant to change. This is particularly true in Arts and Recreation Services, where almost all workers felt powerless. Although many women stand up to make their workplaces safer and more inclusive, their voices are often overlooked or dismissed. Hostile cultures also hinder women from developing their skills and confidence to advance their careers and gain more authority to drive change.
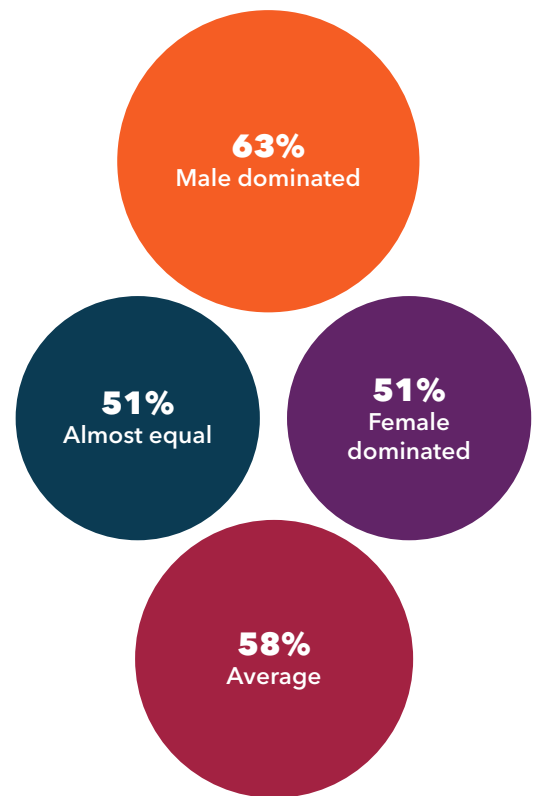
Women's experiences of powerlessness by industry and workplace gender composition

Women and gender diverse workers who "felt powerless":
- by industry
- by workplace gender composition

92%
Arts and Recreation Services

64%
Manufacturing

70%
Public Administration and Safety

73%
Mining

64%
Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing

63%
Male dominated

51%
Almost equal

51%
Female dominated

58%
Average

"I feel as though I don't get heard when I try and speak up, but then a male can say the exact same thing, and they are listened to."

- Female Mining Worker

"As a female, we don't always get the respect and/or listened to. Being [in] a male-dominated job, they say we are whining and whinging. We get classed and then picked on even though we are trying to make a better workplace."

- Female Manufacturing Worker

"I feel like I have it in me to make positive change, but the appetite for change by managers isn't there."
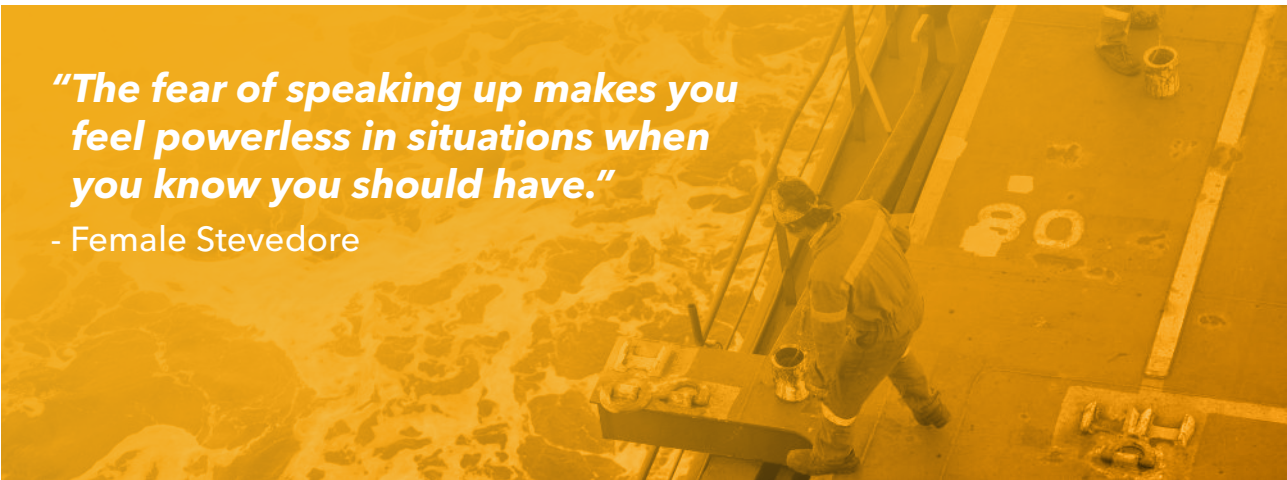
- Female Forest Fire Operations

"I like to speak up about issues but feel like because we only have four women [in] our workplace, our wants aren't included."
- Female Construction Worker

"If I reported the [inappropriate] behaviour, it was very likely to get worse. If I did nothing, my life was hell. I felt doomed to the lack of care from leadership, the company and HR."
- Female Electrical Technician

"The fear of speaking up makes you feel powerless in situations when you know you should have."
- Female Stevedore

"I feel powerless for not being able to develop my operator skills, for not being able to have more opportunities within my company to try out new machines."
- Female Construction Machine Operator

