

Workplaces FOR Women

Safe staff, safe venues.

***“Our passion, our profession
and our livelihood”:***

Building secure, safe and
equal hospitality



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

1. About this project

2. Introduction: Making hospitality work in Victoria

4. Challenge 1: Insecure hospitality work

- 4. Job insecurity and unstable scheduling
- 8. Wage theft

14. Challenge 2: Unsafe hospitality work

- 16. Working alone
- 18. Serving alcohol
- 19. Workplace injuries
- 23. Sexual harassment/gender-based violence

24. Challenge 3: Unequal hospitality work

- 24. Gender discrimination
- 27. Intersecting forms of discrimination

30. Shifting hospitality toward a secure, safe and equal industry: what workers need

40. Conclusion

41. Our actions

42. Support for hospitality workers

Victorian Trades Hall Council acknowledges the support of the Victorian Government.

“Our passion, our profession and our livelihood”: **Building secure, safe and equal hospitality.**

About this report.

Victorian Trades Hall Council (VTHC) has a deep commitment to creating safe and fair workplaces and advancing workplace gender equality. Supported by the Victorian Government through the Safe Workplaces for Women Initiative, the *Workplaces for Women: Safe Staff, Safe Venues* project seeks to reduce gendered workplace harm, strengthen understanding of workplace rights and create hospitality workplaces that are safe, respectful, equal and inclusive for all workers.

To understand the unique experiences of hospitality and events workers, we conducted an online survey (the Safe Venues Survey) and engaged directly with hospitality workers through venue visits, phone banks and Safe Venues Chats, where workers shared their lived experiences and ideas for change. Our survey collected responses predominantly from Victorian workers on issues ranging from wage theft, rostering, gender discrimination to occupational health and safety concerns and familiarity with unions and workplace rights.

This report examines the issues faced by hospitality workers in Victoria and highlights how the industry

remains insecure, unsafe and unequal. Workers’ experiences of exploitation are shaped by unequal power dynamics with management (employers) and customers, as well as by workers’ intersecting attributes, which together make hospitality a high-risk industry for workers. To make hospitality a safe and fair industry where workers can truly exercise their rights and benefit from their entitlements, action is required from both the State Government and employers.

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 gendered risks and harm in Victorian workplaces, we believe that we can create workplaces that are accessible, fair and safe for all workers.

Victorian Trades Hall Council acknowledges the United Workers Union and the Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance for their support.



Making hospitality work in Victoria



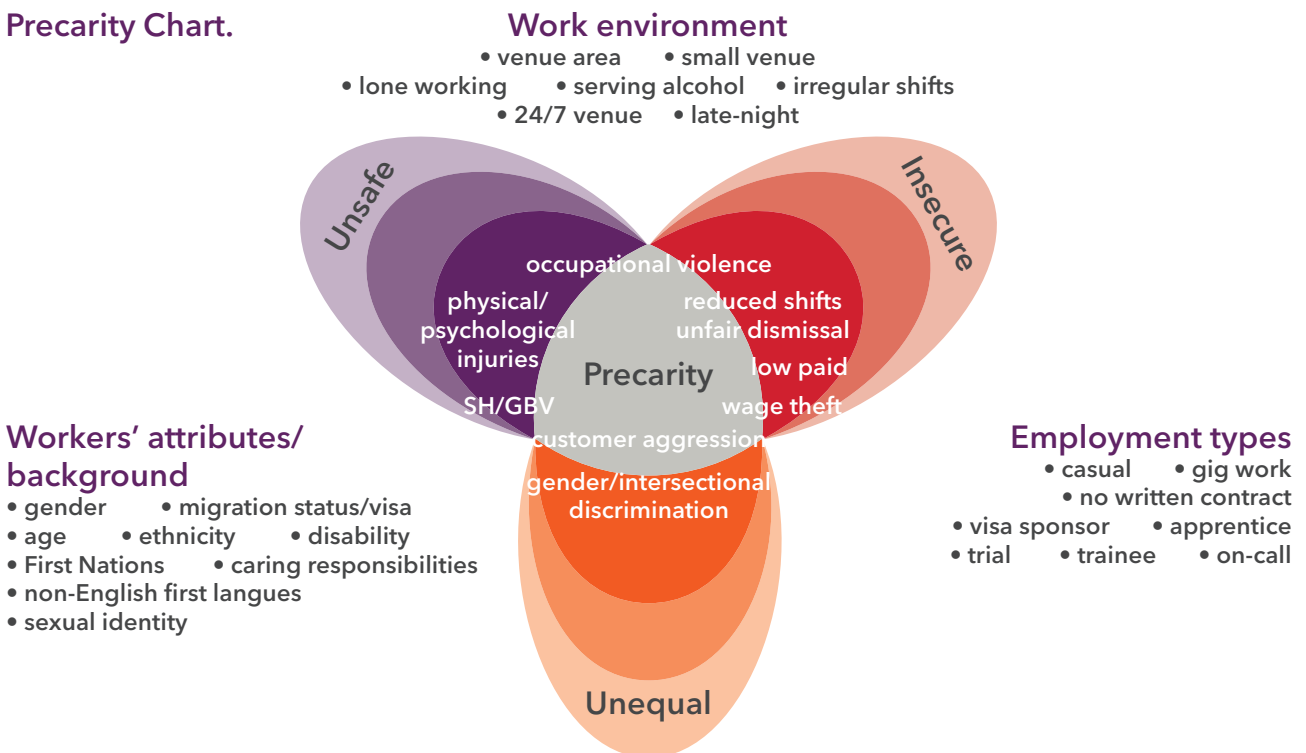
Many Victorians are proud of our vibrant food culture, supported by more than 30,000 cafes, restaurants and bars.¹ Since COVID lockdowns were lifted, sales across cafes, restaurants and takeaway food services have continued to grow.² Dining out, meeting for coffee and grabbing a drink are part of locals' everyday life and a key attraction for tourists, benefiting the wider economy.³

Yet, hospitality is not working for its workers. Exploitation remains widespread due to precarious employment and low pay. Workers face occupational violence and aggression from employers and customers, in a culture where "the customer is always right". Women in hospitality are paid less than workers in any other industry in

Australia.⁴ As a result, more than half of businesses in Accommodation and Food Services have struggled for years to fill positions.⁵ Hospitality is **insecure, unsafe and unequal**, jeopardising the futures of both workers and the industry.

To build hospitality into a safe and attractive industry, workers' rights must be protected in law and enforced in practice. This requires stronger regulations that reflect how the industry actually operates, as well as accountability and action from employers to uphold workers' rights and entitlements. Workers must be supported to come together, deepen the understanding of their rights and advocate for fair treatment with union support.

Precarity Chart.



1. The Labour Hire Authority. 2025. Labour hire in the hospitality industry.
 2. Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). 2025. Retail trade, Australia.
 3. Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions. 2025. Economic contribution of tourism to Victoria 2023-24.
 4. ABS. 2025. *Employee earnings*.
 5. ABS. 2022. *Business conditions and sentiments*.

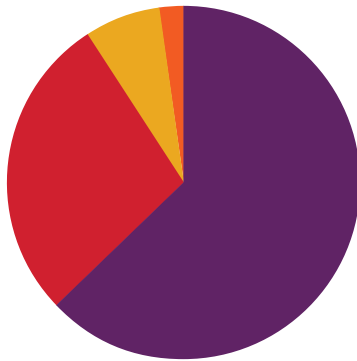
Hospitality is powered by diverse workers.

Hospitality embraces a diverse and vibrant workforce. The average age among hospitality workers in Australia is 22, with more than 40% of the workforce aged between 15 and 19.⁶ Women make

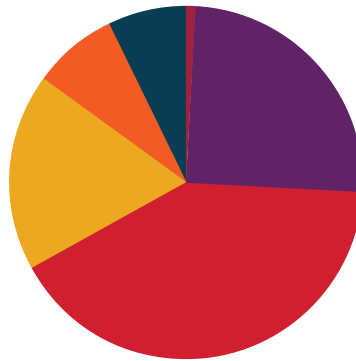
up more than half of the workforce, and the industry is also supported by a large share of workers on temporary visas.⁷ Our survey respondents reflect this diversity:

Survey period: 9 July 2025 - 18 March 2026

Total responses from hospitality workers: 608



Gender	
Woman	63%
Man	28%
Non-binary	7%
Other	2%



Age	
Under 18	1%
19 - 24	25%
25 - 34	41%
35 - 44	18%
45 - 54	8%
55+	7%



Years in hospitality	
<1 year	4%
1 - 3 years	20%
4 - 6 years	26%
7 - 10 years	19%
10+ years	30%

43%
Identifies as
LGBTIQ+

34%
Has a first language
other than English

34%
Is a union member

13%
Identifies as a
person of colour

13%
Has a temporary
visa

20%
Has a disability

1%
Is First Nations



6. Farruggia, D. et al. 2025. Youth, labour and value in the hospitality industry.

7. Ibid.; Jobs and Skills Australia. 2025. Occupation profile: Hospitality workers.

Challenge 1: Insecure hospitality work

"I'm a casual worker, so my job always feels a bit at risk. I feel easily replaceable, and the managers aren't really involved. Sometimes it feels like we're just numbers, not people."

- Supervisor/Food and Beverage Attendant, woman

"I feel like my life is getting scammed away."

- Supervisor, man

"Despite voicing concerns to the boss about being paid under minimum wage, I was told that they "could not afford to pay minimum wage" and that I "ask for too much". There are so few jobs out there, so I have to take whatever I can get, and employers know that, and that they can get away with underpaying staff because they are desperate."

- Waitress, woman

Job insecurity and unstable scheduling

Casualisation drives precarity in hospitality.

The hospitality industry has the biggest share of casual workers; in 2025, there were 484,000 casual workers in *Accommodation and Food Services industry*, making up 58% of all employees in the industry.⁸ In our survey, over 60% of respondents said they currently work or have worked as casual, compared with 32% who have worked full-time and 24% part-time.⁹ Among casual workers, **62% said they feel their job is insecure and unstable**. Most are concerned of the nature of casual employment and the lack of guaranteed entitlements. This contrasts with other employment types – for instance, full-time workers are more concerned of irregular hours, unpaid overtime and health and safety issues.

While some workers choose to work casually to balance caring responsibilities, health needs or other personal commitments, casualisation heightens the precarity of work. Casual workers do not have access to most forms of paid leave or entitlements¹⁰, as they are not guaranteed under the National Employment Standards.¹¹ Casual work rarely offers career progression opportunities and holds workers in a structurally insecure position.

As a result, casual workers are more vulnerable to and targeted for exploitation, placing additional financial and psychological burdens on them. All the challenges and barriers discussed in this report are driven and underpinned by casualisation of hospitality work and the vulnerabilities it produces.

8. ABS. 2025. Working arrangements.

9. Respondents were able to choose multiple options.

10. Casual employees are entitled to family and domestic violence leave under the National Employment Standards (Fair Work Act, s. 106A).

11. ACTU. 2025. Escaping the casual employment trap.; Laß, I. et al. 2025. The Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia Survey: Selected findings from Waves 1 to 23.

Workers' feeling of their job insecurity and top 5 reasons.

What makes you feel that your job is insecure and unstable? (multiple answers)

Casual

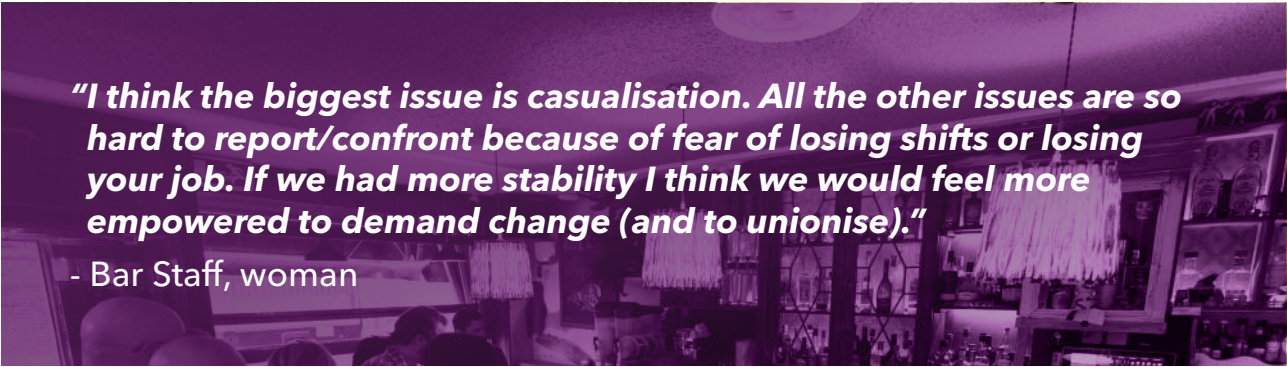


Part-time




Full-time





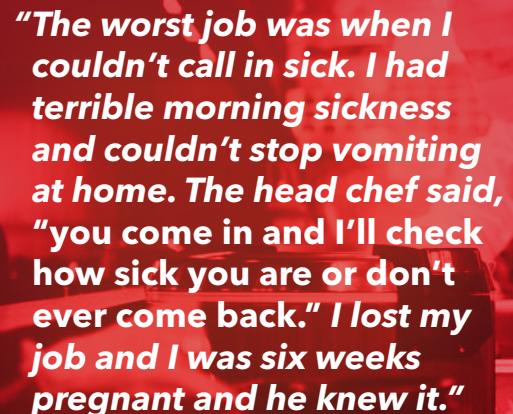
"I think the biggest issue is casualisation. All the other issues are so hard to report/confront because of fear of losing shifts or losing your job. If we had more stability I think we would feel more empowered to demand change (and to unionise)."

- Bar Staff, woman



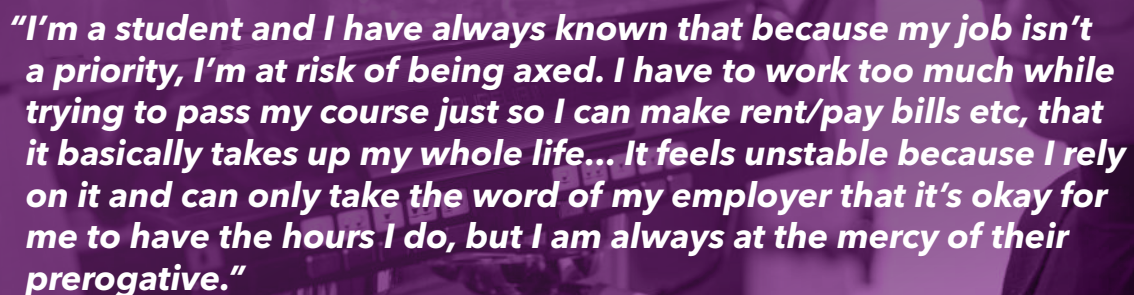
"Been at my workplace for eleven years, I was sick for a few months, took unpaid leave and, upon my return, only got one of my two weekly shifts back and was questioned if I'd be reliable. I'm a single mum, and the Sunday shift I lost has screwed me financially."

- Front of House Staff, woman



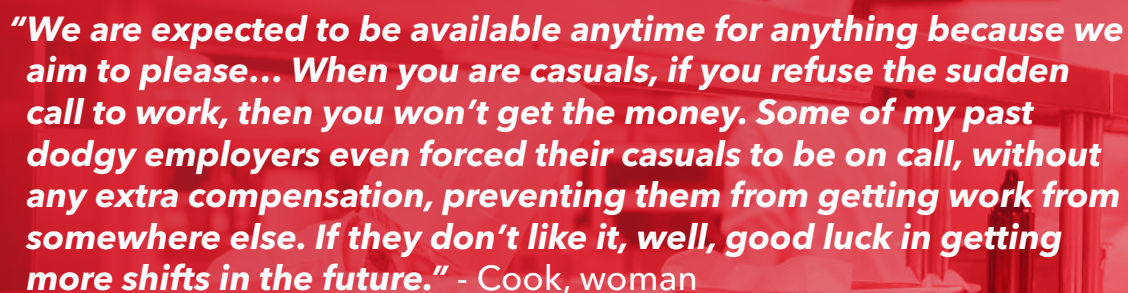
"The worst job was when I couldn't call in sick. I had terrible morning sickness and couldn't stop vomiting at home. The head chef said, "you come in and I'll check how sick you are or don't ever come back." I lost my job and I was six weeks pregnant and he knew it."

- Sous Chef, woman



"I'm a student and I have always known that because my job isn't a priority, I'm at risk of being axed. I have to work too much while trying to pass my course just so I can make rent/pay bills etc, that it basically takes up my whole life... It feels unstable because I rely on it and can only take the word of my employer that it's okay for me to have the hours I do, but I am always at the mercy of their prerogative."

