Behind the silence: A critical exploration of the sexual harassment of women in the hospitality workplace

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Abstract

This study provides a unique insight into the experience and impact of sexual harassment on female employees working in the hospitality industry. The evidence suggests that sexual harassment is a pervasive problem in hospitality settings; however, it continues to be a silenced phenomenon. Therefore, there remains much to be understood about the experience of sexual harassment faced by women working in the hospitality industry and its possible impacts on their personal and occupational lives.

This study aims to explore women employees' experiences and perceptions of sexual harassment in the hospitality sector. In order to meet the aim of the research, this study adopts an interpretivist approach to analyse and interpret the data obtained from narrative interviews with twenty-two female employees. A range of hospitality organisations, including hotels, resorts, restaurants, pubs, and coffee shops, were included within the sample, and work experience in both operational and managerial roles was represented.

The findings are delineated into three main themes: being harassed in the workplace, the perceived impact of workplace sexual harassment, and the organisational response to sexual harassment. The findings suggest that sexual harassment in hospitality workplaces is complex and multifaceted and has the potential to pose a significant threat to female employees' well-being. Hospitality organisations exhibited two main responses to sexual harassment: a proactive management approach that directly addressed reported cases and a passive approach where incidents were inadequately acknowledged, addressed, or acted upon, effectively ignoring the harassment.

This study underlines the gendered spaces and perspectives of the hospitality workplace, combined with tough and precarious working environments and high levels of interaction between employees and customers, which fosters the risk of sexual harassment. In addition, social and cultural expectations, traditional roles and values and power dynamics in social settings play an important role in individuals' experience and perception of workplace sexual harassment. The findings further demonstrate that the impact of sexual harassment can extend

beyond the workplace, permeating women's personal lives and affecting their intimate relationships, career trajectories, and financial well-being. This research, therefore, extends knowledge of the experience of sexual harassment in hospitality work environments.

A conceptual framework is presented to demonstrate how female employees experience and perceive sexual harassment in hospitality. Implications for practice and future research directions are discussed in order to identify the scope of work that needs to be explored in this area.

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List of Abbreviations

EHRC – Equality and Human Rights Commission

EEOC – Equal Employment Opportunities Commission

F&B – Food and Beverages

HR – Human Resources

ILO – International Labour Organization

ONS – Office for National Statistics

PTSD – Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

UK – United Kingdom

List of Publications Based on the Thesis

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To all women who persist and keep on breaking barriers…

CHAPTER 1: Introduction

Research Context

> *'Sexual harassment is the most common but least discussed occupational health hazard for women.' (Sedley and Benn 1982, p.6)*

> *'Sexual harassment is a widespread experience that brings real harm to women's lives...' (Fitzgerald and Cortina 2018, p.220)*

Despite the decades that have passed since Sedley and Benn's (1982, p.6) statement that sexual harassment is the 'most common but least discussed occupational health hazard for women', the issue remains persistently alarming. Fitzgerald and Cortina (2018, p.220) highlight that 'sexual harassment in the workplace is fundamentally, even paradigmatically, a women's issue', and it continues to be 'a widespread experience, causing real harm to women's lives' (Fitzgerald and Cortina 2018, p.215). This indicates that, despite increased awareness of the problem, the prevalence of sexual harassment and its detrimental effects on women have not significantly diminished for decades. In that vein, this research seeks to explore the nature and scope of sexual harassment in the hospitality industry, shedding light on the ongoing challenges that women face.

The tourism and hospitality industry is one of the main economic and social sources for many countries on a local, national, and international scale (UNWTO 2023). On the supply side, which includes governments, NGOs (Non-governmental organisations), and both private and public stakeholders and businesses, the tourism and hospitality business is widely recognised as one of the core sources contributing to world business in terms of economic, socio-cultural and environmental aspects (Page and Connell 2020). On the demand side (customer/host/guest/tourist/visitor), tourism and hospitality activities are mostly reflected in the focus on the positive impacts that lead to a variety of motivation outcomes such as socialising, celebrations, enjoyment and relaxation, pleasure, escaping from routine, desire to experience cultural interaction and meet new people, and other motivators

depending upon the specific hospitality activity has been involved in (Fletcher et al. 2018).

As one of the main sectors of tourism, hospitality services (*accommodation/lodging* – hotels, motels, resorts, and others; *food and beverage services* – restaurants, café shops, pubs, clubs, taverns, casinos, and others; *meeting and event sector* – congress, conferences, business meetings, exhibitions and trade fairs, festivals and concerts, weddings, celebration dinners and fundraisers, and others) are the largest and most omnipresent sub-sector within the tourism industry where products and services are based on the process of delivering an experience (Page 2019). It means tangible and intangible products create experiences in which customer (guest) satisfaction is essential (Pizam et al. 2016). Service providers in the hospitality sector are thus aiming to enhance service quality and perceived value, better customer satisfaction and loyalty, good reputation and image, and robust business performance (Ingram and Grieve 2013). Therefore, to maintain a fruitful service experience, the employee's role in service transactions and the interaction of employee to customer and employee to employee are critical (Fletcher et al. 2018).

While employee performance is significant and essential in all sectors and organisations, this is particularly important in hospitality because it is a highly labour-intensive service industry where employees are part of the core of delivering service experience and identifying the quality of service (Baum 2006; Grönroos 2006). In the hospitality sector, jobs are generally characterised by delivering front-line employee's attitudes, skills, knowledge and performance to customers. Thereby, customer satisfaction is mostly associated with employee performance, resulting in customer loyalty and, finally, financial gain for companies (Kandampully et al. 2015; Baker and Magnini 2016; Nguyen et al. 2022). Moreover, this condition adds value to the organisation and constitutes a competitive advantage, maintaining robust performance and development and ultimately driving business success (Pizam et al. 2016; Agyeiwaah et al. 2022; Rodríguez-López et al. 2023).

However, by the nature of this sector, the existence of an intense relationship with customers, a close relationship with colleagues and a continuous business relationship with third parties in the workplace (e.g. suppliers and business

contractors) can trigger misconduct towards employees in the form of abuse and harassment. The constant interaction between these groups during the service production process makes employees vulnerable to harassment behaviours (Ram 2018; Morgan and Pritchard 2019). In this context, a negative side of the hospitality workplace environment is that some of the service providers (workers) are subjected to sexual harassment at work.

Sexual harassment is a prominent issue in almost all occupations and industries and organisational cultures on a global scale (UN Women 2018, UN Women UK 2021). The International Labour Organisation (ILO) (2020) emphasised that workplace sexual harassment is a barrier towards its primary goal of promoting decent working conditions for all workers. Moreover, although both women and men can experience sexual harassment incidents at work, women overwhelmingly tend to be the primary targets (UN Women UK 2021; ILO 2020).

The regional survey on violence against women, conducted by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) in 2014, highlighted that over half of women in the EU (55%) had experienced sexual harassment at least once since the age of 15, and nearly a third (32%) were exposed to sexual harassment in the workplace from a colleague, manager or a customer (71% of the perpetrators were male). Worldwide, between 40% and 50% of women employees have reported some form of sexual harassment in the workplace (ILO 2007). This percentage is markedly emphasised as 'nearly all of the people who had been sexually harassed were women being a main target' according to a survey with the participation of around 1,000 respondents working in British workplaces conducted by the Equality and Human Rights Commission (2018).

Even though no workplace is exempt from sexual harassment, it may be more recurrent in some industries than others (Hunt et al. 2007). Reports from the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA, Milczarek 2010) and the International Labour Office (ILO, Hoel and Einarsen 2003) have recognised the tourism and hospitality industry as experiencing the highest levels of sexual harassment incidents compared to any other sectors. These reports and other studies also emphasise that sexual harassment is a pervasive problem in interactive hospitality service work (Matulewicz 2015; Madera 2018: Zhu et al. 2019;

Hadjisolomou et al. 2023) and largely continues to be covered up, diminished, ignored, or normalised (Ram et al. 2016; ILO 2020).

The employment within the global hospitality industry has generally been characterised by diversity that is mostly dominated by women, young people, students, migrants and members of ethnic minorities (Paulston 2008; Janta et al. 2011; Rydzik et al. 2012; ILO (International Labour Organization) 2017; Waudby and Poulston 2017; Ram 2018). This is clear in the UK's hospitality workforce, which has a range of hospitality workers who have diverse backgrounds in terms of gender, age, race, ethnicity, education level, socio-economic class, migration status, sexual orientation, and others. Specifically, regarding the gendered division of hospitality work, women make up a large share of the industry's workforce (Baum 2013; Pritchard and Morgan 2017; Morgan and Pritchard 2019). Although it is hard to estimate the exact number of women employed in hospitality, according to the International Report on Women and Work in Hotels, Catering and Tourism (Baum 2013), female workers constitute over 60% of the sector's labour force at a global level, and up to 70% in some regions. As for the UK, there are 1.05 million women working in the hospitality industry, of whom 49% work in operational roles and 11% in managerial roles (People 1st 2017). Also, 65% of all part-time jobs in the hospitality and tourism sector are occupied by women, rising to 82% in contract food and service management and 72% in hotels (People 1st 2017).

The high levels of harassment incidents are strongly linked to hospitality work (Hoel and Einarsen 2003; Hunt et al. 2007; Poulston 2008). It is mainly associated with hospitality workplace characteristics and working conditions (Hoel and Einarsen 2005; Yagil 2008; Alrawadieh et al. 2022). Research has uncovered prevalent harassment behaviours within the hospitality industry, primarily targeted towards women (Gilbert et al. 1998; Mkono 2010; Waudby and Poulston 2017). At least one in four female employees in hospitality are subjected to unwanted and offensive sexual behaviours at work (Poulston 2008; Pritchard, 2014). In the UK, 67% of women working in hospitality had experienced some form of sexual harassment compared with the national average of 52% (TUC (Trades Union Congress) 2016).

The term 'sexual harassment' is relatively new; it emerged in the mid-1970s in the USA, and was adopted in the UK at the beginning of the 1980s. However, the experience of gender-based workplace sexual harassment is not a new phenomenon, dating back to women's inclusion in the labour market after industrialisation (Thomas and Kitzinger 1997; Zippel 2006). It was not defined as a pervasive social problem until the 1970s, thus the seriousness of the issue was ignored by employers and regulators for many decades (Women and Equalities Committee 2018).

Although the existence of sexual harassment at work is not a new phenomenon, views on sexual harassment have evolved to be considered an occupational hazard in which women are more vulnerable and more silenced to toxic workplace behaviour and cultures (Quick and Fadyen 2017; Latcheva 2017). Over the last decade, women's advocacy groups around the world have increased knowledge of the extent and adverse consequences of sexual harassment on women workers. As an offensive and damaging attitude towards victims (generally women), workplace sexual harassment has been redefined and deemed an inescapable fact of workplace life that includes a manifestation of gender discrimination and a form of gender-based violence against women (Latcheva 2017).

Thereby, the prevalence of sexual harassment in the workplace has gained growing public and scholarly awareness and concern worldwide. Many governments and organisations have introduced a range of laws, policies and regulations to prevent and combat workplace sexual harassment at national and international levels. International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention 190 (2019) focuses on violence and harassment in the world of work, urging countries to adopt comprehensive measures to prevent and address sexual harassment at both national and international levels. The Australian Human Rights Commission's report (2020) highlighted the prevalence of workplace sexual harassment in Australian workplaces. It recalled all levels of government, independent government agencies, the private sector, and the community to prevent and respond to sexual harassment in Australian workplaces. In response to the report's findings (33% of Australian employees have experienced sexual harassment in the workplace in the past five years), the Australian government has committed to fully implementing all recommendations of the report (The Office of Impact Analysis (OIA) 2022).

Similarly, a new anti-harassment law was introduced in Japan in 2019. In light of growing awareness of workplace harassment, Japan revised its labour laws to include stricter penalties for companies that fail to prevent or address sexual harassment, particularly in male-dominated industries (PWC 2019).

Moreover, various movements (#MeToo (under the #Metoo hashtag on Twitter) and Time's Up, for example) have emerged through social and mainstream media in order to raise awareness of gender disparities, gender-based violence and sexual harassment in the workplace. These sorts of movements have indeed helped to encourage many women around the world to express their harassment experiences frankly and publicly. According to a survey conducted by Angus Reid Institute in Canada (2018) the #Metoo campaign had an impact on two-thirds of Canadian women. It meant that they were able to share their harassment stories on social media, and felt empowered to speak out about their past and current transgressions and misbehaviours towards them.