Barrier:
The absence of consideration towards intersecting issues in workplaces

Nearly half of women workers who experienced gender discrimination also experienced other forms of discrimination.
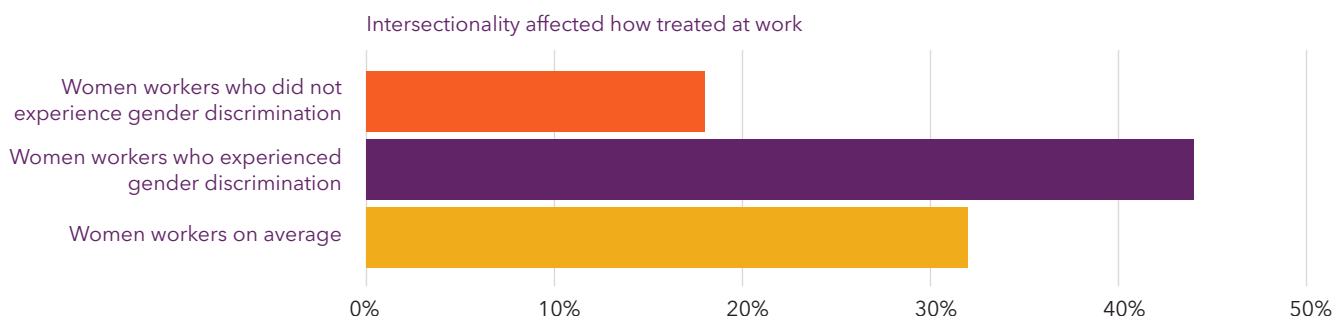
Workplace gender discrimination is not experienced by everyone in the same way. Workers' personal characteristics – such as race, ethnicity, First Nations background, sexual identity, disability status, age, and migration pathway – intersect with each other and create multiple layers of inequalities.[4] 32% of women workers said attributes other than gender influenced how they were treated at work. However, of those who reported experiencing gender discrimination, 44% said they were also treated differently because of their other attributes, whereas 19% of women who did not experience gender discrimination reported experiencing other forms of discrimination. These figures are quite consistent across MDIs, FDIs and Balanced industries, showing that women workers face multiples forms of discrimination everywhere. Hostile workplace cultures against women allows discrimination based on other attributes to take place.
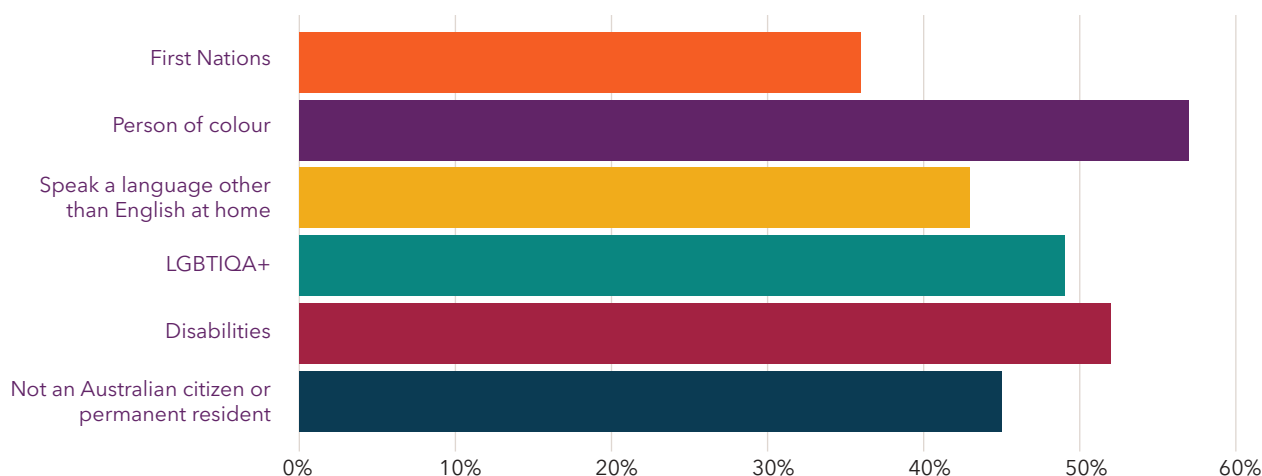
Women's experiences around intersectionality by industry and workplace gender composition

Intersectionality affected how treated at work

In this survey, the common attributes reported were sexual orientation, cultural background, age and disability, aligning with the most reported reasons for workplace discrimination identified by external data.[5] Compared to the average above (32%), women and gender diverse workers with specific attributes said that their experiences have been informed by intersectionality.

Women's experiences around intersectionality by attributes

Intersectionality affected how women and gender diverse workers from these demographics were treated at work
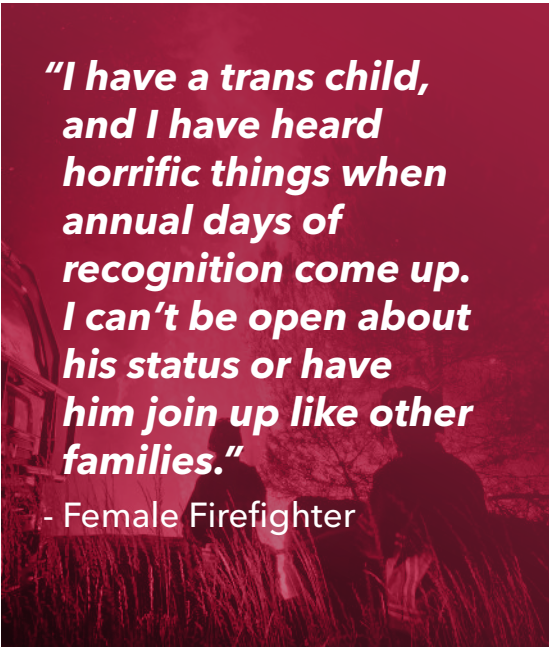

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4. WGEA, "Gender equality and intersecting forms of diversity"; Jobs and Skills Australia, "New perspectives on old problems."
5. Roger Wilkins, Ferdi Botha, Inga Laß and Kyle Peyton, "The Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia Survey: Selected Findings from Waves 1 to 22."

"As a queer non-binary person who doesn't fit in with 'the boys', I have been passed over for promotions and have heard inappropriate and discriminatory comments said about me."

- Non-binary Transport Worker

"I have a trans child, and I have heard horrific things when annual days of recognition come up. I can't be open about his status or have him join up like other families."

- Female Firefighter

"It has been my experience personally to have been exposed to a lack of support and promotion as a brown-skinned woman. I have been seriously undermined and undervalued in my workplace where there is still a toxic old boys' club mentality."

- Female Teacher

"I was treated differently due to race. Racial remarks in the workplace [by] managers, stereotyping of customers that look like me."

- Female Health Care Worker

"Disability, people don't understand why it's important to make reasonable adjustments. There is no fair process in my workplace to request them."

- Female Electricity, Gas, Water and Waste Services Worker

"I feel I was judged on combination of my gender and age in my early years of qualifications."

- Female Electrical Technician

"[I am] under pressure from boss to not identify as Aboriginal."

- Female Researcher

Personal attributes shape workers' experiences in every aspect of their careers.

Our survey asked women and gender diverse workers to rate their experiences of entering their industry and their long-term experiences. Compared with the overall rating, people with disabilities, First Nations workers, LGBTI+ workers, and those without Australian citizenship or permanent residency reported more negative experiences entering and remaining in MDIs.

Women's experiences of entering and staying in the industry by personal attributes
On a scale from 1 (very bad) to 5 (very good)

Entering experiences

Long-term experiences

■ All women and gender diverse workers in MDIs (average)   ■ Not an Australian citizen or permanent resident
■ First Nations   ■ Person of colour   ■ LGBTIQA+   ■ Disabilities   ■ Caring responsibilities

The FW Act protects several attributes and prohibits workplace discrimination based on them.[6] *The Equal Opportunity Act 2010 (Vic)* also prohibits discrimination based on some attributes.[7] However, workplaces have not implemented effective practices to address them. On average, about 45% of Australian private sector employers provide sexual harassment training program considering diverse and intersecting experiences of people with different backgrounds. Yet, within Transport, Postal and Warehousing industry, only 29% of employers include such consideration in their training program.[8] Addressing gender discrimination at work is not only about eliminating gender-specific inequalities, but also about tackling other forms of discrimination and improving an overall workplace safety. We will continue to include the voices of workers from diverse backgrounds in our reports and highlight how their workplace experiences are shaped by intersectional dynamics.

Recommendation:
Design and deliver better workplace training for workers with diverse backgrounds

Develop more effective and tailored workplace training that incorporates intersectional attributes and addresses unconscious bias and hostile environments that women and gender diverse workers face.

