Survey exposes sexual harassment crisis in hospitality industry

A survey of hundreds of hospitality workers, released today, has found that 19 percent report being sexually assaulted at work.

Eighty-nine percent of respondents, who were predominantly young women, say they have been sexually harassed at work.

These workers say they face humiliating and sexually suggestive remarks from customers and management and co-workers, on a daily basis, as well as being bullied, groped and threatened. One worker told of being drugged and raped by her employer.

The survey gives a frightening snapshot of life for young women working in Australia’s hospitality industry.

Workers told United Voice that the culture in hospitality is one where sexual harassment is relentless and normalised. Only a third believed their employers took the issue seriously.

The survey release comes as the hospitality union United Voice announces it will hold crisis meetings with workers and employers to find ways to make hospitality workplaces safer.

Jess Walsh, Victorian Secretary of United Voice, the hospitality union, said the survey results were an indictment on the hospitality industry.

“"The stories people have told us are horrible. Every day young women are go to work feeling unsafe, in fear of being groped, humiliated or threatened by customers or managers,” she said.

"The culture today in many venues seems to be 'if you don't like it you can leave' and 'if you speak up then don't come back'."

"Some employers put young workers' safety and well-being well behind their customers' desire to have another drink. It's wrong and it's dangerous. Young workers' safety needs to come first second and third in the hospitality industry."

"This is the first experience of work for so many young people. Hospitality employers have an important responsibility to get it right for young workers. Lots do but so many are seriously letting their workers down. We want to work with those employers who are doing the right thing to tackle this issue head on."

"If you’re a young hospitality worker, it’s time to join together and change this. You have a right to feel safe and respected when you’re at work."

Explained one of workers surveyed: “One night we were having drinks after work and my manager followed me into the women’s bathrooms. When I went to close the cubicle door he used the next cubicle over to jump over the wall to try and get at me.”

Said another: “I've been sexually harassed many times! Worst time was when a bloke was hitting on me. I was friendly but firm and told him I wasn't interested. He then told me he would find me and rape me. The boss only called the police because he walked out on a $200 bill. I was 17 and hid in the kitchen crying. They served him again another time a few months later.”

A third worker commented: “At a café I worked at they allowed a man to harass me during my shifts by coming in several times during the day, sometimes not ordering, but standing near the counter to stare at me and asking personal questions, they didn't want to start anything with him so I had to deal with it.”

Women made up 90 per cent of those surveyed. Most respondents were under 34 years old, with about half (49 per cent) younger than 24.

Further info: Tim Petterson, United Voice Communications Director 0438 399 973
FAST FACTS: SEXUAL HARASSMENT SURVEY

- 89% have experienced sexual harassment at work
- 86% have felt unsafe, uncomfortable or at risk in their workplace

Sexual harassment in hospitality looks like:
- 87% reported experiencing sexist comments
- 85% reported comments on their body
- 84% reported sexual innuendo/insinuations
- 73% reported unwanted sexual advances
- 69% reported being touched inappropriately
- 49% reported being bullied
- 19% reported being sexually assaulted

- Do you believe your employer takes sexual harassment in the workplace seriously?
  - 48.2% No
  - 36.5% Yes
  - 15.3% Unsure

- Type of employment
  - 68% Casual
  - 32% Permanent

- Age
  - 49% of respondents were under 24 years old
  - 89% of respondents were under 34 years old

- Gender
  - 90% of respondents were female
  - 8% of respondents were male
  - 2% of respondents identified as ‘other’

- The survey was conducted online by United Voice Victoria between January and March with 306 hospitality workers.