Sexual harassment at work is complex owing to its various forms. It is also widely debated in academic research and organisational settings in terms of individual, organisational and cultural constructs. Definitional criteria (i.e., severity or frequency of the behaviour, consequences of the behaviour, perception and acceptance level/limit of the behaviour by the victim, organisational/sectoral atmosphere and culture) vary, making sexual harassment difficult to define. For the purpose of this study workplace sexual harassment can be defined as *"unwanted conduct of a sexual nature, which is intended to, or has the effect of, violating a person's dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive work environment"* (Equality and Human Rights Commission 2018) and that can result in occupational health hazard for women (Quick and Fadyen 2017; Fitzgerald and Cortina 2018). In the literature review chapter, definitional criteria, forms of sexual harassment, main themes of sexual harassment in the context of hospitality industry and its consequences will be discussed in detail. However, it is generally accepted that sexual harassment is one of the most common forms of gender-based violence that includes abusive and offensive behaviours and/or acts towards the individuals (typically and mostly against women) due to their gender or gender identity/expression (Council of Europe 2011; Hearn et al. 2016;

Bradbury-Jones et al. 2019). Furthermore, it is acknowledged as physical, psychological and emotional violence towards a person in the workplace within the context of a power differential (Patterson et al. 2018; Doe and Essiaw 2023).

While considerable attention has been paid to identifying business profitability, productivity and performance with regards to employee's work performance within the hospitality industry, little attention has been paid to understanding the experience of women employees during the service transaction, especially those experiences which are deemed to be negative and lead to detrimental impacts on an employee's personal and occupational wellbeing. Most of the relevant literature focuses on the impact of harassment on an employee's work-performance (see Gilbert et al. 1998; Worsfold and McCann 2000; Theocharous and Philaretau 2009; Hershcovis and Barling 2010; Alexander et al. 2012; Bentley et al. 2012; Ineson et al. 2013; Sojo et al. 2016) rather than considering how it affects female employees' life outside of the workplace. Their stories about workplace harassment and its impact on their life are seldom heard within the United Kingdom (UK) hospitality context.

Given that one in three women experiences sexual harassment in their lifetime either at work or in their social life, and it costs $8 trillion to the global economy (The Womanity Foundation 2019), the economic and social impact of harassment cannot be ignored. Nevertheless, sexual harassment is a serious issue which is largely underreported and should be examined in more depth. There is currently a research gap about the impact of harassment behaviour on the lives of women employees. This research aims to address this gap in knowledge and to explore individual employees' personal experiences and stories of sexual harassment in the hospitality workplace.

Research Aim and Objectives

The aim of this research is to critically examine the experience of sexual harassment among female workers in the hospitality sector. To achieve this, the emic perspective is given priority in order to gain a deeper understanding of the

individual experience of workplace sexual harassment. The following related objectives have been set for this research:

- To investigate the linkages between sexual harassment and the hospitality industry.

- To identify the nature and forms of sexual harassment in hospitality settings.

- To explore female employees' experiences of sexual harassment in hospitality in the United Kingdom in order to examine how and why harassment occurs.

- To investigate the impact of workplace sexual harassment upon female employees and analyse the long-term impact of harassment on women.

- To explore the reporting of sexual harassment by female hospitality workers and the subsequent organisational response.

- To develop a conceptual framework demonstrating the experience and impact of sexual harassment on female employees in the hospitality sector.

Rationale for the Research

Workplace sexual harassment has become a prominent issue in discussions on organisational behaviour, gender and management, and workplace well-being discourse. Research on sexual harassment has increased noticeably over the past two decades in disciplines such as psychology, sociology, law, education, gender studies, and management, as well as in tourism and hospitality contexts (Dhanani et al. 2021; Zhou et al. 2021; Tsai et al. 2023; Opoku et al. 2024). Therefore, scholars have explored sexual harassment from the perspective of their respective disciplines, taking into account the unique characteristics and dynamics of their specific fields and sectors to understand better how workplace sexual harassment manifests, is experienced and can be addressed effectively. For instance, psychologists have mainly focused on the psychological impacts of harassment on individuals (Fitzgerald et al. 1997; Barling et al. 2001; Miner-Rubino and Cortina 2004; Iroegbu et al. 2024), while sociologists have examined how social structures and power dynamics contribute to the prevalence of harassment (Uggen and

Blackstone 2004; Chamberlain 2008; McLaughlin et al. 2012; Saguy and Rees 2021). Scholars from law have analysed the effectiveness of laws and policies in preventing and addressing harassment (Collins 2004; Richards and Hayes 2024; Heymann et al. 2023), and gender and women studies experts from various disciplines have investigated how gendered characteristics and power relations shape the experience and reporting of harassment. In the tourism and hospitality sectors, researchers have considered the high level of customer interaction, gendered job roles, and precarious working conditions that make employees particularly vulnerable to harassment (Ali et al. 2015; Waudby and Poulston 2017; Jung and Yoon 2018; Wang et al. 2020; Tsai et al. 2023).

From an academic viewpoint, this research seeks to contribute to how these enduring industry-specific dynamics continue to shape the occurrence, perception, and response to harassment in various hospitality settings. It aims to enhance knowledge and understanding through providing in-depth insight into the different types of sexual harassment women employees can experience within the hospitality workplace and its possible impact on them. Additionally, there is limited research on how workplace harassment impacts the personal lives of women in the hospitality industry beyond their work lives, both in the short and long term. Research has mostly focused on the consequences of workplace sexual harassment on women employees' individual work performance, such as lower job satisfaction (Alrawadieh et al. 2022), performance and commitment (Liu et al. 2014), higher absenteeism and intention to leave the job (Bohle et al. 2017) as well as negative impact on employees' physical and mental health such as anxiety, stress, fear and other health impairments (Yoo et al. 2015) in tourism and hospitality literature. Therefore, there remains much to be understood about the impact of sexual harassment on an employee's personal life outside work. Moreover, there is still a significant lack of understanding regarding the way in which female hospitality employees report cases of workplace sexual harassment, as well as how organisations approach and respond to both victims and perpetrators. Further, the findings from this PhD study will be utilised to enhance theoretical understanding of the nature and impact of sexual harassment on women while identifying types of perpetrators, causes, and incidents of sexual harassment behaviours within the hospitality work environment.

From a sector perspective, the hospitality industry employs a significant number of women from diverse backgrounds (Ladkin 2011; Rydzik et al. 2017). Although the industry has suffered from severe instances of sexual harassment, there is still a lack of reporting of such incidents at work (Hart 2019; ILO 2020). Some employees might be reluctant to report incidents of sexual harassment due to the insufficient policies and procedures designed to protect them and the lack of effective measures to prevent re-victimization of those who do come forward. Therefore, it is expected that the findings of this research can be used to inform procedures and policies related to the treatment of women in hospitality. The findings could also be instrumental in enhancing training programs for both managers and staff, ensuring a more proactive and effective approach to preventing, combating, and responding to workplace sexual harassment. Additionally, this research might provide insight into how employers could mitigate the financial losses associated with workplace harassment in the future.

In terms of my personal rationale for this research, my journey in the hospitality industry began with a part-time job at my neighbour's coffee shop during weekends when I was a teenager. I first helped with a celebration event at the coffee shop, which later turned into a regular part-time job for me. I enjoyed earning my own money as a high school student, which meant additional financial flexibility at that age apart from the pocket money given by my family. My hospitality journey then continued during my university years when I pursued a degree in tourism. During my education and placements, I gained experience working in various hotel departments and realised the high interactions between different departments within a hotel complex. Unfortunately, in such settings, some employees, including myself, experienced or witnessed abuse or harassment from coworkers or customers. These experiences sparked my interest in understanding why such behaviours are often hidden, silenced, and normalised in the hospitality industry. I found it perplexing that victim-blaming is the prevailing response by perpetrators and authorities, particularly considering the detrimental consequences it has, especially for women.

On a personal level, my interest in this subject has been shaped by my own experiences and observations, as well as my education in tourism management. I

was inspired to collect and share more personal stories from women employees in the hospitality industry. Through delving into the stories of more women, I aim to amplify women's voices and break the silence behind the incidents of workplace harassment. I also want to raise awareness of the significance and pervasiveness of sexual harassment incidents from a workplace well-being perspective rather than considering hospitality employees solely as a source of productivity, profitability and customer satisfaction.

As my own personal experiences and observations inspired me to explore how workplace sexual harassment impacts women employees, my experiences likewise no doubt occupy an important role during the research. The reflexivity of the researcher will therefore be discussed in Chapter 3, the Methodology.

Structure of the Thesis

The thesis consists of the following chapters, and the synthesis of each chapter can be described as follows:

Chapter 1 presents an introductory background to the research and sets the aim and objectives. While highlighting the gaps within the literature, this chapter explains the study in the context of the hospitality industry and the relevance of the research. The chapter also gives the rationale and background for the study. The remainder of the research is divided into seven chapters.

Chapter 2 includes a literature review related to general features of the hospitality industry with a focus on gendered roles, power inequalities and working conditions to build a better understanding of gendered work roles and the position of women employees within the hospitality labour force. The chapter then offers a critical review of sexual harassment within the framework of the hospitality workplace in order to contribute an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon for this thesis.

Chapter 3 details the methodology, specifically designed to capture women employees' experience of sexual harassment in order to prioritise the employee voice through collecting individual narratives of sexual harassment in hospitality workplaces. The chapter discusses the methodological aspects of the research in

which an interpretive qualitative approach is adopted. The details of the research paradigm that guides the study are described, and the research strategy is discussed. It discusses the approach to interviews, the use of narrative inquiry and the sampling methods used. Issues of gaining entry and rapport are explained. Data analysis is detailed, and the issues of trustworthiness of the research, ethical considerations, and limitations are explored.

Chapters 4, 5, and 6 discuss findings that emerged from the primary data. The analysis and interpretation are presented within the discussion chapters using the data of the narrative interviews elicited from women employees' stories and their subjective experiences of workplace harassment. Chapter 4 delves into the theme of *being harassed in the workplace*, capturing the participants' narratives that detail the various forms and contexts of harassment they encountered. Chapter 5 focuses on *the perceived impact of workplace sexual harassment*, examining how these experiences have affected women's mental, emotional, and occupational well-being. Finally, Chapter 6 addresses *the organisational response to sexual harassment*, analysing how hospitality organisations have either addressed or failed to adequately respond to these incidents, with a particular emphasis on the disparity between theoretical policies and practical measures. Together, these chapters provide the complex and multifaceted nature of sexual harassment experienced by women in the hospitality sector, highlighting its profound impact on both their personal and professional lives.

Chapter 7 offers the conclusion of the thesis, which includes guidelines on the implication of the findings for practice, a critical discussion about the contribution to methodology and theory, and recommendations for future research. The chapter concludes with a personal reflection on the research journey.

Conclusion

This chapter has provided an introduction to the thesis and has offered the context of the research topic. The linkages between sexual harassment and the hospitality industry have been discussed, and its prevalence at work and the hospitality workplaces in particular has been presented. The aim and objectives of the research

have been stated, and the rationale of the research has been explained. Finally, the chapter ends with an outline of the structure of the thesis.

CHAPTER 2: Sexual Harassment in the Hospitality Sector

Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the literature on workplace sexual harassment within the hospitality industry, aiming to critically explore the phenomenon of sexual harassment in this sector. Firstly, the chapter starts by presenting a general definition and the forms of sexual harassment in the workplace. Secondly, the chapter presents the general features and working conditions of the hospitality industry to build a better understanding of the context of the research within the scope of the hospitality sector. After that, it explains the gendered work roles and the position of women employees in terms of power inequalities in the hospitality workforce. The chapter then moves on to elucidate the relationship between employment and sexual harassment and its impact on women employees. Finally, the chapter addresses the consequences of sexual harassment for women employees in the hospitality workplace to enhance understanding of what has already been researched in this area and to highlight the research gap. It must be noted that the literature review does not end with this chapter. Taking an inductive approach to the topic, which is in keeping with the qualitative approach (Jones et al. 2013) means that the data analysis will lead to a review of further related literature, which will feature in dialogue with the findings in the results chapters (see Chapters 4, 5 and 6).