Action: Deliver training tailored to the industrial knowledge of the workforce, recognising that workers in MDIs experience different challenges depending on the density of women working onsite. Information and training should include (among other things):

• Understanding gender equality, workplace entitlements and legislative levers

• How to access and improve entitlements and raise concerns

• Advocacy, building confidence, effective bystander intervention, and managing resistance

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6. The protected attributes under the *FW Act* are: race; colour; sex; sexual orientation; age; physical or mental disability; marital status; family or carer's responsibilities; pregnancy; religion; political opinion; national extraction; social origin; breastfeeding; gender identity; intersex status; and experiencing family and domestic violence.
7. The protected attributes under the *Equal Opportunity Act* are: age; disability; employment activity; expunged homosexual conviction; gender identity; industrial activity; lawful sexual activity; marital status; parent and carer status; physical features; political belief or activity; pregnancy and breastfeeding; profession, trade or occupation; race; religious belief or activity; sex; sex characteristics; sexual orientation; spent conviction; and personal association with someone who has, or is assumed to have, one of these personal characteristics.
8. WGEA.

Barrier:
The absence of prevention, reporting mechanisms and accountability for SH/GBV
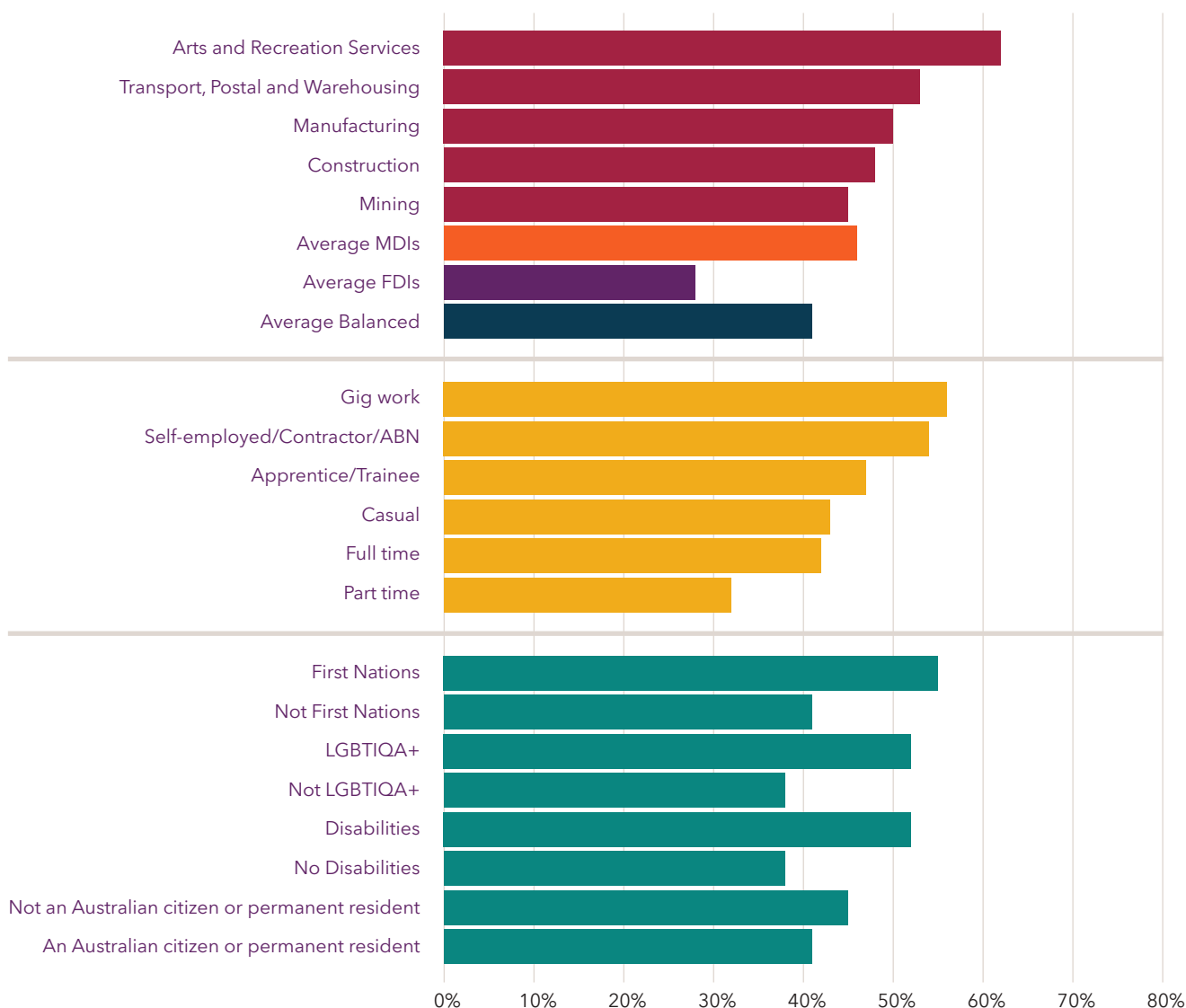
SH/GBV are prevalent, and risks increase for workers with specific attributes.

Sexual harassment and gender-based violence (SH/GBV) are unlawful under several pieces of legislation: the *Sex Discrimination Act 1984 (Cth)* and the *Equal Opportunity Act 2010 (Vic)*. SH/GBV are discrimination that can cause physical and psychological harms (OHS hazard) to a worker, and therefore employers bear legal obligations to address and prevent them.

Nevertheless, the survey shows that SH/GBV are yet widespread in MDIs and other industries. As our first report showed, nearly half of women and gender diverse workers in MDIs have experienced SH/GBV.

SH/GBV experiences are most prevalent in Arts and Recreation Services. Perpetrators are mainly co-workers, managers, customers and patients, while respondents' experiences ranged from sexual comments and jokes, unwanted flirting, touching, stalking, to sexual assaults. Workers with insecure employment arrangements and some other personal attributes are more likely to be subjected to SH/GBV, compared with workers who do not possess those characteristics. Survey responses also indicated lack of familiarity in some cases with what constitutes SH/GBV, and as such these experiences may be underreported.