- Barista, gender diverse



"We are expected to be available anytime for anything because we aim to please... When you are casuals, if you refuse the sudden call to work, then you won't get the money. Some of my past dodgy employers even forced their casuals to be on call, without any extra compensation, preventing them from getting work from somewhere else. If they don't like it, well, good luck in getting more shifts in the future."

- Cook, woman

Workers' rights: Employee choice pathway to permanent (casual conversion)

Under the *Fair Work Act 2009 (Cth) (FW Act)* amended by the *Closing Loopholes No.2 Bill 2024*, casual employees have the right to notify their employer of their intention to convert to permanent employment, either full-time or part-time.¹² To be eligible, a worker must have been employed for at least 6 months, or 12 months if employed by a small business, and meet other requirements. Conversion to permanent employment provides greater job security and access to paid leave entitlements for many long-term casual workers.


Many workers struggle to manage irregular work schedules.

Another major driver of job insecurity is the unpredictability and irregularity of working hours, affecting workers across all employment types. **59% of survey respondents said their shifts or work schedules are unpredictable or unreliable, and more than one in three have no fixed or reliable pattern of shifts.**

Rosters are often released at the last minute, and shifts are frequently cancelled without notice. This

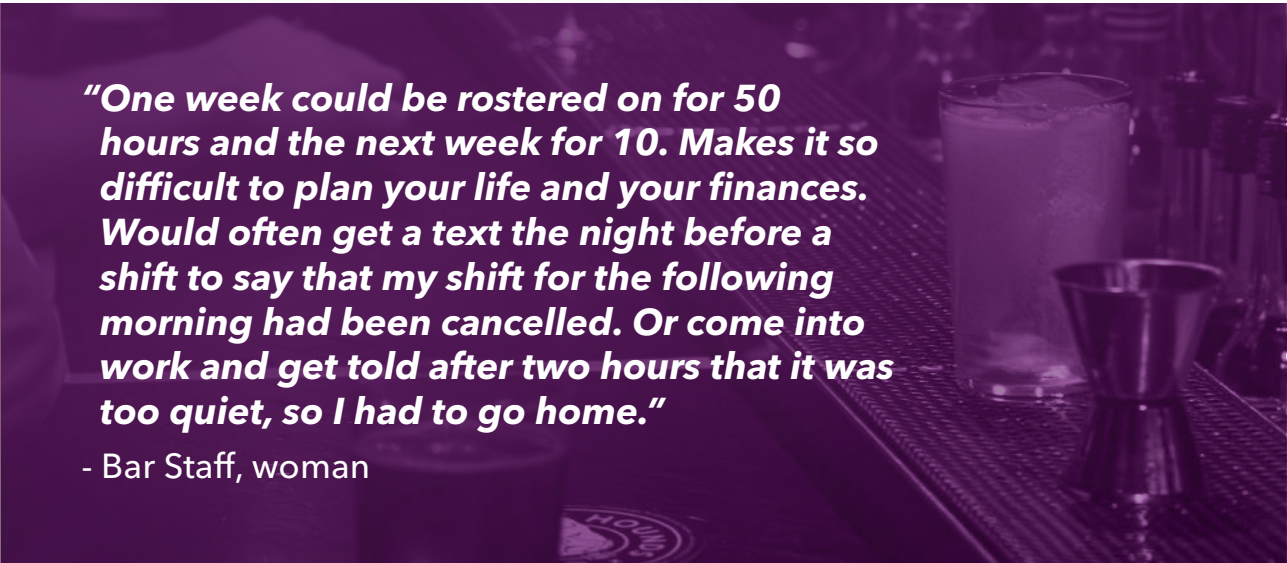
makes it difficult for workers to plan life outside work and exercise their right to rest and leisure. Reduced or cancelled shifts also mean lost income, challenging workers to meet financial needs.

Moreover, shifts are often used as leverage and reduced as a "punishment", as decisions are at the whim of owners or managers. In this way, rosters become a tool to control and discourage workers from raising issues.



"Rosters are not given until one or two days prior to week start. Rosters will say "close" instead of an actual finish time, no idea when that might actually be."

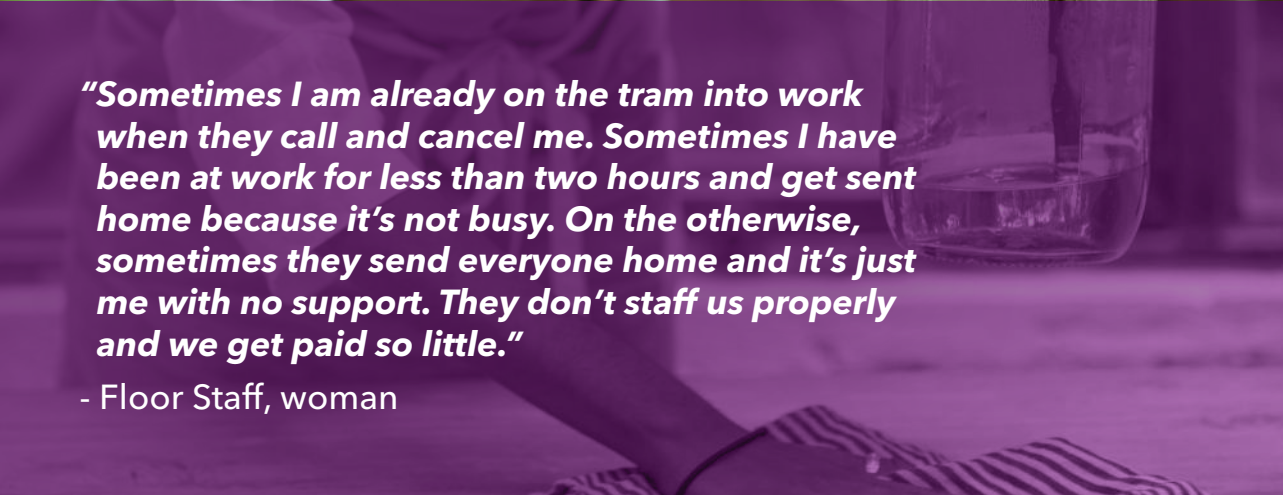
- Chef, man



"One week could be rostered on for 50 hours and the next week for 10. Makes it so difficult to plan your life and your finances. Would often get a text the night before a shift to say that my shift for the following morning had been cancelled. Or come into work and get told after two hours that it was too quiet, so I had to go home."

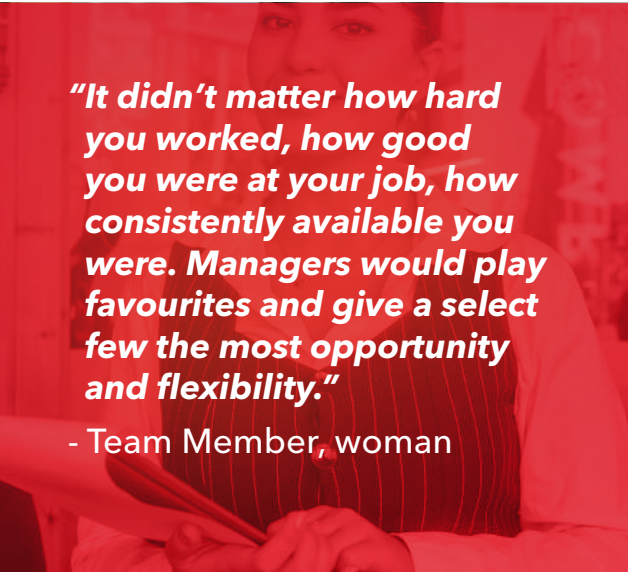
- Bar Staff, woman

12. FW Act 2009 (Cth). s. 66A.



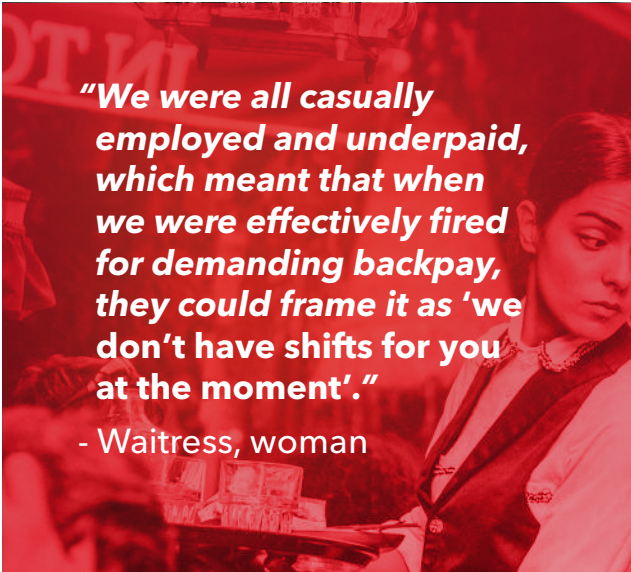
“Sometimes I am already on the tram into work when they call and cancel me. Sometimes I have been at work for less than two hours and get sent home because it’s not busy. On the otherwise, sometimes they send everyone home and it’s just me with no support. They don’t staff us properly and we get paid so little.”

- Floor Staff, woman



“It didn’t matter how hard you worked, how good you were at your job, how consistently available you were. Managers would play favourites and give a select few the most opportunity and flexibility.”

- Team Member, woman



“We were all casually employed and underpaid, which meant that when we were effectively fired for demanding backpay, they could frame it as ‘we don’t have shifts for you at the moment’.”

- Waitress, woman

Wage Theft

Two in three hospitality workers have experienced wage theft.

Wage theft is rife in hospitality, with **67% of workers reporting that they have experienced some form of wage theft**. This includes: not being paid for hours worked; unpaid overtime; being paid a ‘flat’ or all-inclusive rate which does not adequately compensate for minimum entitlements; not being paid penalty rates or superannuation; being paid below the minimum award rate for their classification; unpaid breaks or forcing workers to work through meal breaks; withholding leave payments or final pay; and unlawful deductions.

Wage theft is a common experience across workers of any gender, age and other personal characteristics. **While 75% of wage theft victims had their pay stolen in multiple ways**, the most frequently reported issue was unpaid overtime. Workers also reported having to perform duties and holding responsibilities above their classification level without compensation.

Management exploits workers’ precariousness, whether related to their personal attributes (migration status, nationality, age), or contract type (casual, apprentice), to steal their pay. Wage theft through “trial shifts” is also common. While an unpaid trial is legal only when it is short (no more than a full shift) and under direct supervision of a potential employer, unlawful practices take advantage of those seeking employment.

Notably, the longer workers stay in hospitality, the more they recognise wage theft. While half of workers with up to three years of experience reported underpayment, the figure rises to 75% for workers with more than five years in the industry. This demonstrates that wage theft is normalised, **with workers’ pay regularly stolen over the course of their careers**. Indeed, half of those who experienced wage theft reported it occurring with multiple employers.

Workers' rights: Wage theft is a criminal offence

Wage theft is illegal under the *Fair Work Act 2009*. Employers who intentionally underpay their workers face substantial fines or imprisonment.¹³ Workers can report wage theft to the Fair Work Ombudsman (FWO) for investigation. Reports can be made anonymously, and multiple language options are available.

"One of the jobs that stole wages was brought to Fair Work by a collective of employees, as far as I'm aware everyone eventually got paid what they were owed. I was owed over \$3,000!"

- Manager, woman

Workers' experience of wage theft

Two in three hospitality workers have experienced wage theft, and 75% of wage theft victims had their pay stolen in multiple ways. Half of them have had their wage stolen from multiple employers.

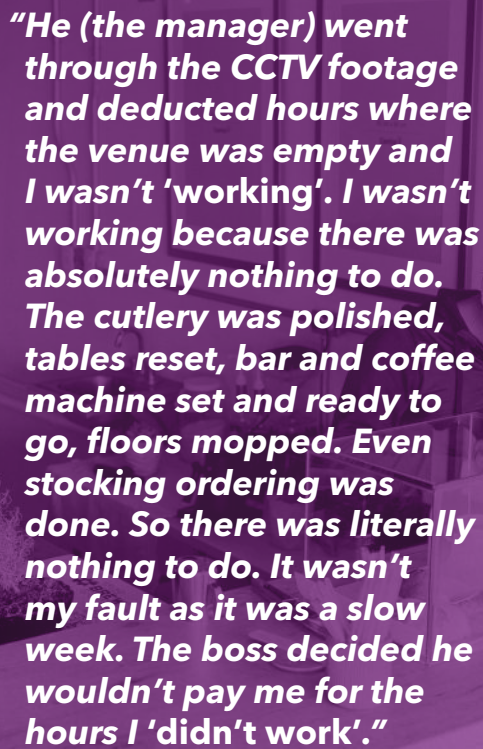
What best describes your experience of wage theft? (multiple answers)



"One job I wasn't paid my full wage every week. I had to remind the owner to pay me. He often went to the till and just got some cash, which was never the full amount. I couldn't make ends meet."


- Sous Chef, woman

13. FW Act 2009 (Cth). s. 327A.



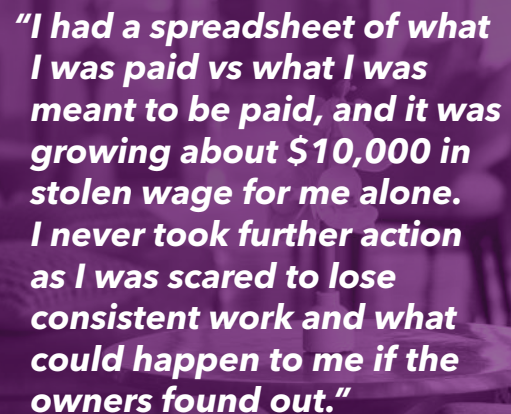
"He (the manager) went through the CCTV footage and deducted hours where the venue was empty and I wasn't 'working'. I wasn't working because there was absolutely nothing to do. The cutlery was polished, tables reset, bar and coffee machine set and ready to go, floors mopped. Even stocking ordering was done. So there was literally nothing to do. It wasn't my fault as it was a slow week. The boss decided he wouldn't pay me for the hours I 'didn't work'."

- Front of House Staff, man




"I was given shift manager responsibilities while on the wage of entry-level work."

- Barista/Bartender, man



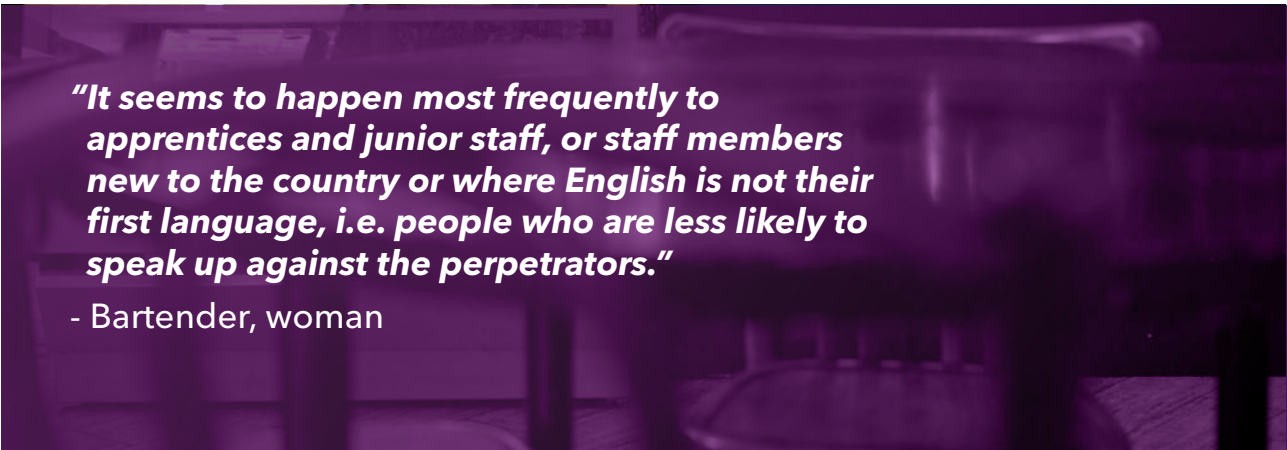
"I had a spreadsheet of what I was paid vs what I was meant to be paid, and it was growing about \$10,000 in stolen wage for me alone. I never took further action as I was scared to lose consistent work and what could happen to me if the owners found out."

- Restaurant Manager, man



"I was forced to do overtime due to understaffing, but my time stamps were changed and the extra hours removed. I have had this happen consistently. Each time I bring it to their attention it is ignored until I escalate it to head office and then I am compensated. But I fear retaliation because my shifts are reduced the following roster."