Defining Sexual Harassment in the Workplace

Although it is difficult to describe the exact boundaries of sexual harassment, it has been generally defined from sex-based and behavioural perspectives in the US and Europe. According to the US EEOC (Equal Employment Opportunity Commission) (2019a), sexual harassment is an illegal form of sex discrimination. It violates Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and is defined as: 'unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favours, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual

nature…when this conduct explicitly or implicitly affects an individual's employment, unreasonably interferes with an individual's work performance, or creates an intimidat ing, hostile, or offensive work environment' (EEOC (Equal Employment Opportunity Commission) 2019a). Offensive sexist behaviours and comments are also considered to be forms of workplace sexual harassment in the US context. In the UK, sexual harassment is illegal under the The Equality Act (2010), which sets out strategies to increase equality of opportunity and to enable protection against sexual harassment in the workplace (Women and Equalities Committee 2018). The Act describes that workplace sexual harassment can be related to certain personal characteristics, as follows:

> "… a person engages in unwanted conduct of a sexual nature that is related to gender reassignment or sex or the other relevant protected characteristics such as age, disability, race, religion or belief, and sexual orientation which is conducted has the purpose or effect of, violating a person's dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment."

> (The Equality Act 2010, section 26)

The Act emphasises workplace sexual harassment as 'unwanted conduct of a sexual nature' which has the purpose or effect of 'violating a person's dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment' (The Equality Act 2010, section 26). The act also highlights that sexual harassment in the workplace could be related to certain personal characteristics that must be taken into account when someone has experienced some form of unwanted sexual behaviour in work settings. These include sex, gender reassignment, age, race, disability, sexual orientation and religion or belief (The Equality Act 2010, section 26).

As highlighted by previous research, gender cannot be taken as a single analytic category without considering other social identities that shape an individual's experience (Pilcher and Whelean 2004; Samuels and Ross-Sheriff 2008). Apart from gender, other personal identities such as race, class, ethnicity, age, religion, sexual orientation, dis/ ability, migration status, and other dimensions of subordination can create power imbalances, multiple inequalities, challenges, oppressions or privileges in a woman's professional and social life (Bose 2012; Cho

et al. 2013; Collins and Bilge 2016). Certain personal features along with social and organisational structures of power can work together to generate specific forms of vulnerability that have an impact on the scope of workplace harassment.

Harassing behaviour in the workplace is inherently offensive and abusive as it involves physical, psychological and emotional violence (Hunt et al. 2007; EHRC (Equality and Human Rights Commission) 2018). Yet the perception of what constitutes workplace sexual harassment varies among different people, sectors, countries and cultures (McCann 2005). Sexual harassment is perceived differently by employees working at different levels within an organisation's hierarchy, or by those who belong to different age or gender groups (Chappell and Martino 2006). Studies have found that male employees think that sexual harassment is less common in the workplace than their female counterparts (see e.g. Corr and Jackson 2001). However, across sectors and cultural contexts, it is agreed that the factors that define sexual harassment refer to 'unwanted and/or unwelcome' sexual behaviour, which the victim regards as offensive, undesirable or unacceptable (ILO (International Labour Organization) 2019). Based on several international sources (e.g. EHRC (Equality and Human Rights Commission) 2018; EEOC (Equal Employment Opportunity Commission) 2019b; ILO (International Labour Organization) 2019), these behaviours can take various forms including verbal, non-verbal, physical and electronic, including:

- Unwanted and inappropriate touching, rubbing, hugging, kissing, howling, leaning over, patting, pinching or cornering.
- Unwanted pressure for dates and/or sexual favours.
- Intrusive questions, jokes, teasing or suggestions about a person's sexual life, preferences, fantasies or history.
- İnsults or taunts of a sexual nature.
- Telling sexual jokes or stories.
- Offensive slurs.
- Turning work discussions to sexual topics.
- Making sexual comments about a person's body, clothing, anatomy or looks.
- Making sexual gestures with hands or through body movements.

- Telling lies or spreading rumours about a person's sex life.
- Repeatedly asking out a person who is not interested.
- Displaying sexually suggestive visuals.
- Giving personal gifts.
- Unwanted instant letters, emails, SMS, telephone calls, materials of a sexual nature.
- İnappropriate advances on social networking sites.
- İnterference with a person's work performance.
- Making behaviours which are under criminal law, such as obscene communications, stalking, actual or attempted physical assault, threats and rape.

Sexual harassment creates a hostile work environment that can occur without even touching someone. However, some acts might lead to actual or attempted sexual assault, such as fondling, forced sexual intercourse and attempted rape. Any type of sexual conduct without the explicit consent of the recipient may constitute a criminal act as defined in law (Sepulveres 2017).

With regard to perpetrators, the harasser can be a colleague, a line manager, a senior manager, a junior colleague or a fellow employee. Yet some studies indicate that the perpetrator of sexual harassment is mostly a man in a position of power over the victim (McMahon 2000; McLaughlin et al. 2012). Additionally, this can be a customer, a client or a contractor, which is considered as third-party harassment. Harassment by third parties can be inevitably harder to act against, tackle and protect employees from (TUC (Trades Union Congress) 2016; Cheung et al. 2018).

Moreover, workplace sexual harassment can occur in different places, even in virtual settings. This latter is known as cyber or online harassment, involving unwanted, offensive, sexually explicit emails or SMS messages, or inappropriate, offensive advances on social networking websites or in internet chat rooms (Hazelwood and Koon-Magnin 2013; European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) 2014). Since the Internet and related technology have also become new mediums for misconduct, communications via the Internet can also be used to threaten, harass, intimidate, and cause harm to others (Recupero 2008; Hazelwood and Koon-Magnin 2013). Although there is a debate among researchers regarding

the definition of these terms, 'cyber harassment' is often used interchangeably with terms such as 'cyber bullying', 'cyber stalking' and 'cyber abuse' (Winkelman et al. 2015). Cyber harassment can encompass the following behaviours carried out through computer or telecommunication mediums, including (Winkelman et al. 2015, p.195; Abarna et al. 2022, p.2):

- Monitoring e-mail communication.
- Sending e-mail that threatens, insults, or harasses.
- Disrupting e-mail communications by flooding a victim's e-mail box with unwanted mail or by sending a virus program.
- Using the victim's e-mail identity to send false messages to others or to purchase goods and services.
- Using the Internet to seek and compile a victim's personal information for use in harassment.
- Remailers (Email sent through a third party where the headings are removed, making it virtually impossible to trace its origins).
- Spamming.
- Hacking.
- Trolling.
- Incessant Instant Messaging (IM) or texting.
- Posting inappropriate messages or stalking behaviours in chatrooms.
- Posting inappropriate messages or stalking behaviours on bulletin boards, blog sites, and/or on social networking site personal pages.
- Website tributes.
- Personal data manipulation.
- Doxing.
- Online impersonation.
- Sexual solicitation and pornography.

Harassment also occurs outside the premises of the work site: at a conference, on a work trip or at a work social event such as a Christmas party, for example (McCann 2005; TUC (Trades Union Congress) 2016). The notion of 'the world of work' refers to new forms of work and groups of workers (i.e. street vendors, teleworkers

or temporary workers) who are exposed to some form of violence or harassment in the labour market under challenging settings (UN Women 2019).

Sexual Harassment in the Hospitality Workplace

According to the main themes that emerge from the previous research on sexual harassment in hospitality literature, workplace harassment can be mostly associated with working conditions, the nature of employment, gender roles and power inequality within the hospitality sector. These factors create a conducive environment for sexual harassment to thrive. It is important to understand the main antecedents of sexual harassment and to examine how and why it occurs more frequently in some workplaces or sectors while being less common in others (Hunt et al. 2010). Therefore, the following sections will provide a detailed explanation of the relevant themes and their connection to sexual harassment within the hospitality workforce.

Working Conditions

Compared with other sectors, the contemporary hospitality sector has tough working conditions due to the necessity for constant and intense service to customers twenty-four hours a day and seven days a week (Nickson 2013). The sector, including hotels, restaurants, pubs, casinos, nightclubs, and others, requires employees to work long, irregular, and unsocial working hours. This includes variable shift patterns like night shifts, afternoon shifts, and weekend shifts and a tendency to be required to work over statutory holiday periods (Tanke 2000; Lucas and Deery 2004; Baum 2006; Janta et al. 2011; Nickson 2013). These features can negatively affect employees and lead to stress both at work and in their lives outside of work (ILO 2010; Arslaner and Boylu 2017).

There are also precarious employment conditions, with a significant portion of the workforce in unstable and insecure roles (Rydzik and Kissoon 2021). These conditions include part-time work, on-call, seasonal and temporary employment with zero-hour contracts, short-term contracts, casual contracts or agency workers

(Joliffe and Fransworth 2003; Baum 2007; Morgan and Pritchard 2019; Rydzik and Bal 2023). Zero-hour contracts, for example, offer no guarantee of work hours, leaving employees uncertain about their income and job stability. In the second quarter of 2024, the number of zero-hour contract employees in the UK reached over one million (ONS 2024). Individuals on zero-hour contracts working in the accommodation and food sector accounted for 32.2% of the total employment in the UK (ONS 2024). Similarly, casual contracts and agency work are also common, where employees are called in on an as-needed basis, often with little notice and without long-term employment security (Ndzi 2021).

Galbraith and Bankhead (2012) stated that the hospitality sector has the second largest number of temporary employees after the education sector, with some 44% of the UK's hospitality employment being part-time. Additionally, hospitality jobs are often associated with conditions such as low pay, poor workforce efficiency, job instability and insecurity, lack of productivity, limited career opportunities and high staff turnover (Riley 2004; Baum 2012; Pearlman and Schaffer 2013; Markova et al. 2016; Murray et al. 2017). As such, these circumstances have relegated most hospitality work and positions as being less prestigious and have thus led to describe many hospitality jobs as precarious work in the job market (Baum 2019; Morgan and Pritchard 2019). Considering the presence of precarious working conditions and employment contracts in the UK's hospitality labour force, these conditions, which are widespread in the service sector, contribute to a work environment where employees may be vulnerable to exploitation and at a higher risk of experiencing sexual harassment. (House of Commons-Women and Equalities Committee 2018).

Another distinctive characteristic of work within the sector is a predominance of high levels of human interaction between employees and customers during service delivery. The outcome of this interaction directly affects customer satisfaction and loyalty (Delcourt et al. 2013; Guerrier and Bohane 2013) and, thus, the success of the business. These conditions of work in the sector may engender closer and more intimate relations between colleagues and customers, therefore encouraging sexual harassment behaviours (Ariza-Montes et al. 2017; Ram 2018).

Other particular characteristics of work within the sector are the prevalence of alcohol and drug consumption, erotic atmosphere and operation in night-time

economy conditions, thereby causing an environment that facilitates misbehaviour and sexual harassment incidents (Hoel and Einarsen 2003; Aslan and Kozak 2012; Ram et al. 2016). Particularly, women working in bars, casinos, and hotels as bartenders, waitresses, cocktail servers, hostesses and housekeepers are at high risk of experiencing workplace sexual harassment and assault, and are more likely to be exposed to some form of harassment from customers and co-workers (Morgan and Pritchard 2019; Tsai et al. 2023). Owing to this high level of workplace harassment risk to employees, a negotiation with Hospitality Unions in Las Vegas casinos and hotels agreed to give panic buttons to casino workers and housekeepers. This means they can call for help if they experience sexual harassment, assault or abuse on the job (Campbell 2018; New York Post 2018).

In hospitality work, women are often employed in certain service areas that are highly feminised and sexualised environments (Guerrier and Adib 2000; Morgan and Pritchard 2019). The hotel industry, for example, is one in which female employees face very high rates of sexual harassment and exploitation in the workplace (Zhu et al. 2019). Many female room attendants are at high risk of sexual harassment because they work alone in spaces with a sexualised and intimate nature (the guest bedrooms). Their dress-style uniform can serve to objectify them sexually, and they are socially categorised according to gender stereotypes (Kensbock et al. 2015). Therefore, the risk of sexual harassment is inevitable and pervasive for them. Most female room attendants have experienced verbal and physical sexual behaviours. Approaches by male guests ranged from inappropriate joking to touching and to explicit verbal propositions to coercive attempts to sexual interaction (Guerrier and Adib 2000; Eaton 2004; Onsøyen et al. 2009; Kensbock et al. 2015; Mooney et al. 2017).

In addition to the housekeeping department, many female employees working in the front office department, such as receptionists or guest relations staff, are at risk of experiencing sexual harassment during interactions with customers. This is mainly due to the expectation of being socially appealing and friendly towards customers (Gilbert et al. 1998; Morgan and Pritchard 2019). As a result, the risk of harassment can be inevitable and pervasive for many female workers associated

with main working spaces, friendly manners behaviours and the nature of dress codes and uniforms within the hotel sector.