Women and gender diverse workers experiences of SH/GBV by industry, employment type and personal attributes
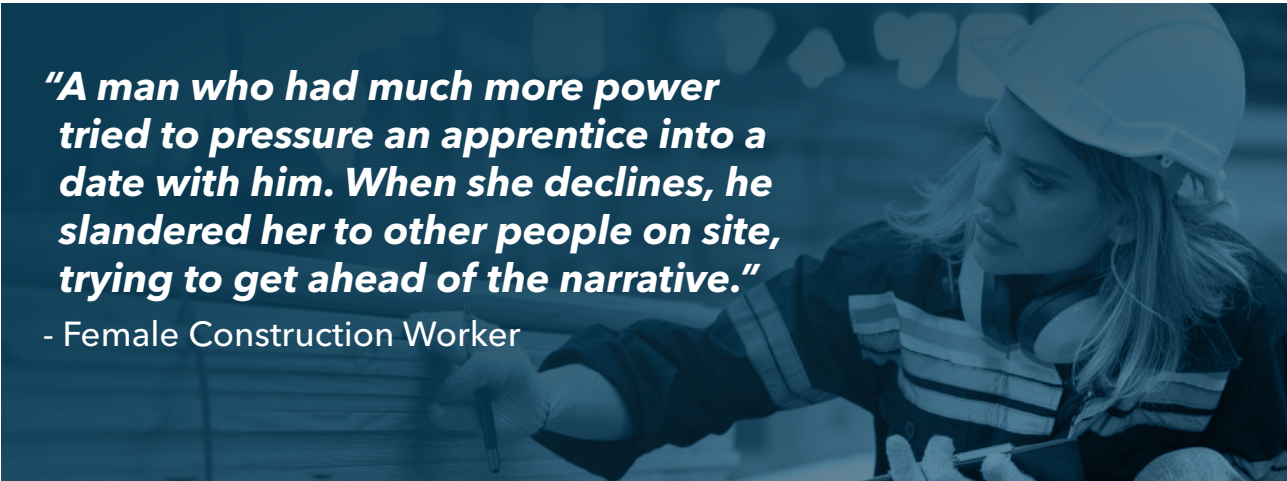
"Pretty much all the people assigned, assumed or affirmed as women in my workplace are harassed within their first few days."
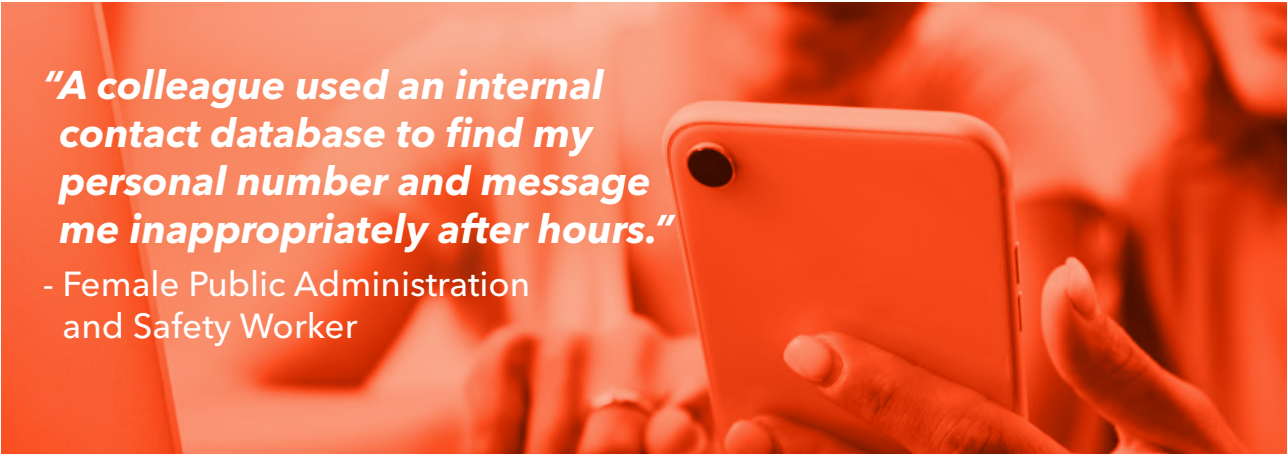- Agender Transport Worker

"Guys making vomiting noises at the bare mention of my period when I've tried to explain why I'm moving slower that day."
- Female Apprentice Electrical Fitter

"A man who had much more power tried to pressure an apprentice into a date with him. When she declines, he slandered her to other people on site, trying to get ahead of the narrative."
- Female Construction Worker

"A colleague used an internal contact database to find my personal number and message me inappropriately after hours."
- Female Public Administration and Safety Worker

"Female staff are very often subject to microaggressions and inappropriate comments from customers and members of the public while working."
- Non-binary Transport Worker

The Sex Discrimination Act 1984 (SD Act) was amended on 12 December 2022 to include a legal obligation on employers (positive duty) to prevent and eliminate discrimination, victimisation, sexual harassment, and hostile workplace environments. Similarly, under the *Equal Opportunity Act 2010 (Vic)*, a positive duty to prevent sexual harassment has been the law since 1 August 2011; yet, it has not been effective in changing employer conduct. *The OHS Act (Vic)* also has a positive obligation on employers to eliminate risks to health and safety as far as reasonably practical. Importantly, new Occupational Health and Safety (Psychological Health) Regulations come into effect from 1 December 2025 that strengthen employers' responsibility to identify and control psychosocial hazards in workplaces, including bullying, sexual harassment and gendered violence. Employers' legal duties to protect workers and to eliminate all forms of violence and hazards must be taken seriously and acted on effectively.

According to WGEA, almost all employers in MDIs have a formal policy or strategy for preventing and responding to SH, and around 90% include a statement on their positive duty to provide a safe workplace.[9] However, from the responses collected through the survey, focus groups and interviews, we identified three main ways that employers continue to fail to fulfill their duties. These issues relate to prevention, reporting and accountability measures.

1. The workplace culture that lets SH/GBV happen and silences victims

Hostile workplace cultures allow SH/GBV to take place and normalise them. In workplaces where SH/GBV have become a "part of the culture", women give up on speaking up, fearing (and often realising) victimisation, including job loss, retaliation and exclusion, which impacts their career opportunities, economic security and health. Power imbalances are extreme, advantaging employers and perpetrators and silencing victims. This also affects men, who are discouraged from speaking up when experiencing or witnessing harassment because of an unsafe work environment and male-dominated culture. In such an environment, workers do not stay; external data suggests that 25% of women who made a formal report or complaint after experiencing workplace SH left their job.[10] Another research shows that 83% of women and 67% of men would consider leaving a job where workplace SH is not treated as a serious issue.[11]

"Sexual comments and belittlement are very common. It's highly normalised and part of the regular workload - for women."
- Female Agriculture Worker

"Women are still belittled in the workplace, and we cannot always report things because there is a consequence of not being spoken to, 'hated', etc."
- Female Mechanical Fitter

9. WGEA, "Industry Data Explorer."
10. Deloitte Access Economics, "The economic costs of sexual harassment in the workplace."
11. Our Watch, "Sexual harassment response a key issue in attracting and retaining staff, new data shows."

"I have been subjected to continuous sexual harassment from my supervisor […]. The [manager] protected the bad guy, and I could not make any rebuttal because my boss could fire me at any time. For my work visa, I had no choice but to swallow my anger. I became depressed because of this, and I am seeing a psychologist. I am in pain and don't know what to do."

- Female Manufacturing Worker

"I am a happy and friendly person. I laugh a lot even when I am uncomfortable. Men might say passing comments, and because it's a workplace you don't want to lose your job, so you just laugh it off."

- Female Maritime Worker

"I told my manager, and she said she would follow it up, but I was frightened of the repercussions and I needed my job, so I said not to bother this time."

- Female Public Administration Worker

"The other guys I work with [were targeted]. They don't ask for help because they will be ridiculed more."

- Female Mining Technician

"A male co-worker of mine was harassed. It was very difficult for him because he was expected not to have feelings. He just tried to move on."

- Female Transport, Postal and Warehousing Officer

An "open environment" for men is not necessarily true for women.

As shown earlier, perceptions of workplace culture differ between women and men, influencing their confidence in being able to report SH.[12] Four survey respondents in the same occupation in the transport industry shared their views on workplace culture and SH experiences. While a male worker said that the increased visibility of women and the workplace policy had created an environment where women feel comfortable speaking up, the women workers said they still do not feel safe enough to report SH/GBV.