- Shift Manager, woman



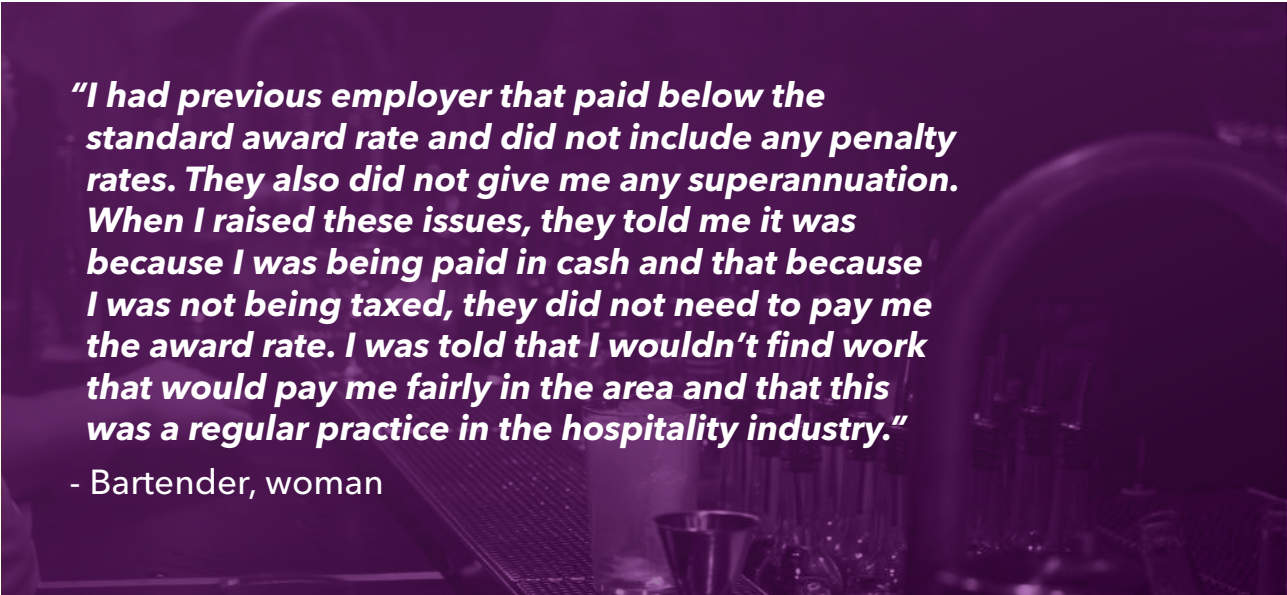
"It seems to happen most frequently to apprentices and junior staff, or staff members new to the country or where English is not their first language, i.e. people who are less likely to speak up against the perpetrators."

- Bartender, woman




"I was in my last year of my apprenticeship but was (unofficially) in the role of head chef. I was running all aspects of the kitchen, managing both BOH and FOH staff all while my pay was only reflecting a third-year apprentice wage."

- Head Chef, man



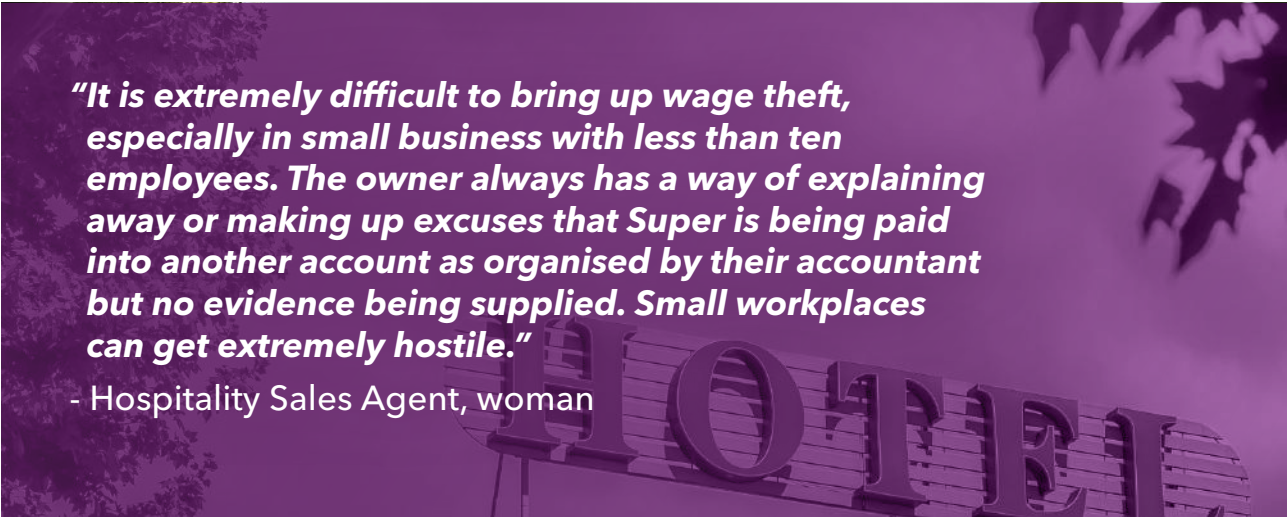
"I had previous employer that paid below the standard award rate and did not include any penalty rates. They also did not give me any superannuation. When I raised these issues, they told me it was because I was being paid in cash and that because I was not being taxed, they did not need to pay me the award rate. I was told that I wouldn't find work that would pay me fairly in the area and that this was a regular practice in the hospitality industry."

- Bartender, woman



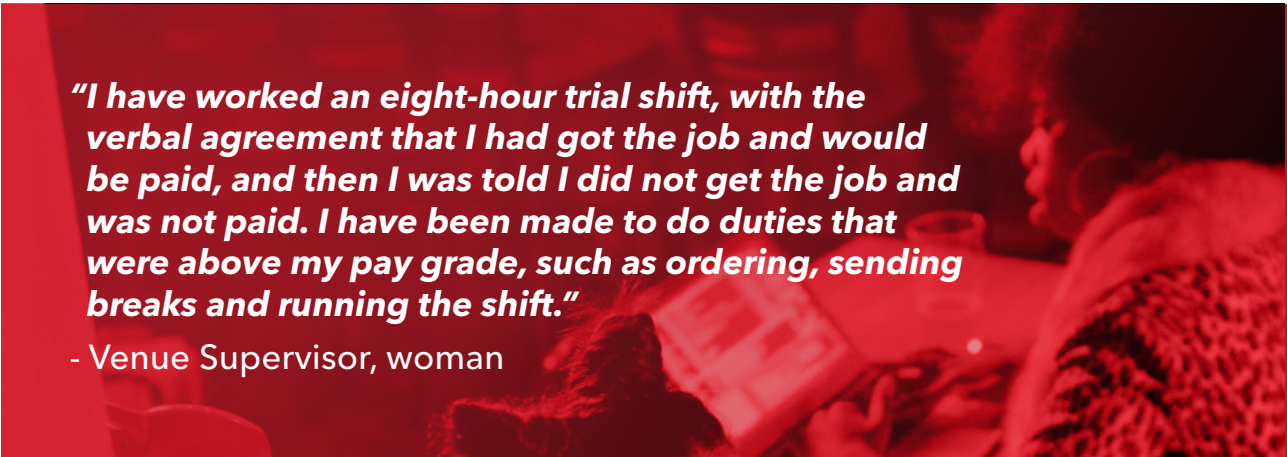
"I have witnessed colleagues being forced to pay their share of the sponsorship fees, and once started the sponsorship, they were asked to work as many hours as the employer demanded with no compensation. I have seen migrant workers on student visas getting offered cash-in-hand wages way below the minimum standard or getting paid 20 hours per week on the payslip and actually working 40 hours plus per week."

- Head Chef, man




"It is extremely difficult to bring up wage theft, especially in small business with less than ten employees. The owner always has a way of explaining away or making up excuses that Super is being paid into another account as organised by their accountant but no evidence being supplied. Small workplaces can get extremely hostile."

- Hospitality Sales Agent, woman



"I have worked an eight-hour trial shift, with the verbal agreement that I had got the job and would be paid, and then I was told I did not get the job and was not paid. I have been made to do duties that were above my pay grade, such as ordering, sending breaks and running the shift."

- Venue Supervisor, woman



"One of the clearest experiences is what starts as a "free trial" for two hours and turns into a six- or eight-hour (sometimes more) shift. They bring you back a couple more times and don't put you on the pay system and repeatedly delay paying you despite you trying to give them your bank and tax file details multiple times."

- Waitress/Bartender, woman

Many workers are unaware of their employment terms, and employers exert control over written/verbal agreements.

While employers are obliged to ensure workers are treated fairly and paid correctly, it is equally important for workers to understand their entitlements, including hourly wages, overtime pay and penalty rates for weekends and public holidays. However, **one in ten casual workers are unaware of their job's terms and conditions**, and their understanding is significantly lower than that of full-time workers.

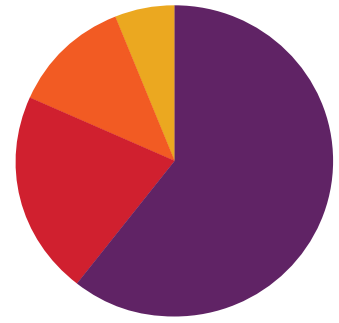
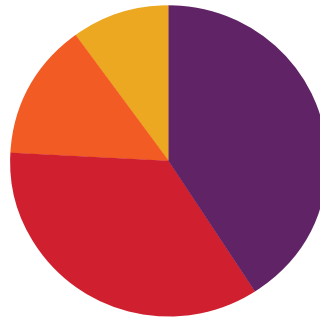
Moreover, **more than one in three workers said their pay or other work conditions differed** from what they were told when they started. Many reported not having a written contract and receiving cash payments, practices that perpetuate wage theft and make it more difficult to report unlawful treatment.

Workers' understanding of their job.

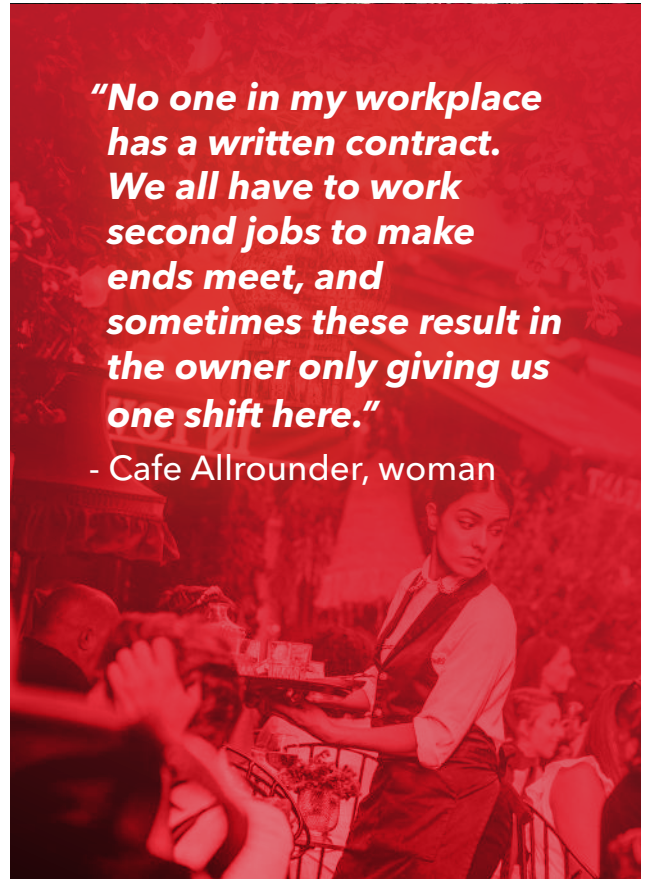
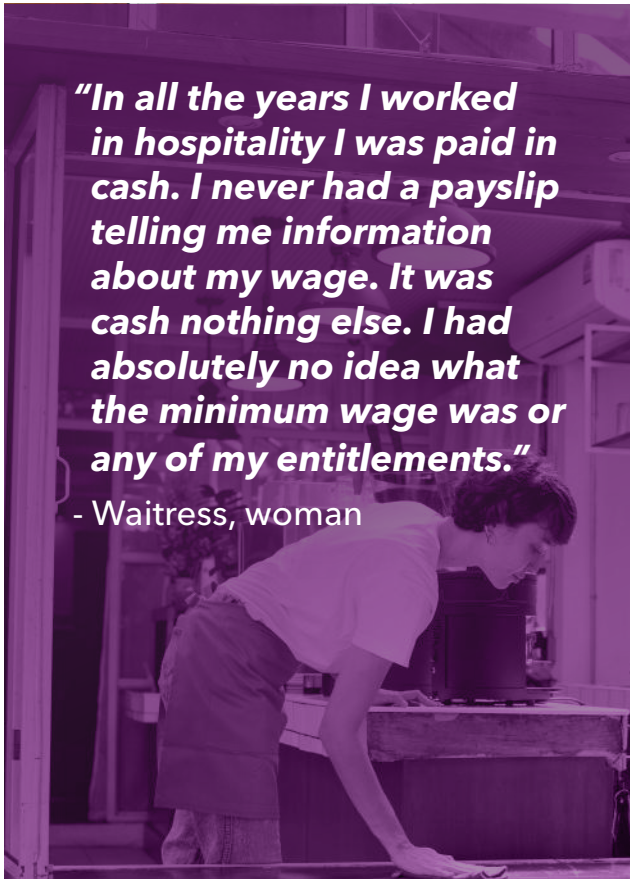
Do you know the terms and conditions of your job?

Casual

Full-time



- I know everything about my job and pay
- I know some details about my job and pay
- I don't know all the details but I know where to access the information or get help
- I'm not sure about my job or pay rates or where to get help




Challenge 2: Unsafe hospitality work



"Health and safety standards not being met. Exposed wires, faulty electrical equipment, old or un-serviced equipment, lack of ergonomic supports (mats, counter height), long shifts of repetitive activity without appropriate breaks."

- Bar Manager, man



"I had customers tell me, 'if you don't want people to comment on your body you shouldn't work here.' I had managers say to my face, 'that customer spends \$10 a day here, we need that'."

- Duty Manager, woman



"I work at [a fast-food chain] and I worry about all the teenagers getting their first jobs there, not knowing their rights and being treated badly. Parents assume it's a safe workplace for their kids or PG-rated, and it's not! It's the worst!"

- Shift Manager, woman

More than half of hospitality workers have felt unsafe at work.