Likewise, as well as the hotel industry, the food and beverage, entertainment and airline sectors, for example, have also assumed aesthetic and sexualised labour in interactive services, which is mainly used by organisations as a source of marketing and commercial benefit (Worsfold and McCann 2000; Warhurst and Nickson 2009; Ren 2017). This embodiment is commonly related to 'looking good' or 'looking centric' to appeal to the senses of customers in order to create effective service interaction through employee's attitudes, appearance, behaviours and dress codes in the name of customer care and service quality (Nickson et al. 2005; Quinn 2007; Karlsson 2012). Due to these aesthetic and sexualised aspects of the hospitality sector, the work environment can have sexualised and gendered implications, which can result in increased incidence of sexual harassment (see Williams 2003; Pilcher 2012; Kensbock et al. 2015; Coffey et al. 2018; Morgan and Pritchard 2019).

Finally, hospitality work is built on the ethos that the 'customer is always right' (Yagil 2008). As one of the largest service sectors, the hospitality product is based on the process of delivering and experiencing. Tangible and intangible products, such as hotel stays, flights, restaurant meals, or drinks at pubs and coffee shops, create the overall experience where customer (guest) satisfaction is crucial (Pizam et al. 2016). Customer experience, satisfaction with products and services, service delivery by front-line employees, and overall service quality are significant drivers for building customer loyalty and gaining a competitive advantage in the hospitality market (Paek et al. 2015; Wahlberg et al. 2017). Therefore, in addition to tangible products, the kernel of hospitality work itself is largely associated with how employees perform during the service transaction because it directly influences the perception of service quality (Hartline et al. 2003; Chapman and Lovell 2006; Sim et al. 2006; Crick and Spencer 2011; Wahlberg et al. 2017). If this is not the case, customers will not be satisfied with the service, and the business will hence be deprived of customer loyalty and profitability (Pizam et al. 2016). Given this context, the overall organisational performance, which includes products and services, is significantly important in attracting new customers and, more

importantly, in retaining and satisfying current and past customers, thereby ensuring their long-term loyalty (Altinay and Altinay 2006; Chand 2010).

Whilst the staff-customer relationship has an important influence on a customer's experience, satisfaction and perception of the service process (Susskind et al. 2007), on the other hand, the mentality that the 'customer is always right' generates unequal power between employees and customers during the service process, and can trigger customer misbehaviour towards employees in the form of abuse and harassment (Yagil 2008; Kensbock et al. 2015; Ariza-Montes et al. 2017). Additionally, managers often adopt the common approach and philosophy that 'you need us more than we need you' with regard to their employees rather than protecting them from workplace harassment (Aslan and Kozak 2012). This can render employees vulnerable to aggression, and most workers are not willing to report sexual harassment incidents that are unlikely to be taken seriously by managers (O'Leary-Kelly et al. 2009).

Power Inequality and Gendered Roles

To understand the pervasiveness of sexual harassment against women within the hospitality workplace, this section will examine gender power relations and inequalities that derive from gender socialisation (i.e. traditional gender roles, behaviours and responsibilities) as one of the roots behind sexual harassment (Beiner 2005; Lightle and Doucet 2010). Gendered spheres and spaces have been used to delineate social reproductive gender roles and division of labour within a society (Duffy et al. 2015). These gendered environments thus shape gendered hospitality practices and workplaces around the world (Morgan and Pritchard 2019), (re)producing distinctions between women and men while giving males advantages over females in work settings (Pilcher and Whelehan 2004).

Due to its labour-intensive nature, the contemporary hospitality sector generates different forms of jobs ranging from professional skilled to semi-skilled and unskilled positions; employment contracts and working arrangements for women and men often differ (Ladkin 2011).

Even though the sector has long employed large numbers of women employees, they are overrepresented in stereotypical occupations such as the housekeeping and food-service departments (e.g. restaurant, kitchen and bar), which are traditionally gendered as 'female domestic tasks' in organisations (Adib and Guerrier 2003; Dyer et al. 2010; Ladkin 2011). Moreover, women are significantly underrepresented at managerial levels (Guerrier and Adib 2000; Poulston 2008). A report by PWC and Korn Ferry (2020) reveals that women occupy 25.5% of senior management roles and executive committee memberships across the hospitality, travel and leisure sectors in the UK. However, findings indicate that men are more likely to make the internal move to chief executive officer (CEO) than women, and very few women take the role of CEO within the sector. The report also highlights that a significant number of small to medium-sized businesses (SMEs) do not consider gender balance an issue, nor do they see it as a priority; in contrast, larger businesses tend to be more progressive in addressing gender balance within organisations (PWC and Korn Ferry 2020). Similarly, a report on the status of women within the UK cruise and tour operator sector (Glover et al. 2016) demonstrates that the representation of women at company board level increased in 2015 (26%) compared with 2005 (12%), but the number of women taking an executive appointment in large UK-based companies indicates they are underrepresented.

The inequalities that emerge from gendered hierarchies and power structures produce gender segregation and give rise to a gender wage gap within the sector (Segovia-Pérez et al. 2019). Men on average earn more than women as they tend to occupy higher-paying positions than their female counterparts. A typical example is the airline industry, where men have traditionally occupied managerial, high-skilled and highly-paid positions (e.g. pilots), whereas women are overrepresented in low-paying operational roles (e.g. flight attendants). The difference between the average hourly pay for male vs female employees reflects these segregation patterns. British Airways (2023) reports that male employees (including flight crew and cabin crew) get an average hourly rate 57% higher than female employees. This represents a significant increase from the pre-COVID-19 figure of 39.7% (British Airways 2018). British Airways explains that their gender pay gap is largely due to the fact that there is an under-representation of women in typically male-dominated

roles and an over-representation of women in typically female-dominated roles. When they exclude pilots (a male-dominated role) and cabin crew (a female-dominated role) from their pay gap figures, their mean gap reduces to 11% (British Airways 2023).

This figure stands at 60.36% for Ryanair (2023), slightly lower than the pre-COVID-19 figure of 62.2% (Ryanair 2018). Ryanair has stated that the majority of its pilots in the UK are male, and on average, male employees are paid 60.36% more per hour than female employees. The airline also claims that female employees are paid the same as their male counterparts in every category (Ryanair 2023).

In the hotel sector, women's average hourly pay is 6.6% lower than that of men (Hilton 2023), compared to the pre-COVID-19 figure of 13.1% (Hilton 2019). The organisation reported that there has been a year-over-year reduction in the gender pay gap. This is primarily attributed to an increase in the proportion of women team members in the upper pay band and an increase in the proportion of men team members in the lower quartile pay band (Hilton 2023). Furthermore, the pay differences between women and men in the hospitality and tourism sector are greater at managerial levels compared with operational roles (People 1st 2017).

The existence of a gendered division of work, occupational segregation and power inequalities gives rise to great disparities between female and male employees in the hospitality and tourism workplace (Pritchard 2014). Despite the sector being feminised, the roles occupied by women are less valued and remunerated compared with those of men (Costa et al. 2017). In workplaces that are male-dominated in values and managerial levels, a demonstration of masculinity and power can result in harassing behaviour against women (Giousmpasoglu et al. 2022; Coffey et al. 2023). Studies from various disciplines have indicated that sexual harassment incidents mostly occur in mixed-gender working environments in which there is gender imbalance and power inequality (Cairns 1997; Leskinen et al. 2011), and such actions (sexual harassment, exploitation, bullying, abusive practices and oppression) are considered acts of gender-based violence (Campos-Soria et al. 2009; Coffey et al. 2023).

Employment in the Hospitality – Vulnerability of Identities

Specific groups, especially those in the service sector, are disproportionately affected by sexual harassment at work (House of Commons-Women and Equalities Committee 2018). Contemporary hospitality employment has generally been characterised by a diversity that is mostly dominated by women, young people, students, migrants and members of ethnic minorities, all of whom make up the population most vulnerable to workplace sexual harassment (Janta et al. 2011; Rydzik et al. 2012; Pritchard 2014; Madera et al. 2018). Research findings indicate that most of them are employed in low-skilled and low-paid service workplaces as a part-time, on-call, seasonal and temporary labour force in the sector (Hoel and Einarsen 2003; Santos and Varejão 2007; Figueroa-Domecq et al. 2015). Members of this group of employees often have limited formal education, less confidence when dealing with authority and feel less important than other groups of employees in the workplace. The combination of these characteristics has rendered employees particularly vulnerable to workplace harassment cases (Gilbert et al. 1998; Ram 2018), and hostile attitudes and behaviours from co-workers, supervisors and customers.

Migrant workers, particularly youth and female migrants, are one of the most vulnerable groups in that they are more likely to be victims of harassment behaviour than local workers in a host country in the context of hotels, catering and the tourism workforce (Baum 2012; ILO (International Labour Organization) 2017; Rydzik and Bal 2023). This is because they are mostly working at lower levels in an organisation regardless of their experience or qualifications (Rydzik et al. 2017). Furthermore, they face communication barriers, training challenges, lack of knowledge of employment rights, difficulty integrating into the new working environment, and the need to learn about new cultural experiences and legal policies (Baum 2006; Baum 2012; Janta et al. 2011), all of which lead to a period of transition and lack of power. This position of migrants might be misused by colleagues and customers, and lead to workplace sexual harassment (Adib and Guerrier 2003; Rydzik and Anitha 2020).

Younger employees and students also appear to be particularly vulnerable to most forms of abusive behaviours and harassment in the workplace (Lin 2006; Hunt et al.

2007; EHRC (Equality and Human Rights Commission) 2018; Lopa and Gong 2020; Rydzik and Bal 2023). Waudby and Poulston (2017) interviewed women who had worked in a restaurant or bar for over 6 months; these interviews showed that those who were sexually harassed at work tended to be younger and less experienced employees in their late 20s. Given that students on placements or industrial attachment are inexperienced, they have temporary positions and low status (Ram 2018). This situation makes them more vulnerable to abuse, bullying and harassment behaviours. Worsfold and McCann (2000) found that the majority of hospitality students (77%) had experienced incidents of sexual harassment in the form of suggestive remarks (89%), suggestive looks (66%), touching or physical attacks (36%), verbal abuse (33%) and suggestive material (27%) from supervisors and customers. Mkono (2010) notes that about 78% of hospitality students had been victims of sexual harassment while 82% of students had witnessed other employees being harassed, and 95% of the victims of sexual harassment were females.

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer-identified (LGBTQ+) people working within the hospitality sector are another group vulnerable to sexual harassment (Devís-Devís et al. 2017; UN Women 2018). Although there is a paucity of documented experiences of LGBTQ+ employees within the hospitality and tourism workplace (Ineson et al. 2013; Hadjisolomou et al. 2023), in general they are a particularly vulnerable group exposed to harassment, segregation, and homophobic, biphobic and transphobic behaviour on various differing grounds in social environments and in many workplaces (Colgan and McKearney 2012; Cech and Rothwell 2020). Previous studies from various disciplines on the experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender employees in the workplace indicate that many of them have faced some type of stigmatising behaviours, such as harassment and discrimination at work (Ryniker 2008; Eliason et al. 2011; Holman et al. 2019). For example, harassment behaviours can generally include direct or indirect homophobic jokes, derogatory comments, offensive graffiti, objects or pictures, insults and abuse (Colgan et al. 2007; Croteau and Lark 2009).

According to a report on sexual harassment of LGBT people in the workplace (TUC (Trade Union Congress) 2019), research found that around seven out of ten LGBT employees had experienced at least one type of sexual harassment at work (68%)

and almost one in eight LGBT women (12%) reported being seriously sexually assaulted or raped at work. Even though organisations across sectors have started to develop equality and diversity policies at work, there are still prejudices, stereotyping and stigmatisation towards non-heterosexual people in workplaces as well as in societies (Gates and Viggiani 2014). Sexual orientation and sexual identity could be an important factor when scrutinising the incidence of workplace harassment within the hospitality sector.

The Consequences of Workplace Sexual Harassment

Key findings about the impact of sexual harassment in modern workplaces are many and wide-ranging. All forms of harassment lead to negative consequences for employees, organisations, and all parties involved in the process (Zhou et al. 2021). Related studies in various disciplines (e.g. law, psychology, sociology, management, organisational behaviour, women and gender studies, and others) emphasise that the consequences of workplace sexual harassment are multidimensional (Miner-Rubino and Cortina 2004; McLaughlin et al. 2012; Opoku et al. 2024; Iroegbu et al. 2024). Any form of harassment and mistreatment against employees, generally women, whether committed by colleagues, customers or third parties, can have a devastating impact on those who are subjected to it. (TUC 2016; Zhu et al. 2019; Zhou et al. 2021). As a counterproductive phenomenon, sexual harassment can have a detrimental impact not only on the individuals directly involved but also on entire organisations, their members and societies. Even a single instance of sexual harassment at work can have far-reaching psychological, financial, and legal consequences at both the personal and organisational levels, as well as within the sector as a whole. (Popovich and Warren 2010; ILO 2020).