"It would have been a male dominant industry years ago. However, from last 10-15 years the company has given priority to hire more and more female in each department, and this has contributed to a positive gender equality. Hiring more female staff in all the divisions has created a sense of security, and they can comfortably voice their concerns if any. Code of conduct policy and women are very comfortable to raise any concerns at workplace."
- Male Station Worker

"It's a male dominated workplace that has measures in place to increase the amount of women here and the conditions for them, but the culture is still very backwards."
- Female Station Worker A

"Transportation has been a male-dominated industry for a very long time. There are still long hold biases that can hold back female coworkers. It has gotten a little better, but it's still got a significant way to go."
- Female Station Worker B

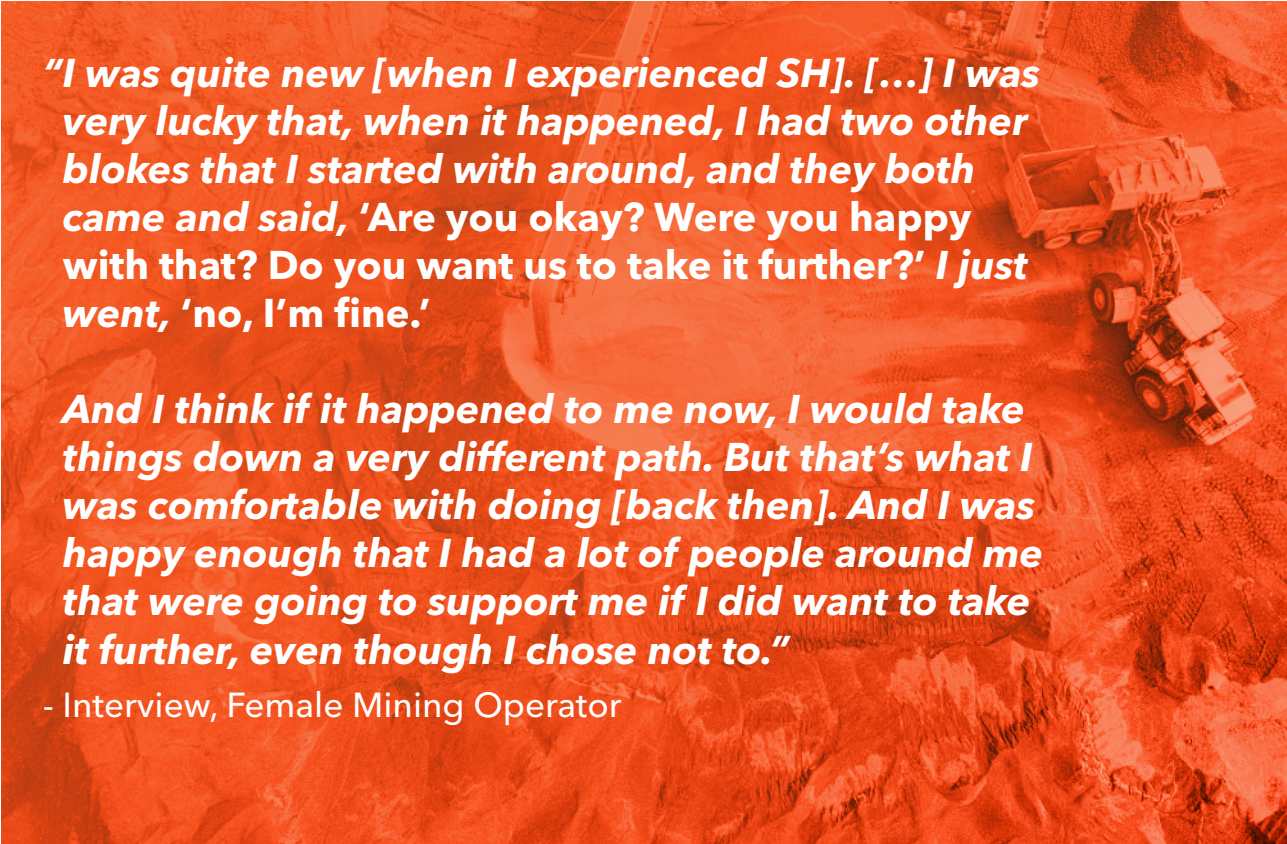*"I did not [report SH]. It felt too hard, and I didn't want to ruin any opportunities for the future."*
- Female Station Worker C

12. Our Watch, "Workplace sexual harassment."

Men can act as allies to address SH/GBV and build a better culture.

To transform hostile work environments in MDIs, it is important that men act as allies. When men refuse to tolerate SH/GBV and speak up for women who find it 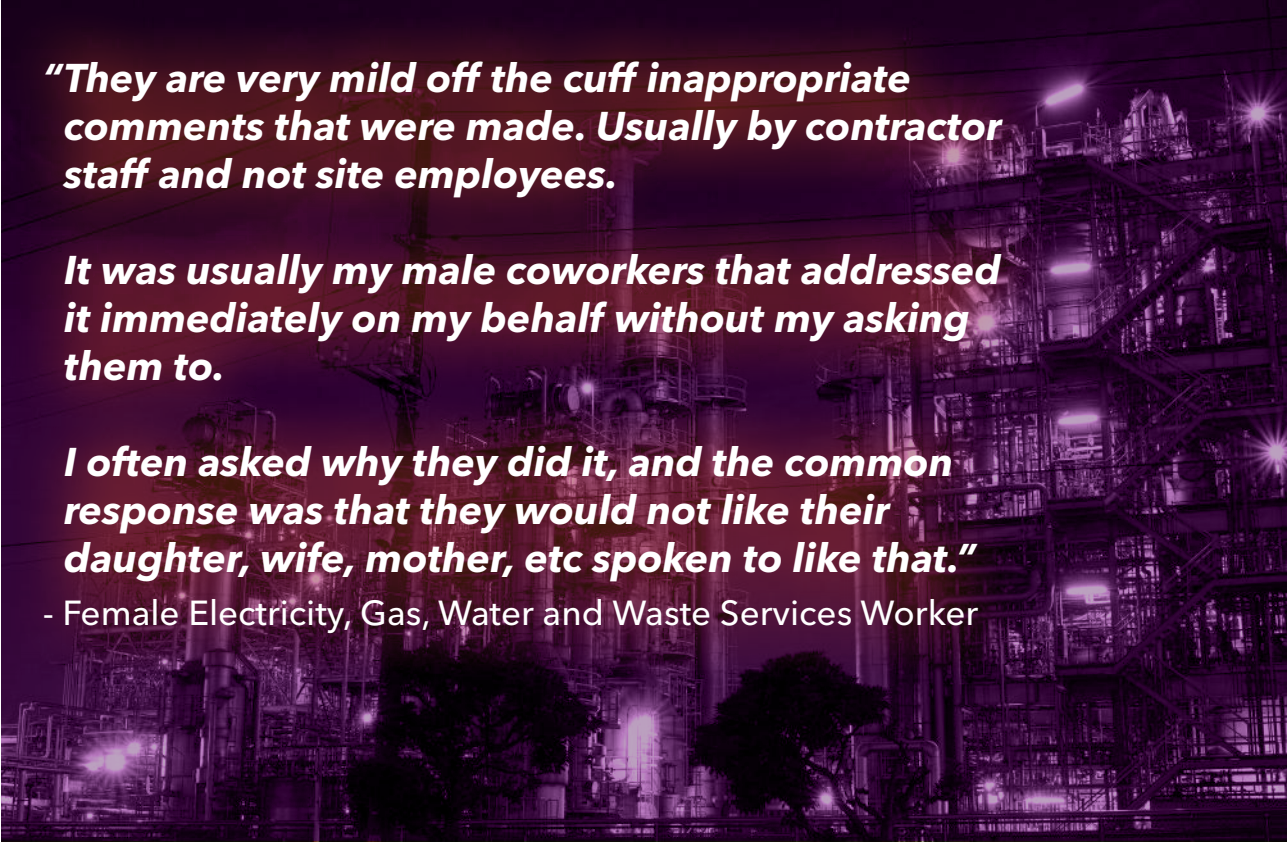difficult to challenge normalised abuse, a workplace culture becomes safer and more inclusive. Some women shared with us positive stories of having male allies who made them feel safer in their workplaces by taking effective bystander action.