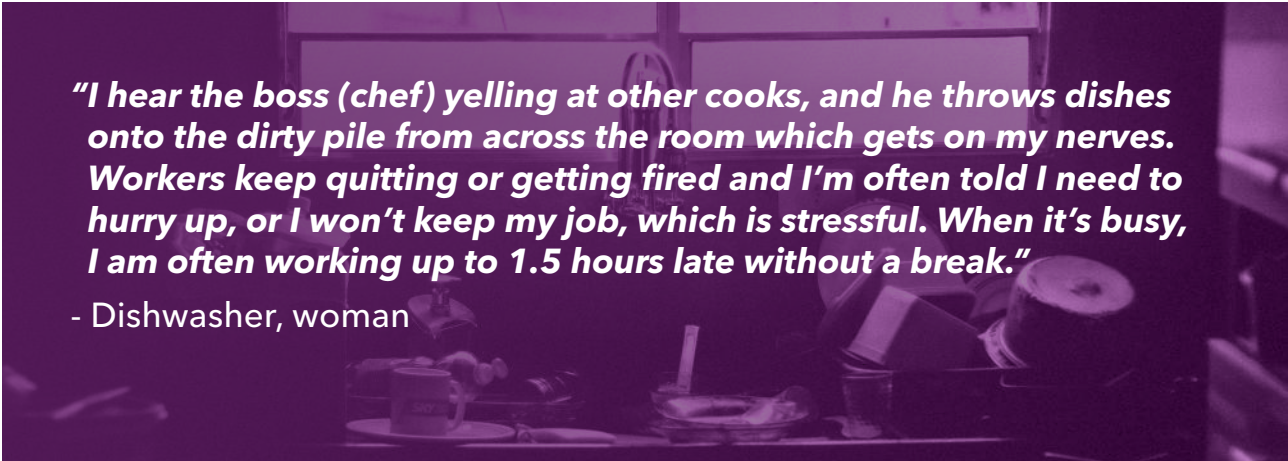
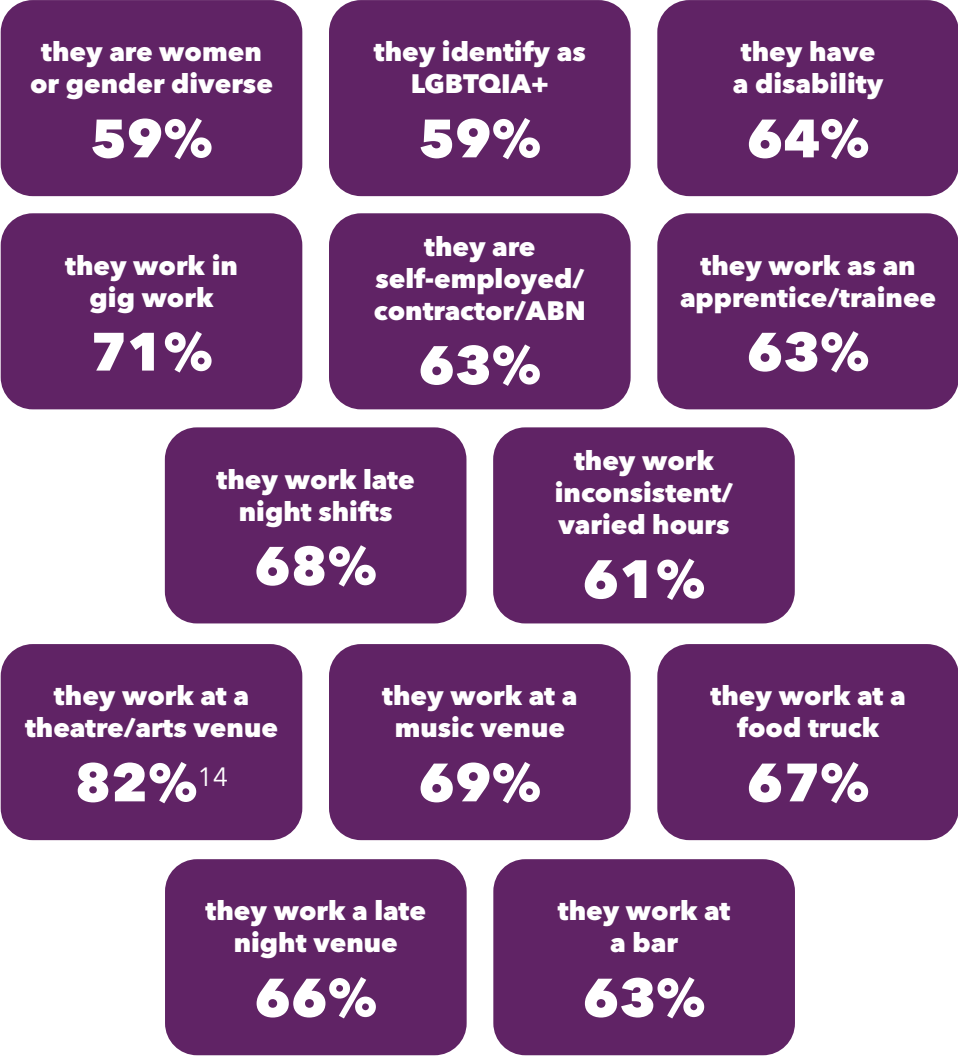
In addition to insecure work, hospitality workers are exposed to unsafe practices that threaten their physical and psychological health. Overall, **53% of survey respondents have felt unsafe at work**. By gender, 59% of women and gender diverse workers reported feeling unsafe, compared with 40% of men.

Furthermore, workers with particular personal characteristics and work arrangements are more likely to feel unsafe. While the specific concerns vary, as discussed below, they are all rooted in the unsafe workplace cultures in which employers have failed to adequately identify and control psychological hazards and physical risks. Instead, violence and harassment are tolerated and normalised, causing physical and psychological harm to workers.

Workers' feeling of unsafety.

53%
of hospitality workers have felt unsafe at work.

Workers feel unsafe especially when...



14. Possible reasons for the relatively high sense of unsafety among workers at theatre/arts venue are the high ratio of workers engaging in inconsistent/ varied hours (79%) and prevalence of sexual harassment perpetrated by patrons under the influence of alcohol. Additionally, theatre and arts venues tend to be more unionised, indicating a higher awareness around workplace safety issues.



Working alone

Almost three out of four workers have had to work alone.

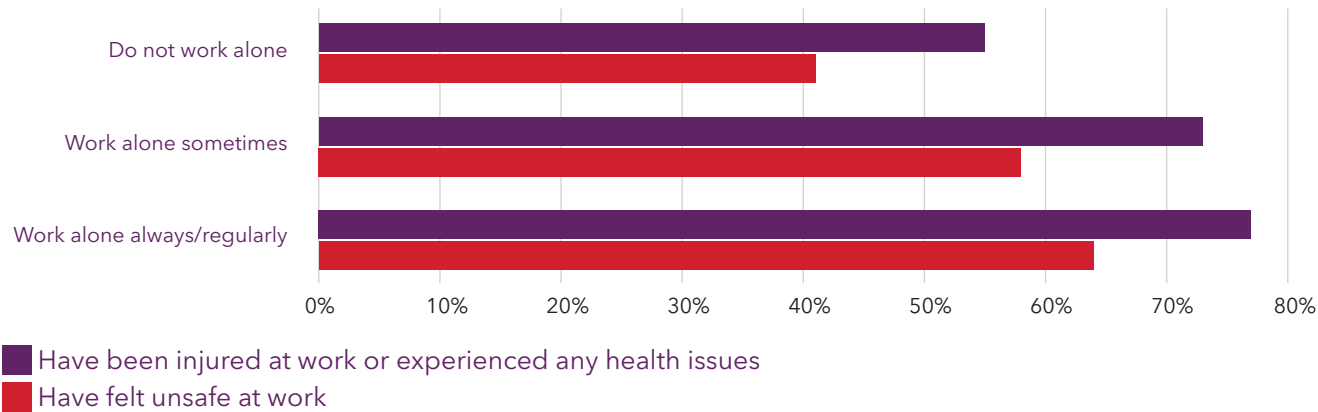
Working alone is extremely common due to understaffing and motivation to reduce labour costs. Across all genders and age groups as well as venues and employment types, workers engage in lone working: **79% of men and 70% of women and gender diverse workers have been required to work alone in the past.** Among them, 4% work alone always, 42% regularly and 21% sometimes.

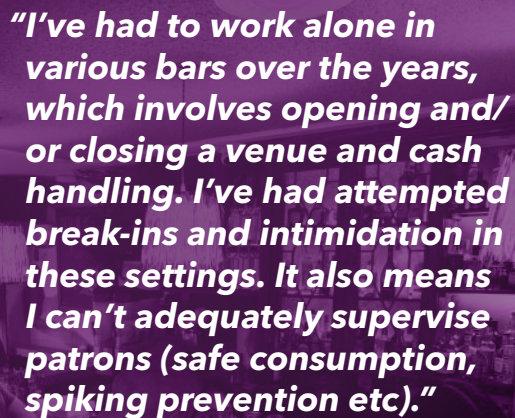
While working alone is of itself not illegal, it carries significant health and safety risks that employers must address. Without security, safe systems of work or adequate support, workers are exposed to abuse, aggression and violence from customers

and members of the public. They are also more vulnerable to theft and robbery. At the same time, workers are pressured to handle multiple tasks alone without adequate breaks or support.

Working alone increases physical risks and feelings of insecurity. Workers who always or regularly work alone reported **significantly higher exposure to workplace injuries and a stronger sense of being unsafe.** While some appreciate working alone when roles and responsibilities were clearly defined, most workers experience normalised risks, poor management and stress.

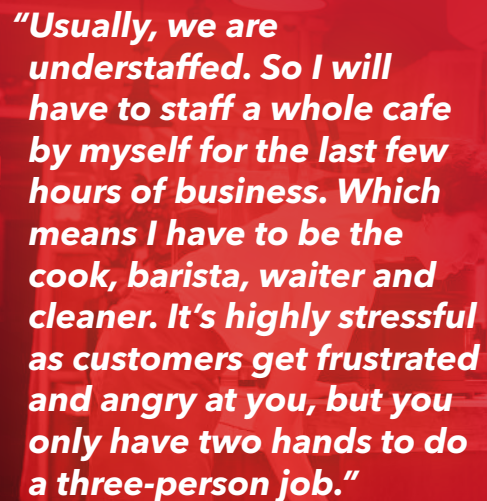
Workers' experience of lone working and associated risks.
73% of workers have had to work alone.





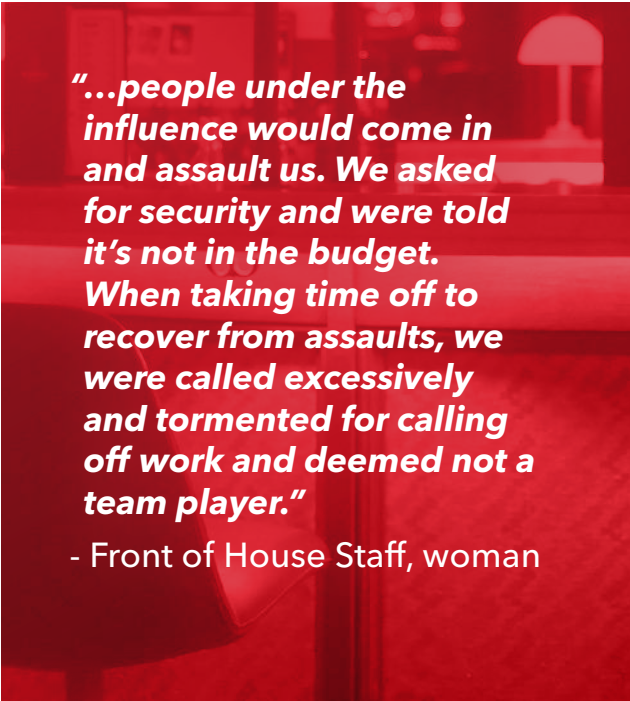
"I've had to work alone in various bars over the years, which involves opening and/or closing a venue and cash handling. I've had attempted break-ins and intimidation in these settings. It also means I can't adequately supervise patrons (safe consumption, spiking prevention etc)."

- Bartender, woman




"Usually, we are understaffed. So I will have to staff a whole cafe by myself for the last few hours of business. Which means I have to be the cook, barista, waiter and cleaner. It's highly stressful as customers get frustrated and angry at you, but you only have two hands to do a three-person job."

- Barista/Allrounder, woman



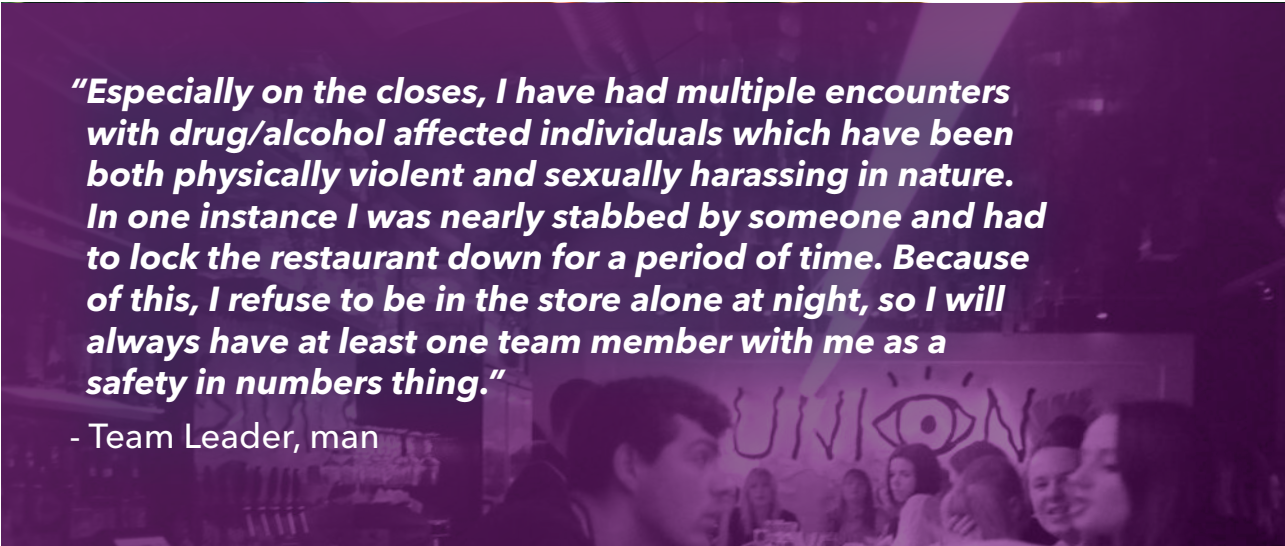
"...people under the influence would come in and assault us. We asked for security and were told it's not in the budget. When taking time off to recover from assaults, we were called excessively and tormented for calling off work and deemed not a team player."

- Front of House Staff, woman



"... The hardest thing is stacking and unstacking the heavy (bread) crates into and out of the van. It's awkward alone and I often end up with sore shoulders and back."

- Catering Staff, woman



"Especially on the closes, I have had multiple encounters with drug/alcohol affected individuals which have been both physically violent and sexually harassing in nature. In one instance I was nearly stabbed by someone and had to lock the restaurant down for a period of time. Because of this, I refuse to be in the store alone at night, so I will always have at least one team member with me as a safety in numbers thing."

- Team Leader, man

Serving alcohol

Workers experience increased safety risks in venues serving alcohol.

More than 80% of respondents in venues serving alcohol have reported increased risks of occupational violence and aggression. Compared with workers in venues that do not serve alcohol, **they reported being more likely to feel unsafe (56% vs 44%), experience sexual harassment (55% vs 45%) and witness harassment (59% vs 43%)** mainly because of aggressive behaviour from customers.


Despite these risks, some venues fail to comply with existing safety requirements, including Responsible

Service of Alcohol (RSA) obligations. Some workers had to serve alcohol while underage and work with supervisors consuming alcohol while on duty. While reforms to RSA training were made in 2025, including a new module to help certificate holders to recognise, prevent and respond to patron-patron sexual harassment and assault at venues,¹⁵ stronger action addressing occupational health and safety risks for workers associated with customer alcohol consumption is needed.



"At my first job, I was underage and I was employed as a "dish hand" but ended up primarily pouring beers."

- Bartender, non-binary



"Rejecting service of alcohol can be risky, I have had many customers threaten me with harm."

- Bartender/Sales Assistant, man



"The owners would frequently get too drunk to work while they were supposed to be on shift, and there were times I felt extremely angry at the position that put me in, with no one ultimately responsible in a state to deal with problematic and equally drunk customers."


- Food and Beverage Attendant, woman



"There were no safety procedures in place for working alone late at night in a place that served alcohol. My manager even said we have good regular customers so I shouldn't be worried because there is usually someone around if something goes wrong? Hardly a proper procedure."

- Bar Staff, woman

15. Victorian Government. 2026. Responsible Service of Alcohol training.



“At my current job I have raised concerns about the lack of training on how to deal with gender-based harassment, as well as wanting more conflict resolution skills when it comes to responsible alcohol service... I was told that there would be a new policy write up and safety plan put in place once the bar manager position was filled. That was over four months ago, and we have had two serious incidences happen at work during that time, and very little action has been taken by management... I am not trained to handle situations on my own that are outside the scope of basic RSA qualifications.”

- Cocktail Bartender, woman

Workplace injuries

Nearly 70% of workers have been injured at work.

Hospitality is among the industries with the highest rates of work-related injury.¹⁶ **68% of survey respondents experienced a workplace injury.** Among them, more than 40% experienced both physical and psychological harm, while 34% experienced physical injuries and 25% psychological injuries. The actual figure may be even higher given that many workers do not necessarily regard certain forms of harm as workplace injuries, especially psychological ones.

Workers with intersecting personal characteristics tend to experience workplace injuries and harm more often.

Faulty or inadequate equipment, excessive workloads and customer violence and aggression are the main causes of physical injury. Customer aggression and unsafe workplace environments also contribute to psychological harm. However, workers' complaints are often dismissed and remain unaddressed by management.