Outcomes of sexual harassment are typically categorised into two groups based on Fitzgerald et al.'s (1995 and 1997) model: work-related outcomes affecting the victims' professional lives and psychological and health outcomes impacting their personal lives (Pina and Gannon 2012). At an individual level, sexual harassment can severely affect an employee's personal and occupational well-being. Several

studies indicate that incidents of sexual harassment at work have a negative impact on victims' psychological and physical well-being (Hunt et al. 2007; Willness et al. 2007; Yagil 2008; Stockdale et al. 2009; O'Leary-Kelly et al. 2009; Leskinen et al. 2011; Pina and Gannon 2012; Zhu et al. 2019; Opoku et al. 2024). Those who are subjected to harassment may have psychological and physical health problems such as stress, depression, anxiety, anger, fear, emotional exhaustion, burn-out syndrome, humiliation, nervous breakdown, tiredness, lack of confidence, and sleep disorders and other health impairments (Fitzgerald et al. 1997; Huerto et al. 2006; Hershcovis and Barling 2010; Ineson et al. 2013; Sojo et al. 2016; Pan et al. 2018). Findings also indicate that experiencing workplace sexual harassment can impact job-related performance, such as decreased work performance, motivation, morale, and job satisfaction related to behavioural patterns due to psychological and physical distress (Gutek and Koss 1993; Fitzgerald et al. 1997; Merkin 2008; O'Leary-Kelly et al. 2009; Bentley et al. 2012; Ram et al. 2015; Ariza-Montes et al. 2017).

Psychological outcomes can also lead to the negative effects and symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) for some individuals who experience workplace sexual harassment (Pina and Gannon 2012). Research has shown that experiencing sexual harassment at work can constitute trauma, which might have a lasting impact on individuals' life satisfaction and persevere over time (Munson et al. 2000; Willness et al. 2007; Chan et al. 2008; Agarwal 2022). Nevertheless, given the subjective nature of sexual harassment experiences and the significant variation in how individuals respond depending on the type of harassment and personality characteristics of the victim, more inclusive criteria may need to be applied to define and recognise trauma (Avina 2002).

At its worst, when victims are exposed to sexual harassment regularly over a long period of time, especially when it is perpetrated by a colleague and involves sexual coercion, assault, or rape, workplace sexual harassment can make victims' working lives miserable and even dangerous (McCann 2005). In such cases, victims of sexual harassment can ultimately suffer from more serious physical and psychological disorders and trauma, and therefore, they are most likely to leave

their jobs and not be able to take advantage of an opportunity or chance on their career (McCann 2005).

At the organisational level, workplace sexual harassment can give rise to fast staff turnover, absenteeism, employee disengagement, decreasing productivity and organisational commitment, and increasing financial and economic human resource costs (White and Hardemo 2002; Kensbock et al. 2015; Ram 2015). Recent studies have shown that being exposed to harassment and bullying in the workplace increases the likelihood of taking sick leave by more than 60% (Nielsen et al. 2018).

Other repercussions of sexual harassment for organisations include ongoing legal issues (Merkin 2008), creating a negative organisational climate (Bentley et al. 2012), loss of valuable workers (McCann 2005), and a decline in employee confidence in management and loyalty to the organisation (Hunt et al. 2007). All these consequences can have an adverse impact on an organisation's reputation both for existing and potential workers, industrial relations and public relations, and lead to a low standard of customer service (White and Hardemo 2002; Kensbock et al. 2015; Ram 2015).

With regard to sector-related outcomes, the accumulative nature of the negative consequences of workplace sexual harassment leads to a precarious working environment and adds to the notorious image of the hospitality sector (Ram 2008; Morgan and Pritchard 2019). While the high rates of harassment and exploitation deter potential good workers within the industry, they also create a risky, insecure, and sexualised image of the working environment (Guerrier and Adib 2000; Ram 2018; ILO 2020). This dynamic may undermine employee well-being while reinforcing stereotypes about the sector's working conditions.

Conclusion

This chapter has reviewed the literature related to sexual harassment in the hospitality workplaces. The purpose of this chapter was to critically examine the relationship between sexual harassment and the hospitality industry, focusing on the main factors contributing to such behaviours against women employees.

Thereby, the links between sexual harassment and the contemporary hospitality industry have been established, and its consequences for the hospitality workplaces have been presented.

Sexual harassment remains a complex and multifaceted issue, particularly in the context of hospitality workplaces. There is still much to be explored to fully understand its dynamics and mechanisms within the vibrant and expansive hospitality industry, where the experiences and stories of employees are significant. The existence of highly gendered roles, divisions and stereotypes within hospitality, combined with tough working conditions and the high levels of interaction between employees and customers that foster gender inequality and power imbalance in the sector's working environment, are all factors contributing to this.

The contemporary hospitality industry puts some women at a disadvantage, making them vulnerable to sexual, physical, psychological, and emotional exploitation, abuse, oppression, and harassment in the workplace. While there has been discussion about the causes and professional impact of sexual harassment incidents in the hospitality industry, there is a paucity of the overall impact of harassment on women employees' lives. This study aims to provide a deeper insight into the stories of workplace harassment experienced by women and the effects of sexual harassment on their lives outside of work. Further, the findings will be utilised to enhance understanding of how and why sexual harassment occurs and to develop a conceptual framework that demonstrates the mechanisms through which individuals experience harassment within the hospitality environment.

CHAPTER 3: Methodology

Introduction

This chapter presents a qualitative methodology designed to facilitate an open and responsive approach to understanding the experience of sexual harassment among female employees within the hospitality sector. The purpose of this chapter is to offer a rationale for the methodological choices made during this research and to explain how the data were collected and analysed. The details of the research paradigm which guides the study are described and the research strategy is discussed. Sampling and issues of gaining entry and rapport are explained. The chapter also presents the in-depth interview process for data collection, followed by the adoption of thematic analysis in the data analysis process. Lastly, ethical considerations, issues of trustworthiness, and the limitations of the research are discussed.

Research Aim and Objectives

This research aims to critically examine the experience of sexual harassment among female workers in the hospitality sector. To achieve this, the emic perspective is given priority in order to gain a deeper understanding of the individual experience of workplace sexual harassment. The following related objectives have been set for this research:

- To investigate the linkages between sexual harassment and the hospitality industry.

- To identify the nature and forms of sexual harassment in hospitality settings.

- To explore female employees' experiences of sexual harassment in hospitality in the United Kingdom in order to examine how and why harassment occurs.

- To investigate the impact of workplace sexual harassment upon female employees and analyse the long-term impact of harassment on women.

- To explore the reporting of sexual harassment by female hospitality workers and the subsequent organisational response.

- To develop a conceptual framework demonstrating the experience and impact of sexual harassment on female employees in the hospitality sector.

Research Philosophy and Approach

All research studies, whether theoretical, methodological, or empirical, are shaped within the parameters of the chosen research paradigm (Killion and Fisher 2018). Research requires an initial stage of choosing an appropriate research philosophy and approach in order to clarify which research designs will fit better for the purpose of the study (Easterby-Smith et al. 2008). A paradigm is a representation and a working notion of the ways in which research is construed (Huberman and Middlebrooks 2000). The choice of research paradigm influences how research is undertaken, and how a research topic is understood and defined (Killion and Fisher 2018). This is essential as it gives direction to the ongoing research.

Every researcher has their own views on what constitutes truth and knowledge. These views influence the researcher's beliefs, assumptions and thoughts on the phenomenon and events and shape how they see the world around them. Thereby, the choice of an appropriate research paradigm is a critical aspect of when conducting research, as it significantly shapes the researcher's perspective and comprehension of social phenomena (Wahyuni 2012).

Yet a philosophical position or paradigm is not applied to research arbitrarily; it is adopted based on the research aim and questions after planning a suitable research design. (Neuman 2011). The research design incorporates various strategies of inquiry which involve applying specific research method/s, approach/es, and philosophy/ies, and considering specific technique/s and procedures for data collection and analysis. Each of these components is interconnected, ensuring a comprehensive and cohesive approach to the research process (Saunders et al. 2023). For the current thesis, this research is positioned philosophically in the interpretivist/constructivist worldview with the inductive approach using

qualitative method strategies. In the following, I explain and justify my choice of employing a particular research philosophy and approach over others.

Research philosophies and/or paradigms have multiple uses and meanings throughout research disciplines and as a result, the topic of what constitutes a paradigm or philosophical view for research has been constantly discussed in the literature (Patton 2015). Different scholars have numerous approaches under the two main philosophical bases of subjectivism and objectivism. Most of the debates have generally occurred between natural science and social science. Behind this criticism can be seen the bases of the methodological and philosophical differences between natural science and social science, and debates within the sciences itself.

Huberman and Middlebrooks (2000, p.282) argue that no paradigm is inherently 'better' than another, stating that *"the nature of the core concepts within the paradigm is in constant transformation; there is a continual mix of perspectives, and paradigms are multiple, not dichotomous, overlapping rather than orthogonal"*. As paradigms are not binary but rather multifaceted and interconnected, each philosophy, thus, offers a unique and valuable perspective of seeing the world (Saunders et al. 2023).

The concept of a paradigm or worldview was first introduced by Thomas Kuhn in the 1960s. According to Holloway and Wheeler (2010), the historian of science Thomas Kuhn has had a major impact on the paradigm debate. He used the term paradigm in his book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (first published in 1962, 1970-1996) as *"an accepted model or pattern"* (Kuhn 1996, p.3). He also described paradigms as *"entire constellation of beliefs, values, techniques, and so on shared by the members of a given community"* (Kuhn 1996, p.162). those common beliefs define the nature of the world and have to be accepted by members of that particular discipline (Pickard 2007). In this sense, Kuhn referred to paradigms which are the set of practices that define a scientific discipline during a particular time (Eriksson and Kovalainen 2008).

As a natural scientist - a physicist and philosopher - Kuhn discussed the development of science, key theories, instruments, values, and metaphysical assumptions within the framework of natural science based on a dominant positivist view (Gattei 2008). However, he did not make the discussion on the concept of

paradigm to be compatible with the field of social sciences. Therefore, his ideas have faced criticism due to their lack of consensus in meaning in different sciences. The term paradigm has been shifted away from the original remarks made by Kuhn and has been extensively used in the social sciences and business research by social researchers (Eriksson and Kovalainen 2008; Holloway and Wheeler 2010) as a world view or belief system, based on different philosophies and assumptions that guide a researcher in their work (Guba and Lincoln 1994; Denzin et al. 2024).

Morgan (2007) states that the term paradigm has multiple uses and meanings throughout research disciplines. Morgan (2007) identified four versions of paradigms. The first version views paradigms as comprehensive ways of experiencing and understanding the world. The second version considers paradigms as epistemological stances that encompass ideas such as ontology, epistemology, and methodology within the philosophy of knowledge. The third version of paradigms pertains to shared beliefs within the research community, a version preferred by Kuhn (1970). Finally, Morgan's (2007) last version of paradigms presents model examples that serve as exemplars of how research is conducted in a given field (Morgan 2007; Creswell 2010; Anand et al. 2020).

There are various conceptualisations of what constitutes a philosophical paradigm (Greene and Hall 2010). To gain a deeper understanding of the concept of paradigm, it is crucial to examine its defining characteristics. In their earlier work (1985), Guba and Lincoln initially labelled and compared two fundamental paradigms: positivism and constructivism (non-positivism). In their later work (2008), they expanded their list to include five paradigms, adding critical theory, post-positivism, and participatory research. However, this expansion raises questions about what constitutes a paradigm. A paradigm is based on ontology (what can be known), epistemology (ways of knowing), axiology (ethics and values regarding knowledge), and methodology (how knowledge is acquired) (Patton 2002). Accordingly, the paradigm frames the philosophical positions that shape the research design (Collis and Hussey 2014). In order to create a robust research design, researchers need to select a research paradigm that aligns with their own beliefs about the nature of reality (Mills et al. 2006). Krauss (2005) stated that

examining these beliefs through an ontological inquiry will shed light on the epistemological and methodological options available.