"I was quite new [when I experienced SH]. […] I was very lucky that, when it happened, I had two other blokes that I started with around, and they both came and said, 'Are you okay? Were you happy with that? Do you want us to take it further?' I just went, 'no, I'm fine.'

And I think if it happened to me now, I would take things down a very different path. But that's what I was comfortable with doing [back then]. And I was happy enough that I had a lot of people around me that were going to support me if I did want to take it further, even though I chose not to."

- Interview, Female Mining Operator

"They are very mild off the cuff inappropriate comments that were made. Usually by contractor staff and not site employees.

It was usually my male coworkers that addressed it immediately on my behalf without my asking them to.

I often asked why they did it, and the common response was that they would not like their daughter, wife, mother, etc spoken to like that."

- Female Electricity, Gas, Water and Waste Services Worker

Employers must consult with workers and make training more than a mere tick-box exercise.

In order to build a zero-tolerance culture, employers must act. Yet, their risk management measures are still inadequate. For instance, in Manufacturing, 62% of employers are committed to identifying and assessing specific workplace and industry risks, and 45% review their measures regularly. In Transport, Postal and Warehousing, the figures are 66% and 46%, respectively. Only about 40% of employers in both industries consult with their staff on SH risks despite legal obligations to do so. While 87% of employers in Manufacturing and 92% in Transport, Postal and Warehousing provide SH prevention training, most of these are offered only at induction. Employers who provide regular training account for 64% in Manufacturing and 56% in Transport, Postal and Warehousing.[13]

Even if they are offered, these trainings are often not taken seriously in the workplace or lack a victim-centred and trauma-informed approach. Women highlighted the importance of developing more effective training that fosters more respectful and safer workplace cultures, as the discussion we had in one focus group shows.

Worker D
(Female Nurse):
"It's a tick-box exercise. It came across as a tick-box exercise to protect the organisation. [...] So I don't understand why we can't put as much emphasis on the training and education around what it constitutes, what's your behaviour looks like, [...] what would it be like if you were on the receiving end of this. So yeah, I think training would be a way to get through that, but that's only a very small part of it."

Worker E
(Female Emergency Services Worker):
"I think it's actually a pretty big part of it, because, although I don't like to [...] say training is the answer, understanding the rules and decency is actually a pretty important thing. [...] I would like to think that we had the capability of pointing out to people what is appropriate behaviour, and yet in our organisation, it's not even mandatory. And it amazes me that my fight to make it become mandatory is met with, 'oh, we just don't really have the appetite for it at the moment.' And I'd love to know when we're going to get hungry enough because it's just not on."

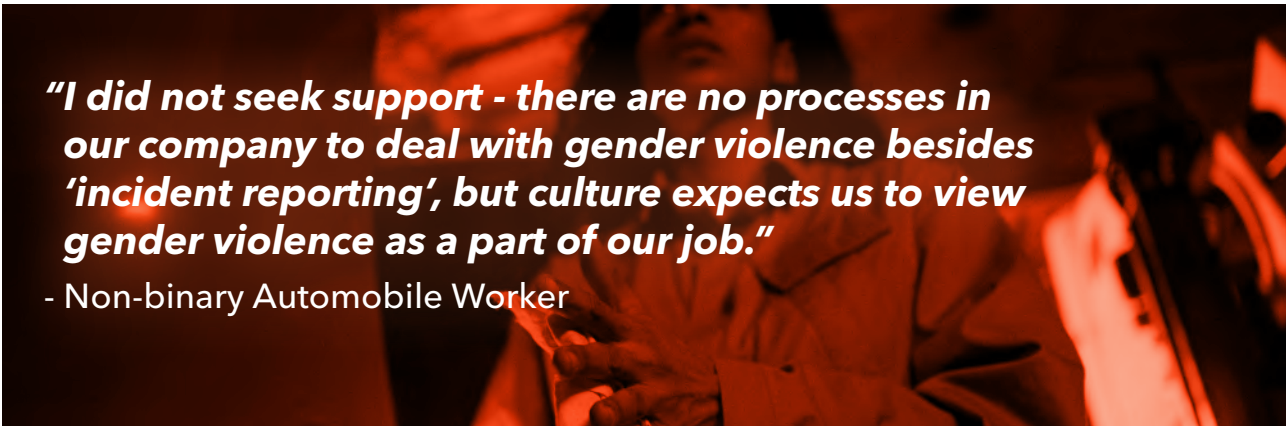### Worker F
(Female Urban Planning Worker):
"I completely agree with [D] and [E]. I think that initially, if there is more information about what sexual harassment looks like straight off the bat, then it's harder for men to get away with it. [...] If she ever tries to speak up, she shouldn't have to come seven or eight times. It should be the first time they (perpetrators) are investigated, they're suspended and that is what happens the first time that they're brought up. And if that doesn't happen, then it's on the boss. Then the boss is the one that needs to get in trouble for not investigating and doing their job properly. [...] And I think that if a part of training highlighted about how difficult it is for women to speak up. [...] Even speaking to my male friends, I just don't know if they truly understand how scary it is to be the first person to say something."