Workers' rights: Right to a safe workplace

Under the *Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004 (Vic)* (OHS Act) and the *OHS Regulations 2017 (Vic)*, employers have a legal duty to identify OHS hazards, control risks and maintain a safe working environment so far as is reasonably practicable.¹⁷ Workers can document hazards and report to their employers or to Worksafe Victoria, the state's workplace health and safety regulator. Workers have a right to form a Designated Work Group at their workplace and elect Health and Safety Representatives (HSRs) to represent them in relation to health and safety matters.¹⁸ Employers must consult with workers and any elected HSRs on issues that may affect their health and safety.¹⁹

16. ABS. 2023. Work-related injuries.

17. OHS Act 2004 (Vic). s. 21-24.

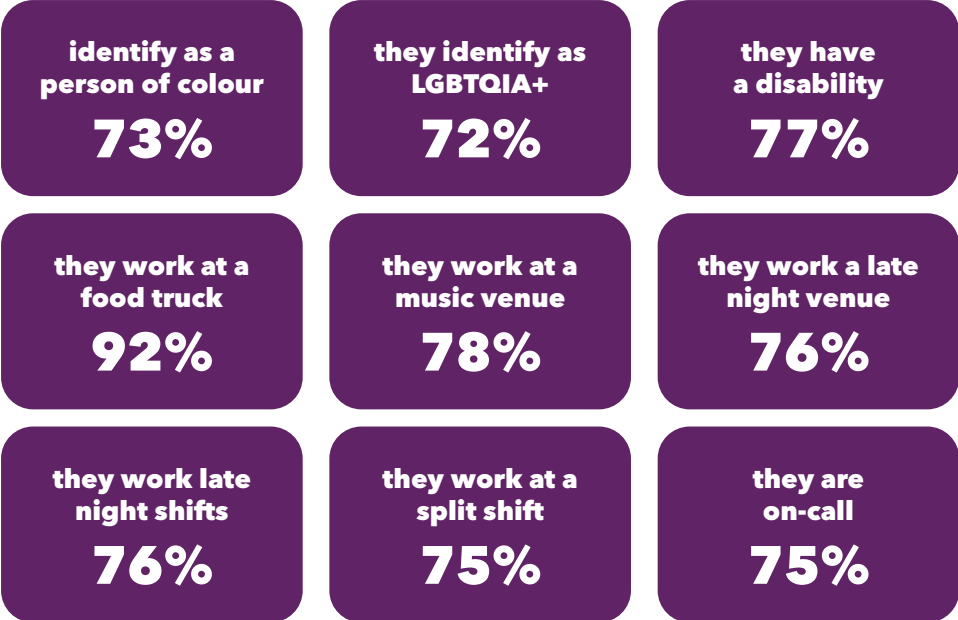
18. Ibid. s. 58.

19. Ibid. s. 35.

Workers' experiences of workplace injuries.

68%
of hospitality workers have been injured at work.


Workers' risk of injuries increases when...



"Low staffing, lack of security, lack of surveillance, lack of supervision, dangerous infrastructure. Also, no good process for banning or barring customers that have perpetrated assault or harassment."
- Bartender, woman

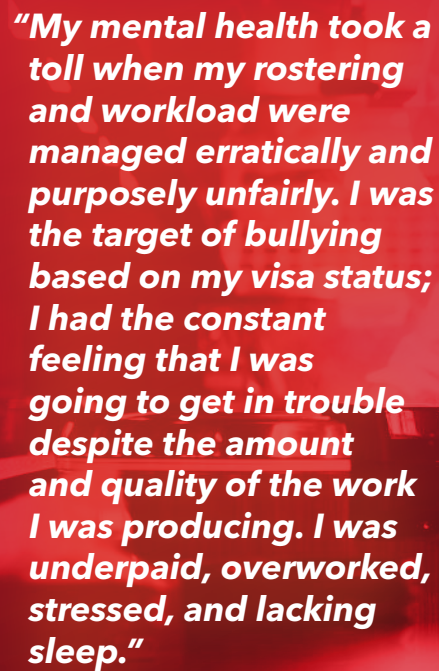
"I got transferred to a venue where the cellar is underground and I had to get gas cylinders in the cellar. This is not in my contract job title. I ended up hurting myself requiring WorkCover and surgery and I'm still not back at work."
- Venue Manager, woman

"Hazards I requested to fix were brushed off and I was told not to bring them up, such as a heavy window which we had to close vertically every night and would swing down quickly and hit people on the head. A cleaner was badly injured, and my manager covered it up."
- Front of House Staff, woman



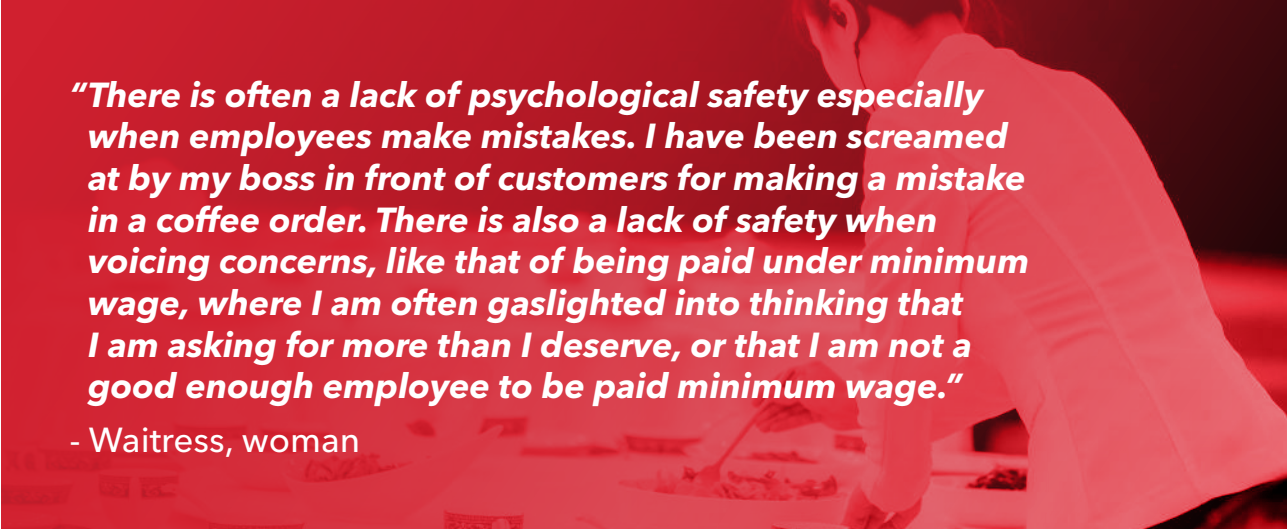
“OHS requests ignored e.g. needing aircon or fatigue mats or not wanting or being able to lift heavy items. Unreasonable long hours and forced overtime. Working short-staffed. Working when sick due to not being allowed to call in sick. No access to a toilet.”

- Barista/Waitstaff/Bartender, woman



“My mental health took a toll when my rostering and workload were managed erratically and purposely unfairly. I was the target of bullying based on my visa status; I had the constant feeling that I was going to get in trouble despite the amount and quality of the work I was producing. I was underpaid, overworked, stressed, and lacking sleep.”

- Head Chef, man



“There is often a lack of psychological safety especially when employees make mistakes. I have been screamed at by my boss in front of customers for making a mistake in a coffee order. There is also a lack of safety when voicing concerns, like that of being paid under minimum wage, where I am often gaslighted into thinking that I am asking for more than I deserve, or that I am not a good enough employee to be paid minimum wage.”

- Waitress, woman

Psychologically injured workers rarely make WorkCover claims.

Workers who are injured at work, whether physically or psychologically, can lodge a claim for compensation to cover the costs of medical treatment and lost wages. However, reforms to Victorian workers compensation laws in August 2025 have made it harder for workers to claim and receive compensation for psychological injuries sustained at work.

In reality, most workplace injuries go unreported. Amongst those who reported being injured at work, **82% did not lodge a WorkCover claim.** While 27%

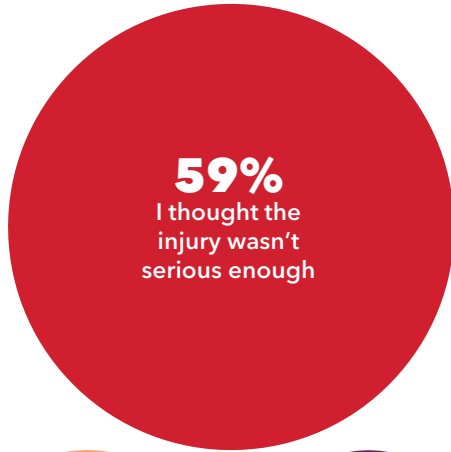
of workers with a physical injury made a claim, **only 4% of those with a psychological injury did so.** Many workers were not aware of their right to claim or did not think the injury was serious enough. In the case of psychological injury, most did not know they could report or did not trust the system. A large share of workers whose first language is not English face language and cultural barriers in lodging a claim. Fear of retaliation and job loss also discourage workers from reporting, especially when they are in precarious employment.

Reasons for not making a WorkCover claim.

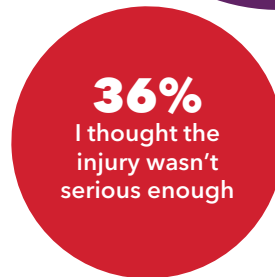
Only 27% of workers with a physical injury and 4% of those with a psychological injury made a WorkCover claim for their injury.

Why did you not make a WorkCover claim for your injuries? (multiple answers)

Workers with physical injuries



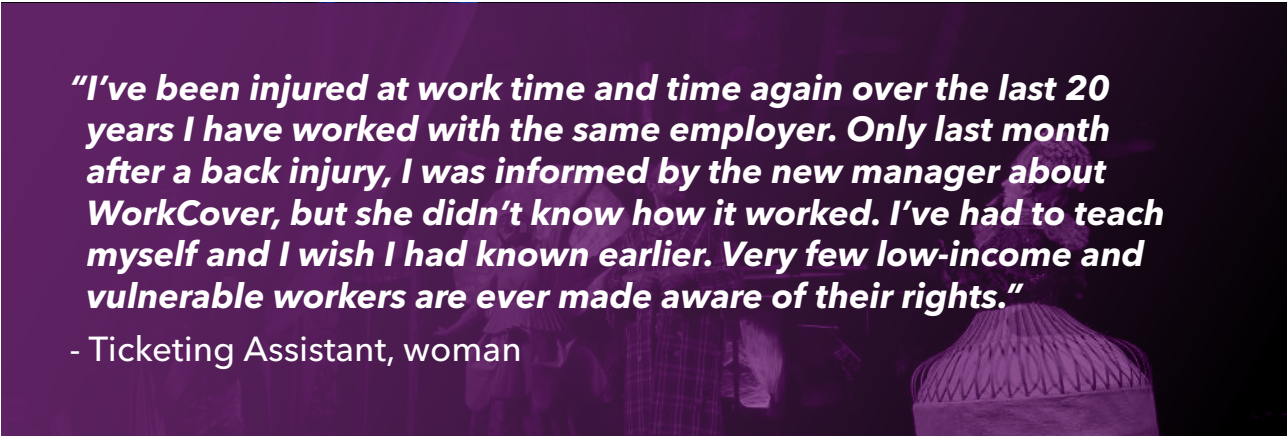
Workers with psychological injuries





"I cut off the top of my thumb once and made a WorkCover claim, the next day my boss yelled at me for costing him \$150."

- Cook/Barista/Waitress, woman



"I've been injured at work time and time again over the last 20 years I have worked with the same employer. Only last month after a back injury, I was informed by the new manager about WorkCover, but she didn't know how it worked. I've had to teach myself and I wish I had known earlier. Very few low-income and vulnerable workers are ever made aware of their rights."

- Ticketing Assistant, woman

Sexual harassment/gender-based violence

Sexual harassment is everywhere in hospitality.

Hospitality is a "hotspot" for sexual harassment and gender-based violence (SH/GBV), with heightened risks for women, gender diverse workers, night-shift staff and workers in alcohol-serving venues.²⁰ In our survey, 63% of women and gender diverse workers and 27% of men have experienced SH/GBV at work. **Almost one in four women and gender diverse workers experience SH/GBV regularly or always.**

The actual number of workers experiencing SH/GBV is even higher than self-reported; 10% of workers who reported being subjected to sexist remarks or inappropriate jokes at work did not recognise it as an act of SH/GBV. This signals workers' limited familiarity with what SH entails and highlights work environments where such forms of SH have been normalised.

Workers' rights: Employers' positive duties

Under the *Sex Discrimination Act 1984 (Cth) (SD Act)*, employers have a legal obligation (positive duty) to prevent and eliminate workplace sexual harassment, sex discrimination, sex-based harassment and hostile work environments. A positive duty to prevent sexual harassment came into force in Victoria in 2011, under the *Equal Opportunity Act 2010 (Vic)*. The positive duty also extends to harassment by customers or patrons.

Sexual harassment and work-related gender-based violence is a psychosocial hazard, which employers are legally required to eliminate. The newly introduced *Occupational Health and Safety (Psychological Health) Regulations 2025* strengthen employers' responsibility to identify and control psychosocial hazards in the workplace, including bullying, sexual harassment and gendered violence so far as is reasonably practicable.

20. Fileborn, B. et al. 2023. Project Night Justice research evaluation report.; Bucirde, J. et al. 2024. Not so hospitable: Sexual harassment in the Adelaide hospitality industry.

21. SD Act 1984 (Cth). s. 47C.

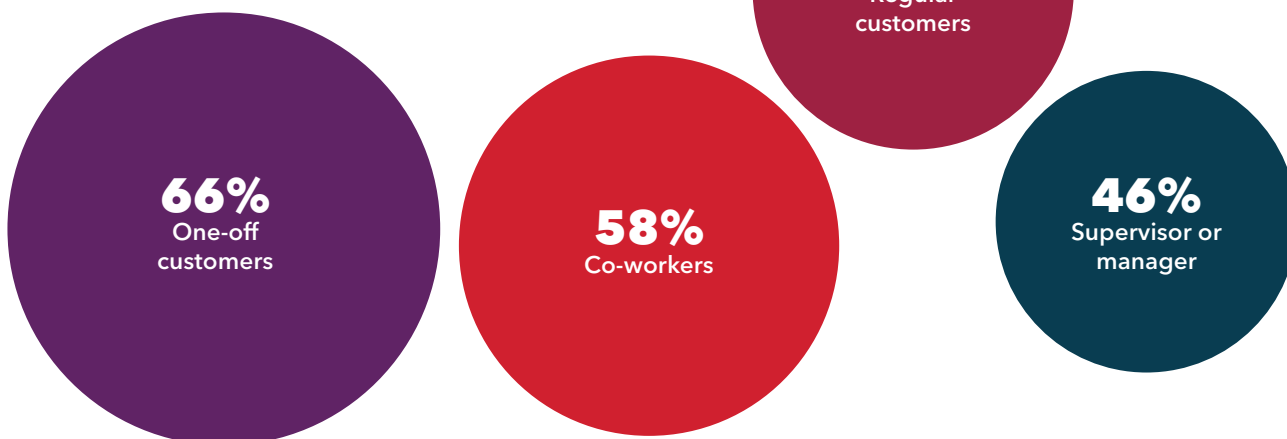
There are several factors that contribute to heightened risks of SH/GBV in hospitality. First, women, gender diverse workers and young workers, who are generally more likely to be targeted, make up a large portion of the hospitality workforce. Second, the nature of work involves customer interactions, and employers often dismiss customer abuse to protect sales and reputation. Third, insecure employment structure and unreliable shifts create a toxic workplace culture that normalises violence and discourages workers from speaking up. Fourth, workers at late-night venues or alcohol-serving venues experience and witness SH/GBV more frequently, with no adequate security or training.

Hospitality workers experience SH/GBV in a complex dynamic from multiple perpetrators, including co-workers, managers and customers. Within the power dynamics where workers are afraid to speak up fearing jeopardising insecure jobs, gendered violence and abuse becomes pervasive and persistent. Management may further take advantage of this and disregard customer harassment, ultimately fostering a culture that tolerates increasing levels of SH/GBV from multiple perpetrators. In other words, **the prevalence of customer harassment is a byproduct of an internal workplace environment where SH/GBV are perpetrated and normalised by managers and co-workers.**

Common perpetrators of SH/GBV.

71% of workers with SH/GBV experiences reported harassment and violence from multiple categories of perpetrators.

Who perpetrated the sexual harassment or gender-based violence you experienced? (multiple answers)

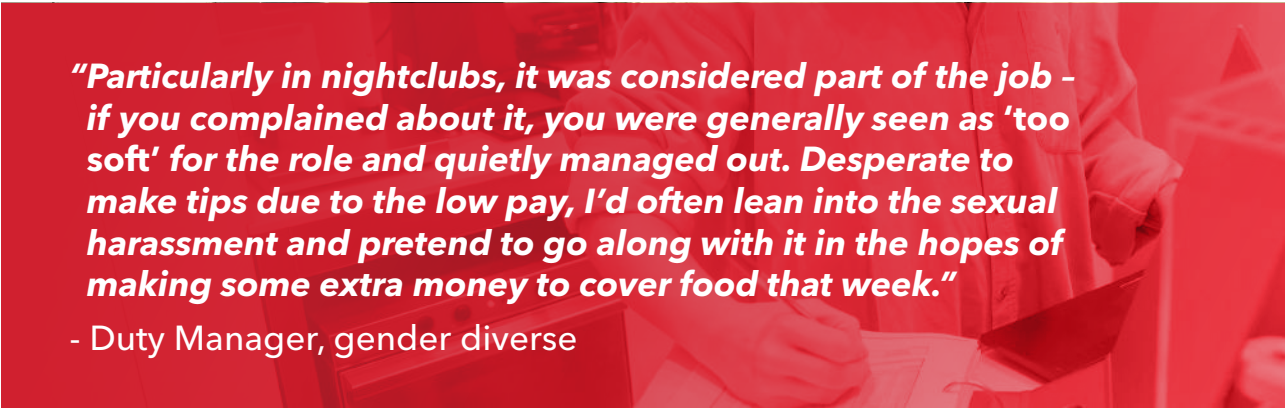


"A head chef at a restaurant I worked at told me that, in exchange for sexual favours, he would arrange more shifts for me. A manager also did the same at the same restaurant."