Many researchers interpret paradigms from the community of scholars' perspective (Creswell 2010). In this sense, some researchers in social sciences prefer to use 'approaches' for paradigms and 'school of thoughts' for philosophies whilst others use the term paradigm and philosophy interchangeably to describe assumptions that researchers make in their work (Saunders et al. 2023). Although some such different views or divisions exist in the academic world, the most widely accepted and adopted by researchers within most academic disciplines is a paradigm and/or philosophy to develop knowledge (Brotherton 2016). In this research, I preferred to use the terms 'research paradigm' and 'research philosophy' interchangeably. After reflecting on numerous classifications of the research paradigms introduced in the literature, I used a combination of the framework proposed by Guba and Lincoln (2008) and Aliyu (2014) with the updated entries to be the most manageable and applicable to this study and will therefore refer to this to outline the assumptions of my research (see Table 3.1).

Tablo 3.1 Key features of research paradigms

A: Basic Beliefs of Research Paradigms

Issue	Positivism	Postpositivism	Critical theories	Constructivism/ Interpretivism	Participatory
Ontology (way of looking at the world – the nature of reality)	Naïve realism – "real" reality but apprehendible	Critical realism – "real" reality but only imperfectly and probabilistically apprehendible	Historical realism-virtual reality shaped by social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, and gender values; crystallised over time	Relativism-local and specific co-constructed realities	Participative reality-subjective-objective reality, co-created by mind and given cosmos
Epistemology (assumptions about knowledge)	Dualist/object ivist; findings true	Modified dualist/objectivist; critical tradition/communi ty; findings probably true	Transactional/ subjectivist; value-mediated findings	Transactional/subje ctivist; co-created findings	Critical subjectivity in participatory transaction with cosmos; extended epistemology of experiential, propositional, and practical knowing; co-created findings
Methodology (ways of gathering and analysing data)	Experimental/ manipulative; verification of hypotheses; chiefly quantitative methods	Modified experimental/mani pulative; critical multiplism; falsification of hypotheses; may include qualitative methods	Dialogic/ dialectical	Hermeneutical/ dialectical	Political participation in collaborative action inquiry; primacy of the practical; use of language grounded in shared experiential context

	Positivism	Postpositivism	Critical theories	Constructivism/ Interpretivism	Participatory
Axiology Ethics and values regarding knowledge	Propositional knowing about the world is an end in itself, is intrinsically valuable	Propositional knowing about the world is an end in itself, is intrinsically valuable	Propositional, transactional knowing is instrumentally valuable as a means to social emancipation, which is an end in itself, is intrinsically valuable	Propositional, transactional knowing is instrumentally valuable as a means to social emancipation, which is an end in itself, is intrinsically valuable	Practical knowing how to flourish with a balance of autonomy, co-operation and hierarchy in a culture is an end in itself, is intrinsically valuable

B: Research Paradigm Positions on Selected Issues

	Positivism	Postpositivism	Critical theories	Constructivism/ Interpretivism	Participatory
Issue	Realist, logical empiricist, functionalist	A modified form of positivism	Create change, to the benefit of those oppressed by power	Gain understanding by interpreting subject perceptions	Transformation based on democratic participation between researcher and subject
Nature of knowledge	Verified hypotheses established as facts or laws	Nonfalsified hypotheses that are probable facts or laws	Structural/historical insights	Individual and collective reconstructions sometimes coalescing around consensus	Extended epistemology; primacy of practical knowing; critical subjectivity; living knowledge
Knowledge accumulation	Accretion-"building blocks" adding to "edifice of knowledge"; generalisations and cause-effect linkages		Historical revisionism; generalisation by similarity	More informed and sophisticated reconstructions; vicarious experience	In communities of inquiry embedded in communities of practices
Goodness or quality criteria	Conventional benchmarks of "rigor": internal and external validity, reliability, and objectivity		Historical situatedness; erosion of ignorance and misapprehension; action stimulus	Trustworthiness and authenticity including catalyst for action	Congruence of experiential, presentational, propositional, and practical knowing; leads to action to transform the world in the service of human flourishing
Values	Excluded-influence denied		Included-formative		

Ethics	Extrinsic-tilt toward deception	Intrinsic-moral tilt toward revelation	Intrinsic-process tilt toward revelation	
Inquirer posture	"Disinterested scientists" as informer of decision-makers, policymakers, and change agents	"Transformative intellectual" as advocate and activist	"Passionate participant" as facilitator of multi-voice reconstruction	Primary voice manifest through aware self-reflective action; secondary voices in illuminating theory, narrative movement, song, dance, and other presentational forms
Traning	Technical and quantitative; substantive theories	Technical; quantitative and qualitative; substantive theories	Resocialisation; qualitative and quantitative; history, values of altruism, empowerment, and liberation	Core researchers are initiated into the inquiry process by facilitator/researcher and learn through active engagement in the process; facilitator/researcher requires emotional competence, democratic personality, and skill

(Source: Adopted from Guba and Lincoln (2008, p.255-286) and Aliyu et al. (2014, p.81)

Table 3.1 shows the ontological, epistemological, methodological and axiological positions of the five different paradigms that can be termed the researcher's paradigm and the philosophical positions (Aliyu et al. 2014; Lincoln et al. 2018).

Ontology refers to assumptions about the nature of the world and reality (Saunders et al. 2023). It answers '*what is the nature of reality?*' and '*what is the world like?*' as seen by the researcher. Ontology connects with epistemology through questions concerning the potential for objective knowledge of reality and truth (Morgan 2007).

Epistemology is concerned with how reality is known (Guba and Lincoln 1994). It covers the questions of *'what constitutes valid knowledge?'* and *'how can we know what we know?* (Veal 2011; Lincoln and Guba 2013). Epistemology aims to address assumptions about what constitutes acceptable, legitimate and valid knowledge and

sources (Saunders et al. 2023). It is interconnected with ontology and refers to the relationship between the researcher and the phenomenon being studied. Epistemology impacts the choice of methodology and its implementation, shaping the relationship between participant and researcher and impacting research quality standards (Carter and Little 2007). Adopting a particular epistemological stance usually results in adopting methods that align with the researcher's position and philosophical perspective (Easterby-Smith et al. 2008).

Axiology represents the role of values and ethics in scientific research (Wahyuni 2012). It refers to the researcher's position on the role of values and ethics in conducting research (Saunders et al. 2023). These values and ethics concerns influence researchers' bias toward the research project (O'Gorman et al. 2014). In a more precise way, the axiological inquiry poses the question of what is fundamentally valuable and precious in individual life, specifically, what type of information and knowledge (if any) holds inherent value and importance (Aliyu et al. 2014). Research philosophy reflects the researcher's values and influences every aspect of the research process, from choosing a topic to developing design strategies to writing up the research (Saunders et al. 2023).

Methodology refers to the ways by which knowledge and understanding are established (Saunders et al. 2023; Lincoln and Guba 2013; Veal 2011). Holden and Lynch (2004, p.2) stated that *"methodological choice should be consequential to the researcher's philosophical stance and the social science phenomenon to be investigated"*. This implies that the choice of methodological approaches should align with the underlying epistemological, ontological and axiological assumptions of the researcher, ensuring consistency between the research philosophy and the methods employed to investigate the chosen topic.

The personal biography of the researcher makes them a gendered, multiculturally situated individual who approaches the world with a particular set of ideas (ontology). These ideas lead to a set of questions about what constitutes acceptable, valid, and legitimate knowledge (epistemology). The researcher then examines the acquired knowledge in a specific way (methodology). The choice of methodology describes the research process and therefore is closely influenced by the ontological and epistemological perspectives used (Veal 2011). The research paradigms that

are considered within this framework, including positivism, postpositivism, critical theories, constructivism/interpretivism (Veal 2011), and participatory (Lincoln et al. 2018), and their positions on selected practical issues have been highlighted in Table 3.1.

This research is grounded in the meanings that people make of their experience of sexual harassment within hospitality workplaces. Thus my research approach relies upon understanding the ways in which individual employees bring meaning to this experience and will therefore be directly interested in the construction of meaning (contructivism/interpretivism). Constructivism/interpretivism is hence the most suitable research paradigm for this study as it facilitates the critical exploration of workplace sexual harassment experienced by women employees.

Unlike positivist and post-positivist philosophies which apply a natural science model of research focusing on the explanation of human behaviour, phenomena, and events under the universal and general cause-effect laws (Brotherton 2016); this research requires the understanding of human behaviour, phenomena, and events by the researcher intervention. Therefore, the researcher is required to connect to the research context and process to produce the knowledge as people's experiences, understandings, thoughts, and meanings are affected by their background, culture, and environment.

As opposed to positivism's ontological view, constructivism/interpretivism asserts that social phenomena and their meanings are continually being constructed and co-constructed by the active role of individuals in social reality rather than the investigations of the social world is an objective, independent, or separate from the social actors (Bryman 2016). As such, the philosophical belief of constructivism emphasises that knowledge is constructed and co-constructed through individuals' lived experiences and their interactions with other members of society (Denzin et al. 2024; Bryman 2016). This paradigm can thus provide a unique insight into female employees' experiences of sexual harassment in the workplace and their feelings, thoughts, opinions, and meanings of the phenomena to co-construct the knowledge.

Whereas the positivist paradigm focuses on measuring social phenomena, constructivist/interpretivist philosophy accentuates exploring the complexity of social phenomena with a view of interpretive understanding of the meanings (Collis and Hussey 2014). As Jones et al. (2013) state, the central endeavour of interpretivism is to recognise the existence of multiple realities through the role of subjectivity. That is, it seeks to understand the meanings of the world constructed by the descriptions and explanations of human beings (Mills and Birks 2014). In this context, 'realities' depend on a subjective transactional between the researcher and the participants. At this stage, knowledge is not discovered but rather created which exists only in the time/space framework in which it is generated (Lincoln and Guba 2013). Therefore, the interpretivist/constructivist researcher attempts to 'get inside the minds of subjects and see the world from their point of view (Veal 2011, p.40).

According to Saunders et al. (2023), for business and management researchers, this means looking at organisations from the perspectives of different groups of people, female or male employees and customers, or those from different cultural backgrounds and organisational roles, may experience workplaces, services or events in different ways. Interpretations of what on the surface appears to be the same thing or phenomenon can differ among people (Saunders et al. 2023). As stated in the literature review chapter (Chapter 2), the experience and position of female employees tend to be seen as homogeneous rather than heterogeneous in social settings, including workplaces and with regard to the experience of sexual harassment. They are exposed to different levels of discrimination, inequality, and violence in social settings depending upon the interaction between the categories of difference in individual lives, social practices, institutional arrangements, and cultural ideologies (Davis 2008). Having considered the diverse workforce that exists in the UK's hospitality sector, it is vital that the researcher co-constructs and interprets different women workers' experiences and stories and connects them with the overall research context in order to make meaningful conclusions. The constructivist/interpretivist paradigm would allow me a deeper understanding of what constructs the forms of sexual harassment incidents that women employees experience in the hospitality workplace in the UK and its impact on them taking multiple women employees' narratives. The understanding of hospitality

employees' feelings, perceptions, and experiences expressed in their own words is valuable and would enhance comprehension of the phenomena within the context of the hospitality sector.

Given the issue of power dynamics, gender violence and inequalities in society, I recognise that there is a transformative and emancipative angle to this study whereby as a researcher, I am questioning negative experiences to raise more awareness of the incidents of workplace harassment rather than solely recording the interviews for the data collection. For many individuals, the hospitality industry offers significant economic and social opportunities. However, some may experience harassment, abuse, and mistreatment from customers and co-workers in this work environment.

In that sense, the critical paradigms, like the constructivist/interpretivist perspectives, assume that multiple realities exist; however, the reality is constructed by social, political, and cultural factors mediated by power relations (Kelemen and Rumens 2008). Howell (2016) states that power dominates human beings in social settings that constitute the foundation of social existence in that it constructs the basis of all social, economic, political, and organisational relationships.