13. WGEA

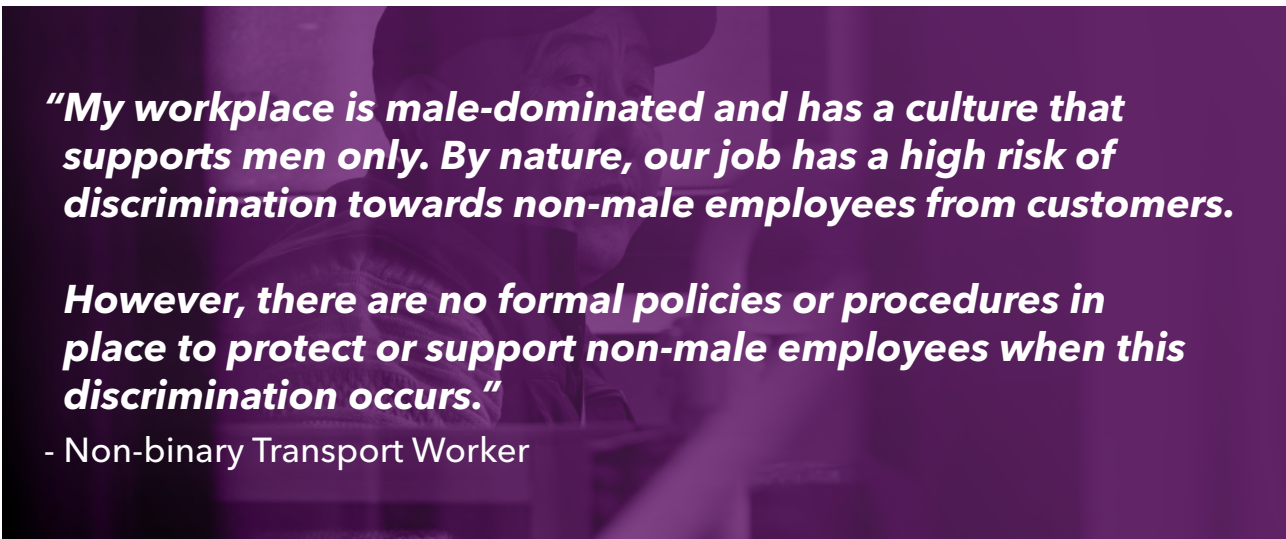# 2. Reporting processes that hinder women from speaking up

Even if women choose to speak up, reporting processes are often inadequate and harmful. Some respondents indicated that often the person they must report to is the perpetrator (see the first report). Reporting processes are bureaucratic, inflexible and complicated, and workers are not well informed of or provided with suitable options available to them nor any choice or control throughout the process. Some women are also concerned about confidentiality and being further targeted. The common feeling amongst the responses is a distrust in the management/HR in providing proper support and accountability in an appropriate manner.

"I did not seek support - there are no processes in our company to deal with gender violence besides 'incident reporting', but culture expects us to view gender violence as a part of our job."

- Non-binary Automobile Worker

"My workplace is male-dominated and has a culture that supports men only. By nature, our job has a high risk of discrimination towards non-male employees from customers.

However, there are no formal policies or procedures in place to protect or support non-male employees when this discrimination occurs."

- Non-binary Transport Worker

"Being 1 of 3 women on site and the only one working outside, it would have been very obvious where complaints came from."

- Female Construction Worker

"At the time I was new, and I didn't know what support I could access. I was the only woman in the team so had no support."

- Non-binary Public Sector Worker

"As a predominantly male company and industry, management is not only unapproachable but I'm afraid of being made fun of or being told to stop complaining and/or whining."
- Female Construction Operator

"I was made to feel like I was asking for too much and was causing difficulties to the company."
- Female Manufacturing Worker

Workers are more empowered and resourceful with the support of their union.

While it is crucial that workplaces provide safe and functional reporting mechanisms, workers also need to understand their rights and employers' legal obligations. Women and gender diverse workers, despite being more likely to be targets of SH/GBV, are less familiar with the positive duty and psychological health regulation than men. This trend was consistent across all industries. When comparing data across industries, more workers in MDIs expressed interest in learning about their rights in this area. Their union is the primary source of information for workers to learn about their rights and employers' obligations (see the second report) and plays a crucial role in addressing SH/GBV cases by assisting workers to access reporting mechanisms and external resources and support.

Workers' knowledge of and interest in learning about their rights

- ■ Know about the positive duty
- ■ Know about psychological health regulations
- ■ Want to know about the positive duty
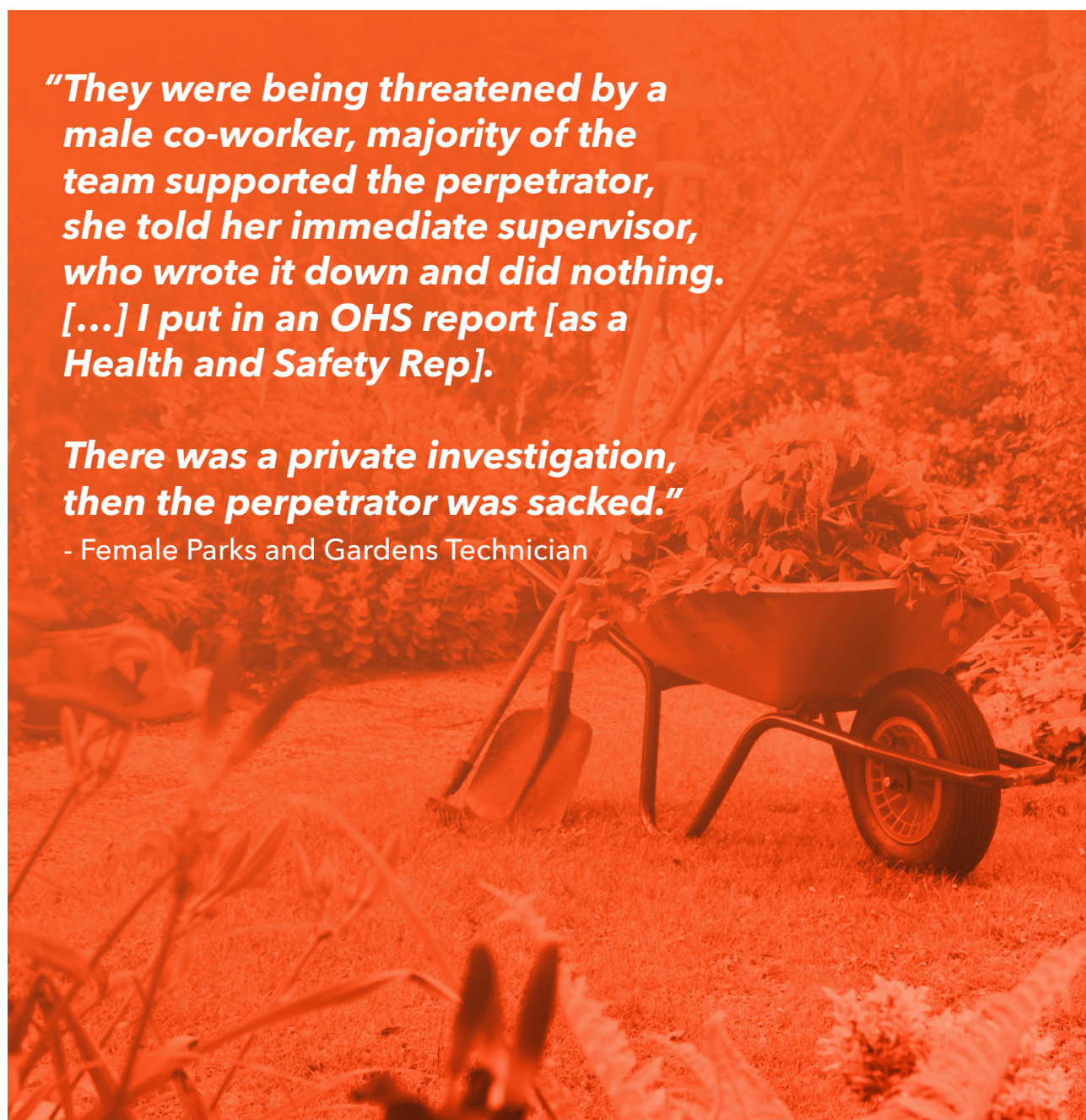- ■ Want to know about psychological health regulations