- Food and Beverage Attendant, woman

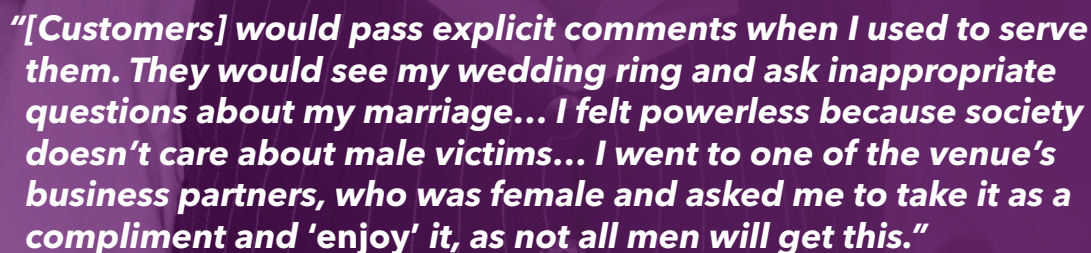
"Having to smile and be nice to people after inappropriate comments, unwanted touching or full-on sexual assault because it's just accepted and normalised. Especially in drug- and alcohol-filled venues, it's normal, and, if you speak up, you're being dramatic."

- Front of House Manager, woman



"Particularly in nightclubs, it was considered part of the job - if you complained about it, you were generally seen as 'too soft' for the role and quietly managed out. Desperate to make tips due to the low pay, I'd often lean into the sexual harassment and pretend to go along with it in the hopes of making some extra money to cover food that week."

- Duty Manager, gender diverse




"[Customers] would pass explicit comments when I used to serve them. They would see my wedding ring and ask inappropriate questions about my marriage... I felt powerless because society doesn't care about male victims... I went to one of the venue's business partners, who was female and asked me to take it as a compliment and 'enjoy' it, as not all men will get this."

- Front of House Staff, man

Two in three workers do not report or seek support after experiencing SH/GBV.


Many workers choose not to report incidents. Men are particularly reluctant, as almost 80% of men who experienced SH/GBV did not seek any support. While some workers had positive outcomes, many

fear and experience retaliation and victimisation. In a workplace culture where SH/GBV are normalised, workers are unsure whether SH/GBV are serious enough matters to be reported.




"I stopped reporting, usual response is 'just have a laugh would you' or 'you should be flattered' or 'it's just part of the hospitality industry'."

- Chef, woman




"When I was younger, [I didn't report] because I wasn't aware I could speak up. I wasn't sure how to even begin, particularly when the majority of roles I've had have been in male-dominant venues."

- Duty Manager, woman



"The female owner let us explain everything that was happening and showed true disgust towards it and support towards us. They gave us ways to handle the situation and provided a safe space for us to report and update her on the situation."


- Apprentice Chef, woman



"Based on previous attempts to communicate grievances, I felt I would be gaslit and shamed for speaking up. I'd witnessed other peers be bullied and humiliated for speaking out, which created an unspoken rule to not discuss it, so you weren't targeted or had shifts cut."

- Front of House Staff, woman

Challenge 3: Unequal hospitality work



"Being the only woman in the kitchen, from a different country, when I ask for support, he minimises me or doesn't listen to me, he complains about everything that isn't working when it's not in my hands, or he starts with insults or discriminatory words towards my country. When I try to defend myself, he tells me that I'm wrong and that in the end it's his restaurant and he decides what should be done."

- Chef/Manager/Bartender/Front of House Staff, woman



"I feel like, as an immigrant on a work visa, you are treated like a disposable commodity."

- Food and Beverage Attendant, woman

Gender discrimination

More than half of women have experienced gender discrimination

In workplaces where insecurity is the norm and physical and psychosocial hazards are ignored, inequality persists in many forms. In our survey, **53% of women and gender diverse workers reported experiencing gender discrimination**, compared

with 12% of men. The types of discrimination vary; most women experienced sexist remarks and a hostile workplace culture, whereas men were more likely to face unfair role assignment and biased management.

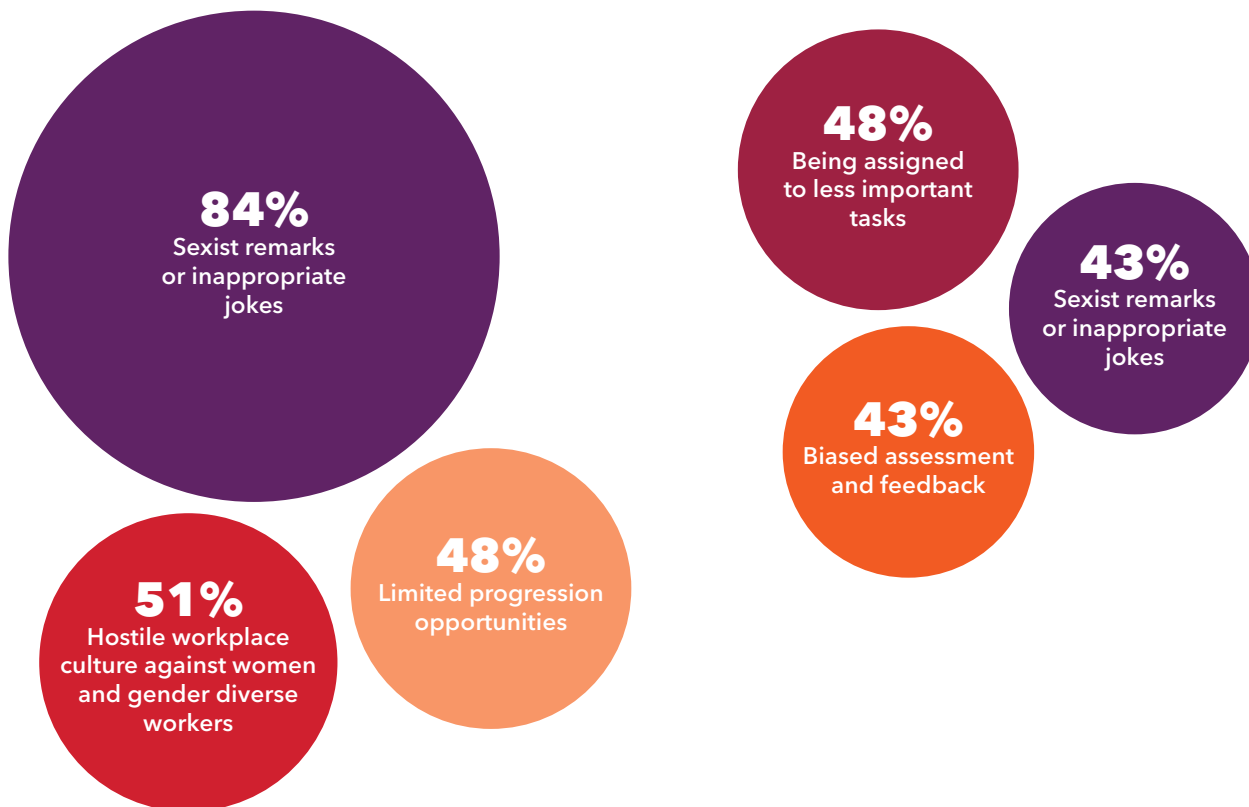
Workers' common experiences of gender discrimination.

53% of women and gender diverse workers and 12% of male workers experienced gender discrimination.

What best describes your experience of gender discrimination? (multiple answers)

Women and gender diverse workers

Male workers



Gender discrimination is severely widespread in hospitality. Women in *Accommodation and Food Services* earn \$630 per week on average, compared with \$750 for men, while national median earnings are \$1,250 for women and \$1,600 for men.²² The gender pay gap for *Food and Beverage Services* stands at 4.2%.²³ Although the hospitality workforce is evenly split between women and men, men dominate management

positions. 78% of employers do not offer employer-funded paid parental leave,²⁴ and many venues lack adequate and accessible women-friendly facilities such as toilets and changing rooms. Workers also experience microaggressions from customers and unfair role assignments rooted in societal norms around gender roles. However, as with SH/GBV, workers rarely report gender discrimination, fearing job loss or retaliation.



22. ABS. 2025. Employee earnings.


23. Workplace Gender Equality Agency. Industry Data Explorer 2024-25.

24. Ibid.

Workers' rights: Gender discrimination is unlawful


Direct and indirect forms of gender discrimination are unlawful under the SD Act and the FW Act. Amendments to the FW Act in 2022 (*Secure Jobs, Better Pay*) uphold promotion of gender equality as one of its objects and mandate the Fair Work Commission to consider gender equality and ensure equal remuneration in exercising its powers.²⁵ Transparency is promoted through the banning of pay secrecy clauses, granting workers a right to freely disclose and discuss their pay and terms of employment.²⁶

In addition, large employers are now required to report their gender gap data and set gender equality targets through amendments to the *Workplace Gender Equality Act 2012 (Cth)*. Gender gap data of employers with 100 or more employees is publicly available on the Workplace Gender Equality Agency's website.



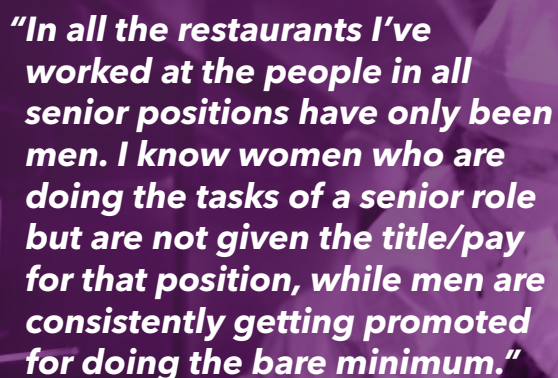
"Male customers will treat my male coworkers with respect and talk to them like people but then be rude and disrespectful to me and my female co-workers."

- Bartender, woman




"Just the regular 'women can't do that - women shouldn't do that' type of stuff, and talking over women, interrupting us - ignoring what we have just said - giving us the shitty jobs... the list goes on."

- Restaurant Help, woman



"In all the restaurants I've worked at the people in all senior positions have only been men. I know women who are doing the tasks of a senior role but are not given the title/pay for that position, while men are consistently getting promoted for doing the bare minimum."

- Commis Chef, woman

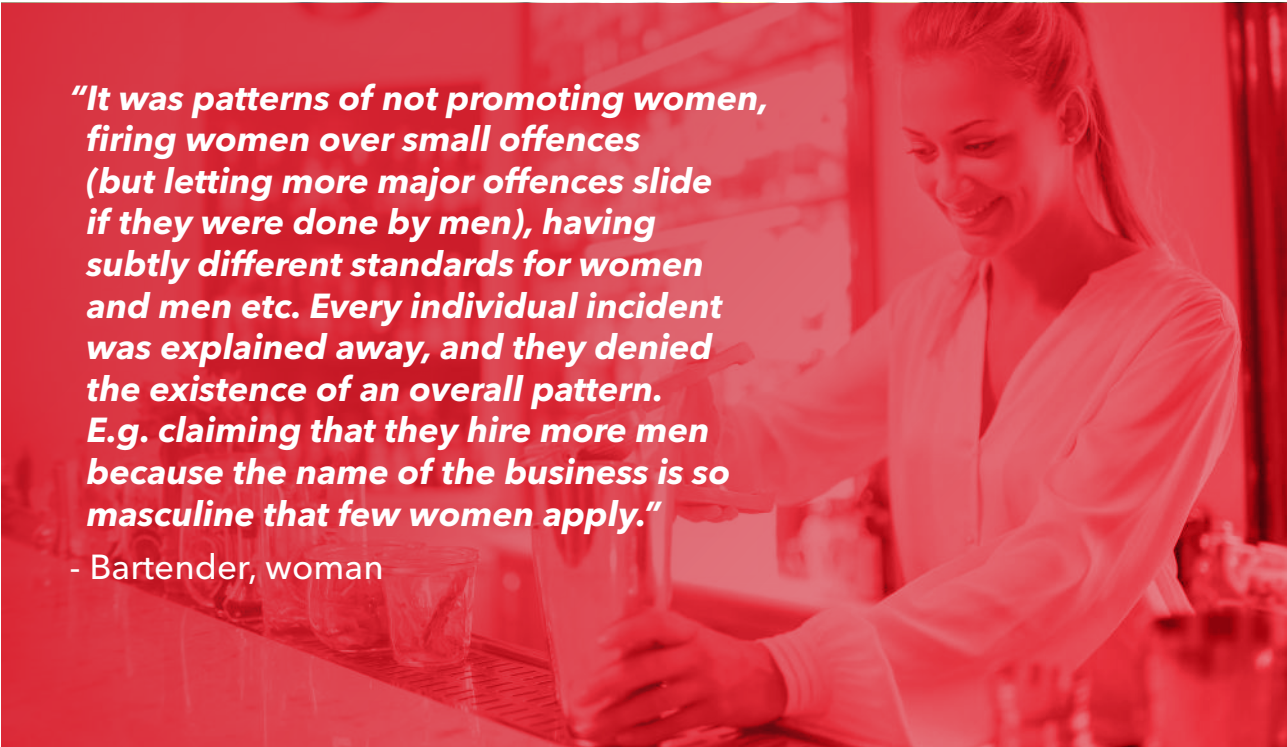


"Being male, I've often had managers assign work that's classically 'masculine' - back of house or grunt work, when really, it's front of house I've wanted to work."

- Restaurant Manager, man


25. FW Act 2009 (Cth). s. 2A.; s. 284.

26. Ibid. s. 333C.



“It was patterns of not promoting women, firing women over small offences (but letting more major offences slide if they were done by men), having subtly different standards for women and men etc. Every individual incident was explained away, and they denied the existence of an overall pattern. E.g. claiming that they hire more men because the name of the business is so masculine that few women apply.”

- Bartender, woman



“The discrimination was always coming from the people in power, the venues where this was the worst were small businesses that did not have a separate HR team or anyone to approach with issues other than the owners who were often the main problem.”

- Front of House Supervisor, woman

Intersecting forms of discrimination

Workers are exposed to various forms of discrimination on a daily basis.

Almost 40% of hospitality workers had their personal attributes beyond gender impact how they were treated at work. Workplaces that tolerate gender discrimination also allow other forms of discrimination to persist. 54% of those whose intersecting attributes affected their treatment also experienced gender discrimination.

Workers are constantly judged, disadvantaged and mistreated based on characteristics such as ethnicity, sexuality, disability, age and visa status. These attributes intersect and shape each worker's

experience, adding layers of vulnerability on top of already precarious work conditions.

Workers with these personal attributes face higher risks of OHS hazards from management, co-workers and customers. Those who identify as a Person of Colour or LGBTQIA+, workers with a disability and workers on temporary visa **experience workplace injuries more frequently, especially psychological ones**. They are also more likely to experience SH/GBV and gender discrimination.

Workers' rights: Protected attributes in workplaces

The FW Act prohibits workplace discrimination based on the following attributes: 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.²⁷


The *Equal Opportunity Act 2010 (Vic)* also prohibits discrimination based on: 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.²⁸

Workplace discriminatory behaviours, such as terminating an employee, refusing to hire someone or treating an employee differently because of above attributes, are all unlawful.




"When I was on a working holiday visa in a remote area, I was working a job with very minimal training and support. Expectations were not clearly communicated to me, and adverse actions were taken against me in the form of not rostering me on for shifts and not scheduling me in for supervision feedback every other employee was getting."

- Food and Beverage Attendant/Bartender, non-binary



"I've had my manager tell me not to hire certain people based on their race even though they are overqualified for the job."

- Head Barista, woman




"I've been othered based on my racial and sexual identity, including being passed over for promotions, being excluded from social events with co-workers, and being ignored during work."

- Sommelier, non-binary

27. Ibid. s. 351.

28. Equal Opportunity Act 2010 (Vic). s. 6




"I believe my nationality and cultural background played a role in how I was treated. At times, I felt underestimated, excluded from certain opportunities, and spoken to in ways that made me feel like I didn't belong. My skills and work ethic were often overlooked, and I felt that stereotypes and assumptions about me influenced management's decisions and overall treatment toward me."