In delineating between the constructivist/interpretivist and critical research paradigms used for this research, it is important to note that qualitative researchers deploy a wide range of interconnected interpretive practices to get a better understanding of the subject matter at hand using the meanings people bring to them. As such, there is frequently a commitment to using more than one interpretive practice in any study, which makes the world visible in a different way (Denzin et al. 2024). Accordingly, a qualitative researcher is described as a *bricoleur* who works between and within competing and overlapping perspectives and paradigms (Denzin et al. 2024) to respond to the nature of the research and the questions it poses. As a qualitative researcher, it is my responsibility to piece together a set of representations to create a bricolage of the emergent themes associated with the research. Acknowledged through this process is that there will be multiple meanings of sexual harassment within the minds of the people and impacts for those who have experienced it in the workplace. However, it is not my role to uncover a single truth from the reality of the participants of this study but instead, provide a

bricolage of meaning in order to provide employees' views and stories of the phenomena and to enhance understanding of the subject within the context of the hospitality sector.

Adopting a Qualitative Approach

In line with the assumptions of constructivism/interpretivism and the critical perspective, this research was undertaken using an inductive qualitative approach to be responsive to the multiple meanings of the female employees interviewed. Such an approach was suitable for this sensitive research topic as there was much to find out about the female employees' personal experiences of workplace sexual harassment. Given that the purpose of this research was to examine the impact of workplace harassment behaviour on the life of women within the hospitality population, the qualitative method best meets the research objectives. The qualitative approach, therefore, provided a deeper understanding of the overarching experience of sexual harassment for hospitality workers and its cumulative effects on their lives.

Considering the significance of aligning the research strategy with the research topic, it is important to take several factors into account before selecting the appropriate research approach and data collection method. This includes evaluating their specific strengths and weaknesses and considering the potential for utilising a mixed-methods approach (Denscombe 2017). Researchers have thus a preference for the suitable research methodology, which can achieve the aims of the research, being qualitative, quantitative, and mixed research methods. According to Silverman (2022), research strategies are neither "right" nor "wrong", nor are they "good" or "bad". It is described only as "more" or "less" appropriate to a particular research question. He also states that the choice of research methods ultimately depends on the research problem sought to be analysed by the researcher. For that reason, "no method of research, qualitative and quantitative, is intrinsically better than any other" (Silverman, 2022, p.13). In this sense, it is not the purpose of this chapter to repeat the well-documented distinctions between qualitative and quantitative research but to offer the rationale for my choice of qualitative research for this study.

Qualitative research is described as an umbrella term comprising a wide variety of approaches, paradigms, and methods to research in the social sciences (Collis and Hussey 2014). It is conducted within and across multiple disciplines, including business and management studies, for different research issues by using specific methods and theoretical backgrounds (Saldana 2011; Flick 2023). A qualitative approach to research is often used to develop a holistic understanding of concepts, events, people, communities, phenomena, and organisations (Crick 2021). Therefore, a description and an interpretation of a person's social environment or an organisation's external context is vital for an overall understanding of the subject matter (Patton 2015). As a result, qualitative inquiry makes it possible to construct a deep understanding of the phenomenon by utilising internal and external symbols (Creswell and Poth 2018).

This holistic point of view allowed me to understand women employees' stories and experiences about workplace harassment by gathering what was happening within the hospitality organisations and how what happens has implications for those subjected to sexual harassment behaviours. This intimate interconnection with internal and external factors of the study provides a comprehensive and complete picture of the particular situation or matter (Patton 2015). As such, qualitative research design enabled me to understand women's inner perspectives and to touch their personal feelings and stories of workplace harassment beyond the surface. It then enabled me to elucidate and make sense of participants' experiences and stories related to the hospitality organisational systems in terms of their particular meaning.

The qualitative researcher needs a deep understanding of the phenomena under investigation, and hence the quality of the data is of paramount importance. In that vein, qualitative inquiry allows the researcher to gain rich data on people's feelings, thoughts, perceptions, attitudes, beliefs, behaviours, actions, and lived experiences (Holstein and Gubrium 2002). All these behavioural and perceptual aspects of inquiry cannot be easily obtained through the variable-based correlations of quantitative research procedures (Silverman 2022). Such qualitative approaches enable the exploration and interpretation of events, understandings, opinions, and experiences through the interlinkages between behaviours and actions within the

social world (Miles et al. 2014). The kernel of qualitative research is to understand situations from the point of view of the participants and the meanings they assign to them (Patton 2015). By using qualitative research, the researcher can gather comprehensive data and gain a deeper understanding of how people interpret their lives and share their experiences within a specific area of study (Denzin et al. 2024). This approach is particularly well-suited for exploring female workers' emotions, perceptions, and experiences of sexual harassment in the workplace in a thorough and inductive manner. In that way, the qualitative approach enabled me to capture important, detailed, and hidden explanations about the experience of workplace harassment that women reported in their own words and achieve an in-depth understanding of their everyday lives at hospitality work through their own reflections and terms.

Qualitative approaches are also particularly appropriate while working on a sensitive research topic (Dickson-Swift et al. 2009). A sensitive research topic has been described as "research which examines potentially delicate issues focusing on experiences that are painful, upsetting or emotional for participants" (Cornejo et al. 2019, p.2). Although all stages of the research process pose challenges for both the researcher and the researched when studying a sensitive topic (Fahie 2014; Fenge et al. 2019), qualitative research allows for the integration of various perspectives, thereby adding rigour to the research process and findings of the subject studied (Cornejo et al. 2019). In this context, sharing personal stories about sexual harassment may involve intense feelings and emotions due to the intimate nature of the research topic. The qualitative research approach enabled me to thoroughly and sensitively explore the personal experiences of the participants through in-depth, face-to-face interviews. This method allowed for a deep reflection on the unique and individual stories, experiences, and perspectives of each person related to the subject at hand.

Narrative Research

Narrative inquiry was undertaken for this research to collect and analyse the primary data on the experiences of sexual harassment among female employees.

There were various qualitative methods that could be suitable for completing this research. However, the choice of narrative inquiry for my study was arrived at after careful consideration of the research aim and objectives, the sensitive nature of the subject matter, and the desire to capture in-depth personal experiences (Silverman 2022; Creswell 2010). By using narratives, I was able to elicit how people story their lives on a social phenomenon in a particular socio-cultural context, which is typical of narrative research (Gubrium and Holstein 2009; Bold 2012; Esin et al. 2014).

Narrative inquiry, which is very often framed by the interpretivist point of view, distinguishes itself from other qualitative approaches as a story analytic technique (Smith and Sparkes 2009). Narrative methods prioritise individuals' stories that emerge through the concrete events and experiences that have occurred in their lives. Narratives tell the story of human lives and reflect how people make sense of their world in terms of events, actions, experiences, and relationships (Bold 2012). In that way, narratives can capture the referential whole of the interpretations which make up a world (Heil and Whittaker 2007). Gubrium and Holstein (2009) state that narrative inquiry is not only focused on the present events but may also emphasise individuals' past or present experiences and stories over long periods of time (for example, an entire life story). As such, during the interviews, the narrative method allowed me to capture both past and present stories of workplace harassment which were shared by the participants as either a victim or a bystander of harassment.

Mura and Sharif (2017) note that by analysing the stories people tell, the researcher can take a picture of social phenomena at the macro level. When people share stories about their lives, they are also creating representations of social phenomena within a specific socio-cultural context. Therefore, narrative research allows researchers to gain a deep understanding of how social realities are constructed, organised, perceived, and shared by individuals and societies. Also, it helps to elucidate how ideologies and phenomena are accepted or silenced (Mura and Sharif 2017). Furthermore, the narrative analysis may be a good choice for researchers interested in complex subjective experiences to find out the extensive meaning of personal stories related to social phenomena (Polkinghorne 2007), which are mostly

overlooked and hidden. In this vein, when the workplace harassment stories of individuals are considered in terms of personal, organisational, sectoral, and social aspects, they are more likely accepted as complex, sensitive and concealed individual experiences in social structures. Adopting narrative inquiry afforded me a deep insight into the context, social and personal experience, and the connectedness of people in a way that may not have been possible otherwise.

Besides, narratives are shaped by a dialogic collaboration between the researcher and the participants (King et al. 2019). This interaction leads to a greater understanding of individuals' stories on the relevant topic. As instances of interactive and social action, narrative researchers treat narratives as socially situated interactions embedded in interpersonal, cultural, institutional, and historical contexts.

Wilson (2015) states that when people create a narrative of events in their lives, they simultaneously explain who they are with the help of identities that they have. They thus configure a narrative identity about themselves and/or others. In this context, "narrating identity gives the researcher possibilities for analysis and discussions of the dynamic role of agency and structure as influences on narrative construction and narrative identity" (Wilson 2015, p.893). In this research, the way female employees could narrate their experiences of sexual harassment in hospitality work settings could be reflected and shaped by identity aspects such as demographics, professional roles, and personal background.

Narrative inquiry is acknowledged more than just the analysis of narratives. It not only represents social phenomena and constructs realities but also allows a deep understanding of the complexity and struggles in human experiences (Andrews et al. 2004). This might thus enable the transformation of people's perceptions of them and help to contribute to social change in current society (Smeyers and Verhesschen 2001). Accordingly, this study relies on female employees' narrations of not only their sexual harassment experiences at work but also their individual lives outside of the workplace as women who have diverse backgrounds, different experiences and perceptions. Through this, I felt I would be able to understand how diverse complex categories and social and organisational settings influence the hospitality

women workers' experience of sexual harassment and, therefore, their lives outside of the workplace.

Sampling and Participant Profile

The participants of this study included twenty-two female employees working in the hospitality sector. A combination of purposive (non-probability) sampling and snowball sampling strategies were adopted in the selection of participants for the research. Maximum-variation based strategy was used in the selection of participants in order to ensure that diverse backgrounds of participants (in terms of age, nationality, race, education level, social background, migration status) and different types of hospitality organisations (hotels, restaurants, coffee shops and bars) were included within the sample. Maximum variation sampling aims to recruit participants with sufficiently diverse characteristics and different experiences to provide the maximum variation possible in the data collected (Jones et al. 2013; Saunders et al. 2023). The criteria were identified following the review of the initial body of research and were as follows:

- Participants should be over the age of 18
- Participants should have originated from different countries
- Participants should have worked in different hospitality places (e.g. hotels, restaurants, coffee shops, bars, etc.)
- Participants should have worked in different departments and positions in the hospitality places
- Participants should have experienced and/or witnessed some incidence of sexual harassment within the hospitality workplace context

Based upon these requirements of the sample, I interviewed women who worked in hospitality places at different levels and positions. The journey of the participants in the sector was varied in terms of personal circumstances, backgrounds and external factors. Four participants were British, and they worked in different hospitality organisations. Eighteen out of twenty-two women came from different parts of the world (Europe and Asia), and they had diverse cultural backgrounds and sector experiences working at different levels across various hospitality

organisations. Some women began their careers in hospitality at an early age (17-18 years old) in their home country and later moved to the UK. Others started working in hospitality when they relocated to the UK for postgraduate study or work in their late twenties. Each woman had varying levels of experience in the hospitality industry; some had worked for just one year, while others, like a front office manager, had 25 years of experience.

To protect the anonymity of the research participants' identity while allowing them to define how they wished to be represented in the study, I asked each participant to choose an English name as their pseudonym at the end of the interviews. This approach provided a deep insight into how individuals from various backgrounds interpreted identity and self-expression in the context of deeply personal and sensitive narratives. Some participants embraced the opportunity to select the names they liked, while others were indifferent to the choice, reflecting the range of attitudes toward representation in sensitive research contexts.

I noticed that some participants would select their favourite English name without considering its meaning but instead focusing on how it phonetically sounded to them. One participant, originally from Spain, chose the name 'Grace', explaining that it carried a melodic quality she admired. Similarly, a participant from Lithuania selected 'Maeve', stating that it sounded sophisticated, even though she did not know its meaning. One British participant wished to choose the name 'Chloe' because she liked the way it sounded.

Some participants chose names based on their favourite flower or movie character. For example, a British participant wanted to use the name 'Daisy'. Meanwhile, a participant from Turkey opted for the name 'Emily' inspired by her favourite movie character.