Any physical or psychological injuries should be reported to WorkSafe, and the Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) also monitors and inquires into SH/GBV issues. However, workers are often not aware of these options and experience barriers accessing them.[14] For instance, information provision for all workers on external support services available is not thoroughly done by employers in many industries; 67% of Manufacturing and 71% of Transport, Postal and Warehousing employers provide such information.[15] Only half of employers in both industries ensure union/worker representative support throughout the disclosure process and response.[16]

Unions are essential in eliminating SH/GBV and ensuring work safety. Another nationwide survey has revealed that union workplaces are safer – workplaces with union members have superior OHS measures and outcomes, including workplace policies, health and safety representatives (HSRs) and regular hazard inspections. Compared to non-union members, union members are more comfortable raising workplace concerns with management.[17] Unions play a key role in assisting workers to access support they need and to hold employers accountable. One respondent, a union member, shared how she supported her co-workers after the perpetrator's misconduct was not addressed by management.

"They were being threatened by a male co-worker, majority of the team supported the perpetrator, she told her immediate supervisor, who wrote it down and did nothing. […] I put in an OHS report [as a Health and Safety Rep].

There was a private investigation, then the perpetrator was sacked."

- Female Parks and Gardens Technician

14. AHRC, "Speaking from Experience."
15. WGEA.
16. This is still higher than other industries, given that the national average figure of employers offering union representative support is 33%.
17. Australian Council of Trade Unions, "Work shouldn't hurt."

3. The absence of accountability

Accountability was one of the biggest demands that women sought in our survey. Even though women gathered their courage to speak up, SH/GBV reports often end up not being addressed or leading to further victimisation. This damages physical and psychological well-being of victim-survivors even further and allows hostile culture and practices to persist harming other workers. With the positive duty, employers must be held accountable for SH/GBV in the workplace. They must ensure transparency in conducting investigations and take action, while providing appropriate victim-centred support for workers who experienced SH/GBV. Improved outcomes will be achieved with increased consultation with workers regarding SH/GBV in the workplace.

"There was no outcome. It was swept under the rug as 'resolved' (with no apology or acknowledgement)."
- Female Entertainment Worker

"In circumstances where I have seen employees seek support, it is either not taken seriously or the one seeking support becomes disadvantaged."
- Female Transport Worker

"Ever since I reported my supervisor, I have been constantly attacked and retaliated against at work."
- Female Construction Worker

"I went to HR, and it ended with the manager having a meeting with the said person and myself, and the manager told me I must have misheard numerous times and that it's just boys being boys."
- Female Forklift Operator

"A huge divide between corporate management and 'on the floor' managers. No accountability for poor behaviours and a culture of 'fit in' and put up with it. No real change comes from speaking out, as there are many apathetic or poorly trained supervisors in charge of people."
- Female Manufacturing Operator

"When a colleague bullied and harassed me, […] I reported it to my manager. His response was to promote the bullying colleague (to become my supervisor), and [he] told me to upskill and build my resilience. I was made to feel I was too sensitive or paranoid, and that my lack of trust was unjustified. Eventually others experienced similar issues with him, and I was vindicated, but that was after several years of thinking I was the problem."

- Female Technical Worker

Union Win: End NDAs

Non-disclosure agreements (NDAs) have long been used by employers to silence victim-survivors of workplace sexual harassment. Once signed, victim-survivors are legally prevented from speaking about their experiences as well as psychological and physical impacts, causing them additional harm. The absence of transparency and accountability disempowers workers, benefitting employers and perpetrators and allowing unsafe work practices to continue.

One respondent, a female Electricity, Gas, Water and Waste Services worker shared her experience of being made sign the NDA:

"I was sexually assaulted by a colleague. […] I have not been supported or cared for since this happened. [...] [I was] made to sign a form with another person who was also assaulted to not speak about it in the workplace. […] [I was] scared to come to work after being assaulted."

With the union movements' continuous and fervent actions, the Victorian Government is progressing legislative reform to restrict the use of NDAs in workplace sexual harassment cases, imparting hope to many women workers and paving the way in Victoria for safer working environments.

Union women activists at the
Victorian Parliament - 22/06/2023

Women feel more supported and empowered when employers are serious about their legal obligations.

"Our company has a policy that there can't be one female on a site, [but] either none or multiple, which means we always have support if needed."

- Female Apprentice Electrician

"[After receiving inappropriate comments from co-workers,] I had two things done about it very quickly, which was great. [...] So the first thing that I was offered was [to] get rid of them (perpetrators) off the site straight off. That's no tolerance policy, which was amazing. [...] The option I ended up going with was that there was a mention in the toolboxes, which is something we do every morning.

And I mentioned in the site-wide toolbox about comments made on people's physical appearance, gender, socioeconomic status… They made it a focus for the toolbox for that week. [...] I found that after that toolbox, I hadn't heard any comments about anyone's body, anything like that. [...] And I found it really empowering to have that choice be mine as opposed to just the company being like, 'that's it, get rid of this person.'"

- Interview, Female Apprentice Electrician

Recommendation: Strengthen accountability mechanisms where employers fail to meet their legal obligations

Management and employers must fulfil their positive duties to prevent and respond to workplace bullying, harassment and discrimination. Perpetrators must be held accountable through transparent processes so that workers feel safe to report via trauma-informed processes.

Action: Encourage and support unions to appoint and train Women's Advocates with the same workplace rights as Workplace Delegates.

Action: Identify best practice entitlements that exist in enterprise agreements that are proven to improve gender equality in workplaces and support unions to adopt actions. Continue progressing and improving entitlements in enterprise agreements which focus on gender equality. To support workers and unions in this work:

- Create standardised aspirational bargaining claims that focus on improving gender equality entitlements to be adopted across target industries (including responding to and eliminating SH/GBV).

- Create best practice template clauses that focus on improving gender equality entitlements.

- Provide data and research explaining why these clauses and claims will improve gender equality and train workers, unions and other stakeholders in their use. Provide bargaining arguments to support negotiations with workers and employers.

Conclusion:
Workplaces must ensure workers' safety and protect them from physical and psychological harm.

Workplaces must be a safe environment for all workers. Any physical, psychological and sexual harm cannot be tolerated, and employers bear legal obligations to ensure that. Yet, women are feeling unsafe, isolated, and disempowered in their workplaces every day. Many women are still experiencing high rates of SH/GBV across industries that affect their health, careers and economic security. These cases are exacerbated for workers with diverse backgrounds. In MDIs, the male-dominated boys' club culture and the under-representation of women drive the prevalence of SH/GBV as well as lack of accountability from employers. We call on all employers to take immediate and effective action to adhere to their legal obligations to address workplace safety now, and to improve consultative processes with workers to ensure their input and achieve better outcomes.

weareunion.org.au/w4w

Workplaces FOR Women

Work that works for everyone.

Australian Government

Victorian Trades Hall Council