- Food and Beverage Supervisor, woman



"I am of Aboriginal descent and working in a small town, I had daily comments on my skin colour or questions about where I was from."

- Baker, woman




"It's not as bad as others, but I'm Irish and have regularly been told to 'get the fuck back where you came from. I don't want you touching my food/drink'."

- Bartender, woman



"Being a gay man means I have frequently been overlooked for promotions; have been left out of decision making; and socially isolated."


- Bar Attendant, man



"I've noticed on occasion the way I'm spoken to or treated changes when they find out my sexuality."

- Front of House Assistant, woman

Shifting hospitality toward a secure, safe and equal industry: what workers need



"I've had to comfort staff on shift because of how a customer sexually harassed them. I've banned people from venues for stalking team members... It's been fucked, and it's why I'm so driven now to foster an environment where anyone can approach me and I'll get it done, I'll have the difficult conversations, I'll follow it up and make sure everyone is comfortable. It's one of the reasons why I wanted to get into hospo management: to be able to be the support I never had."

- Duty Manager, woman



"I've worked in many different types of hospitality venues. There is so much that goes on in hospitality that would not be acceptable in any other workplace."

- Event Sales Manager, woman



"Constant disrespect and undermining as disposable and replaceable commodities. For some of us, this is our passion, our profession and our livelihood, and not just a casual student job."

- Ticketing Assistant, woman

Workers' experiences attest to the precariousness of the hospitality industry, its insecurity, unsafe practices and inequality. These challenges are systemic, interconnected and reinforcing to each other - insecure employment discourages workers from speaking up and management inaction on

workplace safety exacerbates issues, while workers experience gendered harm and their intersecting attributes are exploited as vulnerabilities. To improve the everyday experience of hospitality workers and to make the industry safer and fairer, we need to address what workers need.

1. Workers need support to understand and access their rights

To make hospitality safe and fair, it is crucial that workers are aware of their rights and entitlements. Our survey revealed a clear need to improve workers' knowledge. **One in three casual workers do not know about casual conversion**, and another 30% know only a little, together comprising more than 60%. Many workers are "somewhat" familiar with their rights, while 5% did not know any of the recent legislative changes that protect them from workplace harassment, violence, hostility and exploitation.²⁹ Among this 5%, more than half have a first language other than English, suggesting language barriers in accessing information.

Unions are regarded as the most reliable and trusted source of information. For union members,

65% learned about their workplace rights through their union, while many also rely on government resources. Non-union members, however, rely fairly evenly on government resources as well as family or friends and social media, with the latter two often being less reliable.

Nearly 60% of respondents want to know more about psychosocial health regulations and the right to secure employment through casual conversion. The demand is clear; it is important that all stakeholders, including employers, government, regulators and unions, ensure that workers understand their rights and entitlements and are confident and able to exercise them.

Workers' source of knowledge of workplace rights

Where did you learn about workplace rights? (multiple answers)



²⁹. We asked workers' familiarity with following rights: employers' obligation for gendered violence prevention; employers' positive duty; casual conversion; family and domestic violence leave; the role of regulators, and; the role of unions.

What do you think is the biggest thing that needs to change in the hospitality industry for workers?

- **Education. The bosses control the narrative in every workplace. Workers adopt these messages and cause harm to themselves and others.**
- Chef de Partie, woman
- **I think someone to talk to about shitty conditions. At the moment I don't know who I can talk to even though I've been in the industry for years. A hotline or a message service that can tell me my rights and give advice on how to deal with issues would be good.**
- Bartender/Bar Staff, woman
- **Clarity of rights, definitions of safe and unsafe work environments. Having entered the hospitality industry as a first job, I had no idea what my rights were or what was a safe or unsafe work environment.**
- Wait Staff, woman
- **Hospitality is an industry that has minimal (if any) engagement with industrial and safety training. Being an industry where migrant and young workers are overrepresented, the education aspect is crucial and should be enforced every time someone starts working in a venue. I believe that the cultural aspect won't change until education and advocacy-support are seen as a strongly present part of the industry.**
- Head Chef, man
- **There is a culture of hospitality [where] workers turning a blind eye to things like unreasonable hours and abuses from management. People need to be made aware that they are entitled to the bare minimum of workplace protections that other industries enjoy.**
- Bartender, non-binary

2. Workers need unions

Many hospitality workplaces are small businesses, where unsafe and toxic cultures can easily manifest in the power imbalance between owners and workers. To strengthen workers' power in every hospitality workplace, it is crucial that workers understand the role of unions and connect with each other, beyond their workplaces.

There are barriers to unionising hospitality workers, such as the prevalence of small-medium sized businesses and the highly transient nature of the workforce, making workers hard to reach.³⁰ Many workers reported they have not joined their union because they have not been approached and they are unsure of the role of unions or which union they are eligible to join.

The role of unions goes far beyond providing information on workers' rights. Unions empower workers to take action, negotiate collectively and fully exercise and enforce their rights. For instance,

among workers who were injured at work, **24% of union members filed a WorkCover claim, compared with 14% of non-union members.** When more venue and hospitality workers are union members, the collective voice and power of workers grow stronger, enabling them to demand better conditions and accountability not just at individual workplaces, but across the entire industry.

Workers' rights: Join your union!

There is a union for every worker in Australia. Every worker has a protected right to join their union. Find out how to join here:



"My first job in hospo when I was 15, I was paid \$5 an hour... I had no idea what my rights were. My second job made me work three 7-hour shifts as a "trial". They weren't paid. When I insisted that I should be paid, I was fired. I became a Unionist in part because of my experience of exploitation working in hospo."

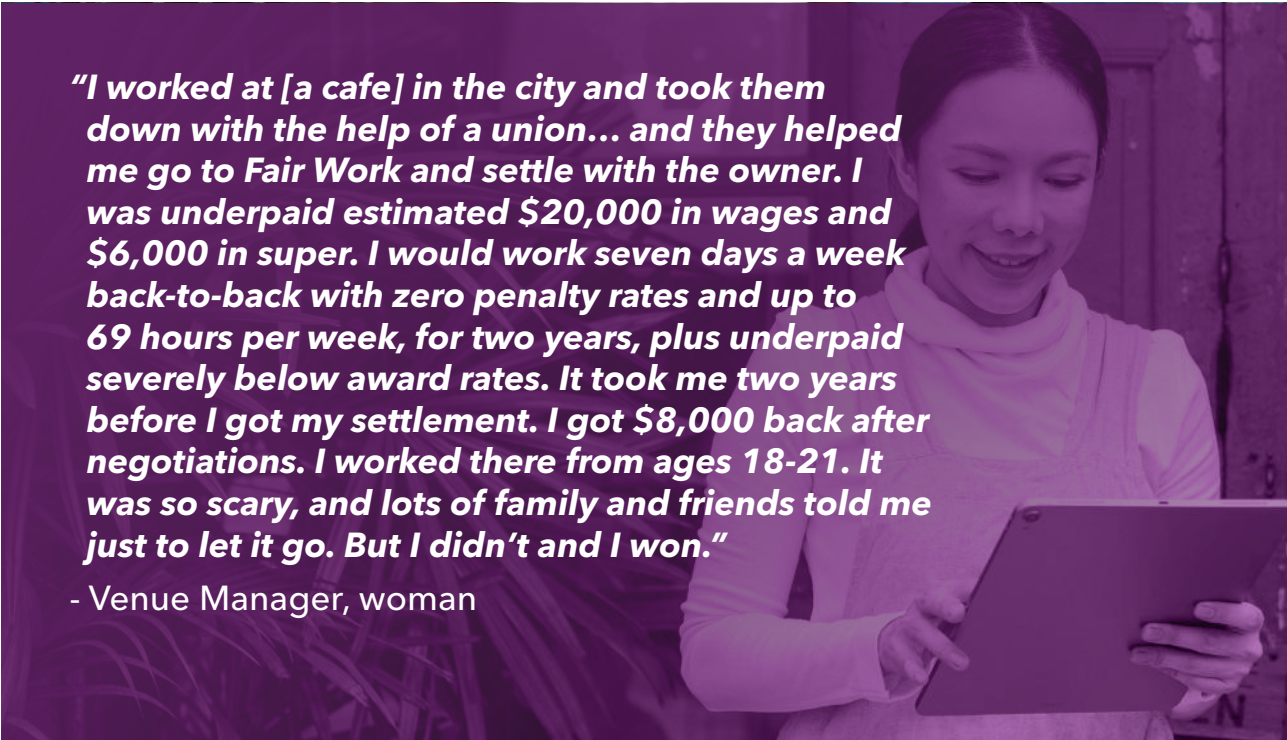
- Waitress, woman

"Myself and all my co-workers banded together to demand backpay for our stolen wages, and our bosses responded by refusing to meet with us as a group and then firing five of us. We staged a protest which attracted a lot of media, and after getting legal support through the Young Workers Centre,³¹ we eventually secured our backpay... We received a lot of support from YWC and [my union]."

- Waitress, woman


30. Linge, T. and Gjerald, O. 2025. Exploring the role of trade unions in creating fair and decent hospitality workplaces for all.

31. The Young Workers Centre provides legal advice and assistance to young workers under 30 in Victoria. For more details, visit: www.youngworkers.org.au



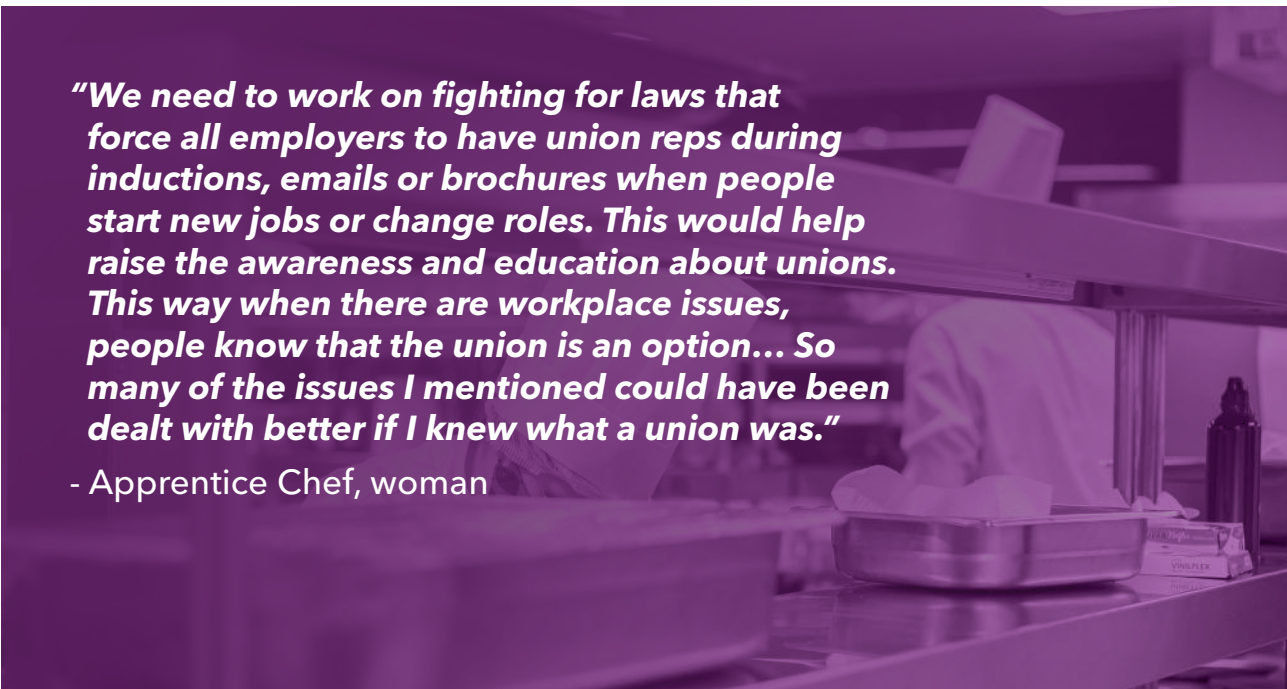
"I worked at [a cafe] in the city and took them down with the help of a union... and they helped me go to Fair Work and settle with the owner. I was underpaid estimated \$20,000 in wages and \$6,000 in super. I would work seven days a week back-to-back with zero penalty rates and up to 69 hours per week, for two years, plus underpaid severely below award rates. It took me two years before I got my settlement. I got \$8,000 back after negotiations. I worked there from ages 18-21. It was so scary, and lots of family and friends told me just to let it go. But I didn't and I won."

- Venue Manager, woman



"I wish I knew more about my rights and unions when I was younger and working in hospo. I really did have moments that I felt helpless."

- Bar Attendant, woman



"We need to work on fighting for laws that force all employers to have union reps during inductions, emails or brochures when people start new jobs or change roles. This would help raise the awareness and education about unions. This way when there are workplace issues, people know that the union is an option... So many of the issues I mentioned could have been dealt with better if I knew what a union was."

- Apprentice Chef, woman

3. Workers need a strong voice in the workplace

Discussing workplace issues is important; it allows workers to compare situations, make stronger collective claims and foster solidarity against exploitation. When workers exchange knowledge and identify issues, it is crucial that their voices are

represented in the workplace to address them and bring about change. Workers surveyed shared the benefits of discussing workplace issues with co-workers to build unity and take practical actions to address them.

Workers' rights: The right to share information about pay and working conditions

The *Fair Work Act 2009* prohibits pay secrecy; workers can share information about their pay and working conditions and discuss with other workers.³² Other co-workers or future employees can also ask other workers (with the same or a different employer) about their pay and working conditions. It is unlawful that employers take adverse action or put pressure on workers regarding workers sharing information.

Employees have formal rights to representation on safety issues by forming Designated Work Groups and electing Health and Safety Representatives (HSRs) with powers under the OHS Act to represent them in safety matters.³³ Further, union members can elect Workplace Delegates with protected powers to represent members' industrial interests under the FW Act.³⁴

HSRs and workplace delegates each have legally protected powers and rights to employer-paid training to fulfil their roles as worker representatives. These representatives play an important role in formalising employee representative structures, addressing the needs of workers and shifting power imbalances.

"Discussed issues regarding underpayment with co-workers, which resulted in the rectification of the issue. Also discussed issue of sexual harassment of staff with co-workers, asked for each of them to put their issues in writing and delivered them to management. The offending patron was barred from the venue for life."

- Food, Beverage and Gaming Supervisor, woman

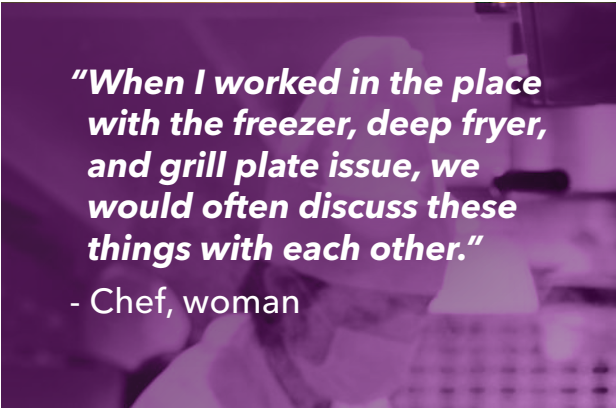
"I believe it's important for everyone I work with to know and understand the issues that are happening and how management and the business are refusing to address these issues. The more who know and the more who raise these issues, the better chance there is at forcing the business to address them, or at the very least, help keep everyone safer by knowing the hazards that exist."

- Demi Chef, man

32. FW Act 2009 (Cth). s. 333.


33. OHS Act 2004 (Vic). Division 5, Part 7.

34. FW Act 2009 (Cth). s. 350C.



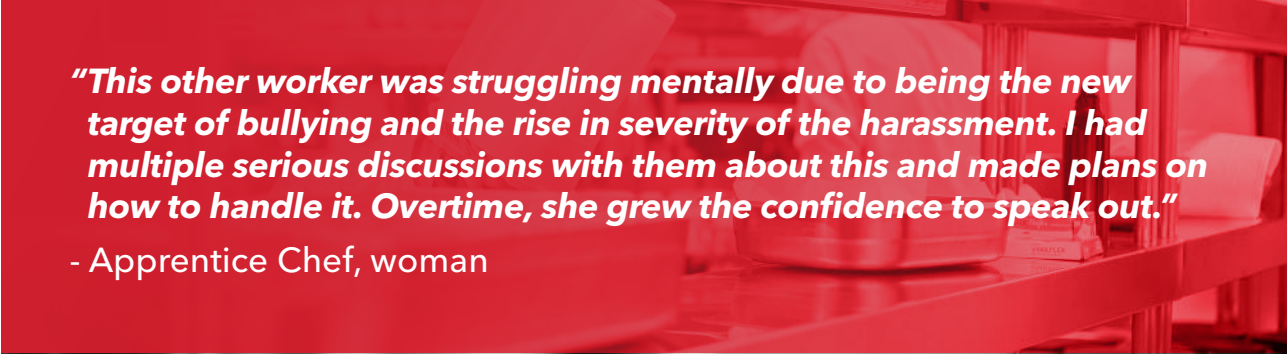
“When I worked in the place with the freezer, deep fryer, and grill plate issue, we would often discuss these things with each other.”

- Chef, woman



“We vent to each other, support each other and encourage one another to take due process to improve our workplace.”

- Front of House Staff, woman



“This other worker was struggling mentally due to being the new target of bullying and the rise in severity of the harassment. I had multiple serious discussions with them about this and made plans on how to handle it. Overtime, she grew the confidence to speak out.”


- Apprentice Chef, woman

4. Workers need employers to implement stronger prevention and accountability measures in the workplace

Workers call out the absence of accountability among management and owners. Retaliation and victimisation are common issues when workers raise concerns, yet they are unlawful. **Among those who have raised a complaint about workplace issues, more than half experienced differential treatment.** Most of such treatment led to unfair dismissal or bullying.


Improving employers' accountability requires top-down enforcement through government

and regulatory organisations and bottom-up empowerment of workers with information and support to enforce their rights. Misconduct and unlawful conduct by employers, including wage theft, failure to fulfill their positive duties, breaches of OHS duties and workplace discrimination, must be addressed immediately. Where they failed to do so, they must face real consequences including strict conditions placed on and potential revocation of liquor licences.



“People shouldn't be in fear of speaking up in fear of losing their jobs or repercussions for standing up for mistreatment in the workplace.”

- Front of House Manager, woman



“Accountability for owners/employers/managers to enact their positive duty requirements and put the workers before profit when it comes to fair entitlements and safe working environments.”

- Front of House Staff/Barista, woman

5. Workers need their employers to understand and meet their legal obligations

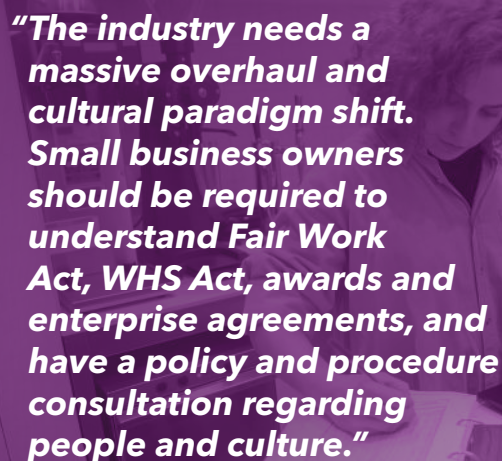
In addition to increasing employers' accountability, it is imperative that employers fully understand their own legal obligations. Many of the issues and challenges prevalent in hospitality are unlawful under various federal and state legislation and regulations that protect workers. Employers cannot continue exploiting workers and normalising

silence by taking advantage of their precarious employment or personal attributes. Employers must comply with the law and actively protect workers. In addition to stricter penalties, better education and training that addresses issues specific to hospitality can benefit employers and management, especially small venue owners.



“Training and education for all workers focused on safety (mainly for women) and how to engage safely and call out unwarranted behaviour, how to support your female coworkers from the sidelines and create space for workers to come forward regarding issues of harassment or discrimination in the workplace.”

- Senior Bartender,
gender diverse



“The industry needs a massive overhaul and cultural paradigm shift. Small business owners should be required to understand Fair Work Act, WHS Act, awards and enterprise agreements, and have a policy and procedure consultation regarding people and culture.”

- Supervisor/Restaurant
Manager, woman

6. Workers need employers to prioritise their safety by fostering respectful workplace cultures

Employers also need to recognise risks unique to hospitality workers, including customer aggression, the effects of alcohol consumption and use of substances. They should ensure that workers are protected from abusive customers.


In our survey, more than half of workers said they

would feel safer if there were better processes to handle aggressive or abusive customers. Creating a positive workplace culture starts from employers understanding and respecting workers' rights and prioritising their safety over customers, so that workers can feel safe to work and contribute fully to the workplace.




“Have more signage to educate customers to treat bar staff more respectfully and not to harass or use sexist language towards staff.”

- Bar Staff, non-binary



“Processes need to be in place to support women, trans, and non-binary people working in hospitality. Sexual harassment is far too common within hospo teams and from customers... It usually gets completely brushed off from management and fellow teammates, but over time (or even a one-off), this treatment can be distressing and turn women away from the industry. There needs to be a zero-tolerance attitude as an industry standard, with proper procedures to back it up!”

- Bartender/Floor, woman



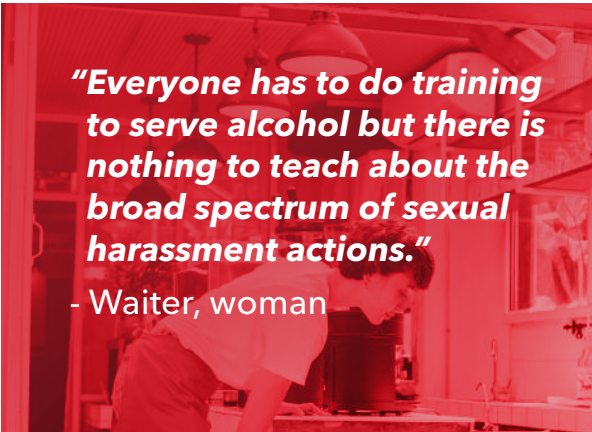
“A change in attitude by both business owners and customers. The industry has become overly entitled, where customers and business owners view their staff as expendable and unskilled who should be grateful to be able to work and are expected to give as much as their time as possible... This leads to an increase in unjustified complaints, which leads to business owners unfairly punishing their staff.”

- Demi Chef, man

7. Workers need to be protected by stronger regulations, especially for high-risk venues

Liquor licensing regulation must be enhanced to require venues to have and comply with gender-based violence prevention plans made in consultation with workers. A penalty system should be introduced for employers and licence holders who fail to prevent safety incidents. This should include strict conditions placed on licence holders and revocation of liquor and venue licences where necessary to protect workers and patrons.

To ensure employers uphold their existing legal responsibilities, the government must strengthen employer, licence holder and management training on identifying OHS hazards. There should also be a specific OHS framework for high-risk venues such as late-night and alcohol-serving venues and ensure employers consult on proposed controls with employees.



“Everyone has to do training to serve alcohol but there is nothing to teach about the broad spectrum of sexual harassment actions.”

- Waiter, woman



“Government needs to crack down hard on businesses that are flouting the laws. Managers need to be held accountable personally as well as the organisation.”


- Restaurant Manager, woman

8. Workers need a transparent, safe and accessible way to report issues

Government and relative agencies, such as the Fair Work Ombudsman and Worksafe, play a crucial role in addressing employer misconduct and must establish a clearer and more accessible reporting process.

Workers often fail to make complaints due to complex and lengthy processes, fear of or actual retaliation,

or lack of evidence when working in insecure employment. In addition to informing workers of existing reporting process and requirements, government agencies should consider the highly precarious nature of hospitality work and make reporting easier, particularly for casual workers, workers on visas or those with language barriers.




“More encouragement and support built into processes - to engage third external parties to resolve issues. Too much stuff is handled in-house, which means it’s not really handled.”

- Room Service Attendant/Porter/Waiter, man



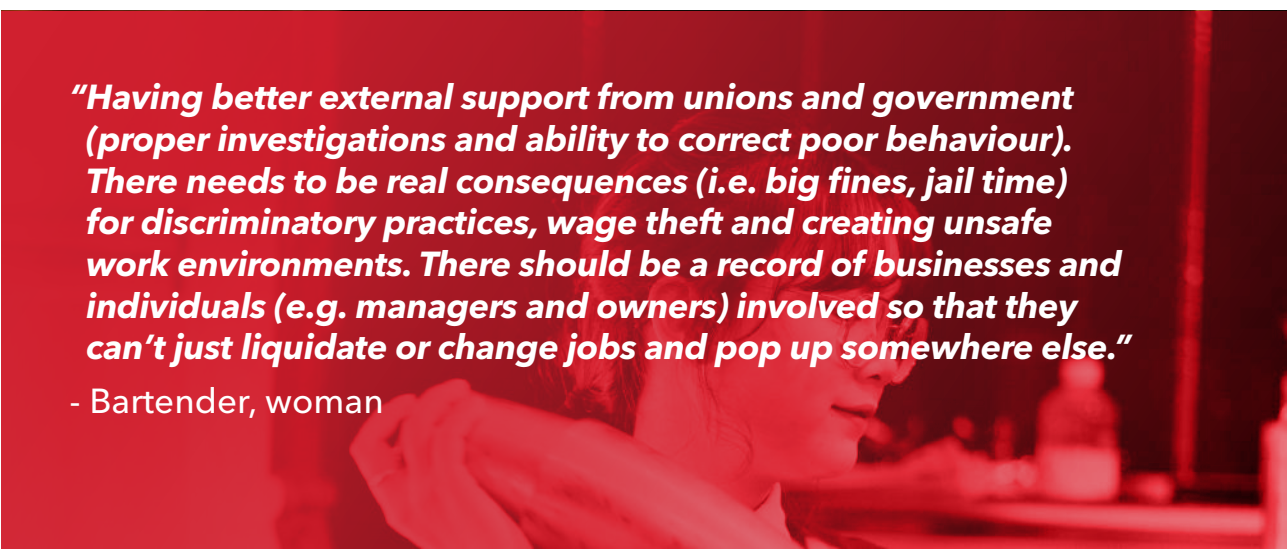
“Better/clearer processes for reporting wage theft and workers’ rights, especially for people joining hospitality for the first time.”

- Bartender/Front Desk, man



“Better policies and procedures from government agencies like FWO and Worksafe. Often evidence has to be insurmountable before any real action can be taken.”

- Food and Beverage Attendant/
Bartender, non-binary



“Having better external support from unions and government (proper investigations and ability to correct poor behaviour). There needs to be real consequences (i.e. big fines, jail time) for discriminatory practices, wage theft and creating unsafe work environments. There should be a record of businesses and individuals (e.g. managers and owners) involved so that they can’t just liquidate or change jobs and pop up somewhere else.”

- Bartender, woman

9. Workers need government to take the lead at state-government operated venues

To drive a cultural shift in the hospitality industry, the Victorian Government must demonstrate its commitment by acting as a role model. This can start from implementing safe and secure work environment measures in state-operated arts and

events venues, where hospitality workers engage in various works such as ticketing, ushering, serving food and beverages and catering. The State Government has power to lead this initiative and ensure that workers at these venues are safe.

Examples of State Government-supported venues:

Arts venues: Arts Centre Melbourne, ACMI, NGV and other museums

Cultural venues: State Library, Melbourne Recital Centre, Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre and other cultural venues.

The Victorian Government can introduce procurement measures to ensure that workers in these venues are paid fairly and safeguarded from any forms of harassment and discrimination. This can be done by, for example: implementing a procurement recommendation that contractors have an enterprise bargaining agreement with workers; imposing a strict zero-tolerance policy in cafes, bars and restaurants in those venues, supported

by penalties for non-compliance; improving formal consultative mechanisms with workers; providing mandatory training for staff and employers; barring contracts with catering companies that fail to meet fair and safe workplace standards; and mandating specific standards for event staffing agencies and limiting their recruitment should they not adhere to them.

Conclusion

Hospitality workers are professional, hard-working, highly skilled, technically trained, emotionally intelligent and qualified. Yet they have been undervalued and disrespected. Hospitality work has long been marked by insecurity, a lack of safety and inequality. These practices are systemic, and workers face physical, emotional and financial burdens imposed by employers and customers. Employers take advantage of insecure contracts to silence workers. Unsafe and toxic workplace cultures enhance exploitation and hostility among workers. Workers feel confined in small, closed workplaces dominated by imbalanced power dynamics, with no HR or third-party oversight.

In these work environments, it is natural for workers to feel lonely, isolated and powerless. Despite the diverse and unique values hospitality workers

bring, their personal attributes are perceived as vulnerabilities. Workers struggle daily to make a living and provide essential services that Australia has long taken for granted.

This is why hospitality must be reshaped to work for all workers. Now. Strengthening employer accountability and enforcing stricter regulations will ensure legal obligations are met. Better knowledge and support backed by unions can educate workers about their rights and entitlements and help mitigate risks of exploitation. When workers come together and raise their voices together, their collective power can challenge employer misconduct and improve working conditions. Starting from one venue, this will create a ripple effect, transforming the entire industry.

“We need more support in the hospitality industry, and this is the start of a big change.”

- Sous Chef, man

Our actions

The issues raised in this report are significant and systemic. To support progress toward making hospitality more secure, safer and more equal, the Workplaces for Women – Safe Staff, Safe Venues Project will:

1. Conduct outreach to empower hospitality and venue workers

Continue outreach to workers in arts, events and hospitality venues through venue visits, phone banks and the Safe Venues Chat program, to understand their individual situations as well as the collective needs for change and connect workers

2. Provide support and accessible information about rights at work

- Create and distribute information resources on workers’ rights that address issues such as insecurity, wage theft, unsafe work practices, occupational violence and harassment
- Design and deliver workshops focussed on key challenges so workers can learn workplace rights and confidently exercise their rights at work
- Make referrals for support with workplace issues where appropriate

3. Raise workers’ voices through unions and training workplace leaders

- Promote and educate workers on the role of unions
- Train leaders at workplaces to improve awareness of workers’ rights and safety with co-workers

4. Advocate for regulatory change, including improvements to liquor licencing regulations

- Advocate for the Victorian Government to introduce stronger requirements for liquor licencing and consequences for licence holders who breach occupational health and safety laws
- Advocate for a specific OHS framework for identifying hazards for high-risk venues to address gender-based violence and harassment
- Call on WorkSafe to prevent, investigate and prosecute incidences and complaints or harassment at work
- Revisit the existing reporting and compensation process for psychological injuries

5. Build community awareness to shift industry culture

- Promote secure, safe and equal employment arrangements and workplace practices while calling out employers who fail to respect their workers
- Improve community awareness about the ongoing precariousness of the industry



Some of the Workplaces for Women, safe staff, safe venues organising team and activists.

Support for hospitality workers

Unions

- **Australian Unions**

www.australianunion.org.au/join

A union is a group of workers who come together to make their job better and their workplaces safer. There is a union for every type of job.

- **We Are Union Women - Workplaces for Women** (Victorian Trades Hall Council)

weareunion.org.au/w4w

E: women@vthc.org.au

Outreach, support, leadership and education for women and gender diverse workers about their rights, safety and dignity at work.

Counselling and support for sexual assault and/or violence issues

- **1800 RESPECT**

1800 737 732

www.1800respect.org.au

- **CASA House**

1800 806 292

www.casahouse.com.au

- **MensLine Australia**

1300 78 99 78

mensline.org.au

- **Men's Referral Service**

1300 766 491

ntv.org.au/mrs

For First Nations people

- **13YARN**

13 92 76

www.13yarn.org.au

For LGBTIQ+ people

- **Rainbow Door**

Phone: 1800 729 367

Text: 0480 017 246

www.rainbowdoor.org.au

For workplace issues

- **Fair Work Ombudsman** (FWO)

13 13 94

www.fairwork.gov.au

Investigates and inquires into alleged breaches of the Fair Work Act on issues around wage theft, hours of work and breaks, entitlements and sexual harassment and takes enforcement action when appropriate.

- **Federation of Community Legal Centres**

www.fclc.org.au

Community organisations that provide legal services to those who need it.

- **Migrant Workers Centre** (MWC)

03 7009 6710

migrantworkers.org.au/

Provides outreach and legal support to workers in Victoria who were born overseas

- **Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission** (VEOHRC)

1300 292 153

www.humanrights.vic.gov.au/

Assists people to resolve complaints of discrimination, sexual harassment, racial and religious vilification and victimisation.

- **Working Women's Centre Victoria**

wwcvic.org.au

Provides women and non-binary people with free and confidential legal advice, information, support and representation about their employment and workplace rights.

- **Worksafe Victoria**

1800 136 089

worksafe.vic.gov.au

Workers can get information about unsafe work, report OHS issues and make a claim for work-related injuries

- **Young Workers Centre** (YWC)

1800 714 754

youngworkers.org.au

Provides outreach and legal support and assistance to young workers under 30 in Victoria.



weareunion.org.au/w4w



Workplaces **FOR** Women

Safe staff, safe venues.