Interestingly, not all participants engaged with this naming approach in the same way. Some participants expressed indifference to what name was assigned to them. They particularly indicated that the name itself was not significant as long as their stories were to be shared and heard. Therefore, I assigned the pseudonym myself to those who expressed no preference, and I selected the most common British

women's names in order to avoid imposing any unintended symbolism or bias. Further information on the participants can be outlined in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2 Female Participants Demographics

No	Pseudonym	Age	Education Level	Nationality	Positions held in the hospitality	Years of Sector Experience
1	**Alice**	32	FE College	Spanish	Front Desk Supervisor	11
2	**Anna**	23	Secondary School	Swedish	Barista	1
3	**Amy**	27	Bachelor	Greek	Conference and Banqueting Assistant	4
4	**Camilla**	42	Secondary School	Slovakian	Housekeeper	4
5	**Carly**	30	FE College	Italian	Conference and Event Supervisor	5
6	**Chloe**	21	Secondary School	British	Barmaid	3
7	**Clara**	28	Secondary School	Thai	Receptionist	6
8	**Daisy**	20	Secondary School	British	Barmaid	3
9	**Daphne**	48	Bachelor	Hungarian	Front Office Manager	25
10	**Dora**	27	Bachelor	Indian	Front Office Supervisor	5
11	**Elaine**	26	Bachelor	Greek	Guest Relations	8

12	**Emily**	30	Bachelor	Turkish	Conference and Banqueting supervisor	5
13	**Emma**	27	Bachelor	Greek	Front Office Supervisor	9
14	**Evelyn**	36	Bachelor	Italian	Pastry Chef	14
15	**Grace**	29	Bachelor	Spanish	Bar Supervisor	11
16	**Hazel**	27	FE College	British	Assistant Manager in F&B	6
17	**Helen**	32	Secondary School	British	Event manager	8
18	**Lauren**	31	FE College	Turkish	F&B Manager	10
19	**Layla**	32	Masters	Malay	Conference and Banqueting Supervisor	9
20	**Lucy**	30	FE College	Romanian	Housekeeping Supervisor	7
21	**Maeve**	44	Secondary School	Lithuanian	Front Office Manager	25
22	**Olivia**	24	Secondary School	Italian	Barista	4

Given that diverse backgrounds could be an important factor when scrutinising the sexual harassment behaviours within a range of hospitality organisations, these characteristics would better reflect the sample population needed to address the research questions, as each participant has a different story to tell about it.

In this research, the sample selection used two strategies: purposive and snowball sampling. Purposive sampling involves a strategy in which participants and settings are chosen for the research based on the relevant research questions that are posed

(Creswell 2013). Patton (2015) points out that the logic and power of purposeful sampling lie in selecting information-rich cases for in-depth study. Therefore, purposive sampling allows researchers to gain rich and deep information according to the purpose of the study (Jones et al. 2013; Patton 2015). As for a narrative story, "the researcher reflects more on whom to sample – all of the individuals need to have stories to tell about their lived experiences" as Creswell (2013, p.155) emphasised.

First, the potential participants, who would be eligible based on the selection criteria and likely to be willing to participate, were identified. At this point, my insider position in the research helped me to find appropriate participants using my professional network in line with the purpose of the research. This allowed eight participants to be identified for initial interviews. Second, after initial contacts were made, snowball sampling then was used to find other relevant participants.

Snowball sampling (chain referral sampling) is a type of purposive (non-probability) sampling strategy, where initial participants of the research are asked to suggest or recommend others who have had the experience or desired characteristics relevant to the research (Noy 2008; Brotherton 2016). These proposed participants then suggest others and so forth. Snowball sampling is frequently used when probability sampling is impossible; not feasible; participants are not easily accessible; or anonymity is needed (Noy 2008; Jones et al. 2013).

Through the snowball sampling procedure, in some cases, I directly contacted the participants whose personal contacts were provided by the initial participants as their friends and workmates to request their participation in the study. In other cases, the participants suggested by the initial participants preferred to arrange the interview time directly with them at their convenience, which was more manageable. Although this recruitment process was disheartening at times (for example, reluctance to participate in the research, reluctance to share workplace harassment incidents, and not being allowed to record the interview), it enabled an additional fourteen participants to be identified. The total number of participants in this research was twenty-two.

Qualitative researchers usually work with a relatively small number of samples to explore a particular phenomenon or institution in-depth. The goal is not to make generalisations (Hammersley 2013; Lee and Saunders 2017). While there is no firm consensus on the optimal sample size to be applied to qualitative research, researchers state that the size of the sample is to be established inductively in that sampling continues until data and/or theoretical saturation are reached (Beitin 2012). It is applied to purposive sampling (non-probability) techniques to determine whether there is adequate data from research to develop a robust and valid understanding of the research subject (Guest et al. 2013). However, since there is no cap on how many participants should be included in qualitative interviews, the researcher can carry on collecting data until data saturation and/or theoretical saturation (Saunders et al. 2024). Warren (2001) suggests that for a qualitative interview study, the sample size might be between twenty and thirty. Holloway and Wheeler (2010) recommend that six to eight participants might contain when the sample consists of a homogeneous group, while a heterogeneous sample might include between fourteen and twenty participants. Whereas this sampling size is much less for narrative research, and some narrative research has been conducted with one participant (Jones et al. 2013). Nonetheless, as there are no rigid rules and specific guidelines regarding saturation, researchers have to decide for themselves when data saturation or theoretical saturation happens, depending on research questions (Holloway and Wheeler 2010).

The research focused on the experiences and stories of female employees regarding sexual harassment in various hospitality settings. The number of participants from each hospitality workplace was based on the willingness of individuals to take part in the study rather than applying an equal selection process for each type of hospitality workplace to distribute the participants. Due to this, there was an unequal distribution of hospitality settings in terms of representing the number of participants. Nevertheless, I made sure to interview at least three participants from each hospitality group. The data analysis was an iterative process, which meant that the participant sampling and the interview process were conducted until the point at which data saturation and theoretical saturation had been met. The saturation point for this research was judged when I was confident that new information (data saturation) was not being gleaned from the narrative interviews, and no new

categories and dimensions (theoretical saturation) emerged from the data collected and analysed. Holloway and Wheeler (2010) stated that the number of participants in a heterogeneous group is generally between fourteen and twenty. Since aiming to reach more depth and richness of data is the intention of narrative research, using large samples might lead to a loss of depth and uniqueness of the research (Polkinghorne 2007; Creswell 2013).

Gaining Access and Building Rapport

Gaining access to the research field and establishing rapport with research participants are more significant in qualitative research than in quantitative research (Flick 2023). The sustained and intensive presence of the researcher in the research settings (e.g. ethnographic studies) or staying relatively a short time but with a more personal engagement, as in-depth interview studies, the researcher enters the lives of the participants (Marshall et al. 2021, p.72). This raises many more strategic, personal, organisational, institutional, and ethical issues during the data collection compared with quantitative approaches (Have 2004). Thus qualitative researchers face an important question of how to gain access to the research field and/or potential participants, which often needs a considerable amount of time to achieve (Patton 2013; Flick 2023).

Since gaining entry facilitates data collection, it must be considered when choosing the research strategy and sampling approach, and specifying the research question and objectives (Jones et al. 2013; Saunders et al. 2023). Gaining access is related to the act of gaining permission to start a study (Creswell 2013). It means that the researcher can talk to the individuals involved, access the necessary documents needed, observe the situation, and interview potential participants to obtain the deepest information within the scope of research questions (Holloway and Galvin 2024). Gaining access to this research was in part generated due to my privileged perspective positioning an insider role within the research context. Working as a lecturer in tourism and hospitality management has provided me with access to the hospitality business environment that may not be afforded easily by an outsider. I also benefited from an existing long-term rapport built through my professional

network within the hospitality industry. This insider status put me in a favourable position and allowed me to access the initial participants of the research without any difficulty. It was evident that someone without insider status might not have easily gained access to the organisations and potential employees to conduct in-depth narrative interviews on a relatively sensitive topic. Saunders et al. (2023) state that obtaining cooperation from potential participants hinges on building relationships. At this stage, building rapport is significant for establishing the credibility and integrity of research. There may be organisational concerns about granting access to work on a sensitive topic. Some organisations are less likely to cooperate with researchers when the research topic has negative implications. Because organisations do not want to present themselves as not performing well in any aspect of their business (Saunders et al. 2023).

During the development of this research, hospitality organisation managers or general managers were identified as the gatekeepers who were willing to collaborate with me and to offer their support to facilitate conducting the interviews. The existing rapport with the initial participants of the research facilitated the development of reciprocity and trust with the proposed participants of the different sample groups to agree to take part in the study. Once I gained entry to the organisations (hotels, restaurants, coffee shops, bars), I was entrusted by the managers and employees to conduct my narrative research there. I was humbled by the level of trust and goodwill that the gatekeepers were willing to introduce me and my research project to the relevant people in their organisations, and participants were willing to share their lived experiences given the sensitive nature of the research. Perhaps my lecturer title helped me to gain rapport.

In addition, making telephone contact before the interview facilitated the initial stage of the relationship with the participant, and this meant that I was not communicating with them for the first time on the day of the interview.

The narrative interview format facilitated open and in-depth conversations with participants, enabling them to explore their experiences of workplace sexual harassment in their own time and position it within their individual stories. Most especially, engaging in informal conversation (lasting up to twenty minutes with each participant) with each participant to talk about their background within the

hospitality sector prior to the interview helped to enhance the communication rapport between the researcher and the participants, creating a mutually beneficial exchange. I believe this warm-up conversation built a sense of understanding between the participants and myself; I got to know their backgrounds through their own stories, and they understood my position as an academic researcher and lecturer. I can add that being a female researcher for this sensitive research subject enabled female participants to think of the interview as a woman-to-woman conversation, and thus willing to share their private and emotional experiences more openly and freely.

Duncombe and Jessop (2012) point out that woman-to-woman rapport can be achieved naturally and spontaneously in some social research, particularly on sensitive issues, as a consequence of gendered subordination and emotional empathy. Eight out of twenty-two interviews were conducted when the coronavirus lockdown restrictions eased (eg. not meeting up with non-family members indoors and outdoors and stay-at-home orders by the governments, and others). At the time when such restrictions were lifted, it was observed that the participants were more willing to share their stories. This may be explained by the fact that human beings, as social creatures, make sense of interviews as a means of socialisation, especially in times of social restrictions. The key point was creating relaxed and spontaneous conversations using appropriate language and granting confidentiality and anonymity, which are enabled by building rapport (King and Horrocks 2010; Creswell 2013). Furthermore, rapport is built by being neutral, nonjudgmental and having empathy (Patton 2015). As an interviewer, I was neutral regarding the content of what was being said to me. I did not show emotions of being shocked, angered, or sad. I cared very much that each person was willing to share with me what they were saying without judging them. Therefore, trust was built between us as the interview progressed.

Pilot Interview

Prior to the main interview process, I conducted a pilot study with my colleague, who is an academic and can provide detailed feedback on the interview questions

and procedures and suggest improvements based on her knowledge and expertise. A pilot study is an integral part of any research to identify potential issues and refine data collection tools for clarity and effectiveness in the study's earlier stage (Saunders et al. 2023). A pilot study is a small-scale preliminary study designed to evaluate the feasibility of the study, and it assists in refining the data collection questions before the full-scale study is conducted (Kinchin et al. 2018).

The role of the interview guide in narrative inquiry differs from that in a traditional semi-structured interview. It serves more as a trigger or prompt, encouraging participants to share their unique stories in their own words. Rather than adhering to a set of fixed questions in a rigid sequence, the researcher uses the guide flexibly to maintain the natural flow and meaning of the narratives being shared (Jones et al. 2013). This method helps to ensure the research captures the full depth and richness of the participants' unique stories, providing valuable insights that might be overlooked with a more rigid interview structure (Riessman 2008). In this study, a pilot study was undertaken at the initial stage of data collection to correct any possible ambiguities in the interview questions that might arise for further interviews and enhance the likelihood of success in the main study (van Teijlingen and Hundley 2001). As mentioned, each individual's story is unique, and the way they express their narrative is also unique; therefore, the pilot study helped to improve the wording of some questions to make them clearer. Additionally, as she is an experienced academic in conducting interviews on sensitive topics, the pilot interview and her feedback provided refined insights into managing interviews on sensitive subjects as well as prepared me for any challenges that might occur during the main data collection. It also served as a training session to enhance my skills in discussing sexual harassment with participants, especially with those who were initially less engaged and might experience emotional distress during the interview. This pre-testing phase could also help to recognise and mitigate possible ethical concerns that might arise, particularly in sensitive research areas (Smith 2019), in terms of how to handle emotionally distressing topics to avoid causing harm to participants' well-being. Therefore, conducting a pilot study with an expert helped me improve some interview questions before actual interviews.

Conducting the Interviews

The data were collected in a seaside destination in the southwest of England, UK, known for being a popular tourism destination both nationally and internationally. This area also has a diverse hospitality workforce in the labour market. Interviews were conducted in this research setting within two periods due to the global coronavirus pandemic restrictions that occurred globally in 2020 and onwards. The hospitality sector has been one of the hardest-hit industries worldwide due to pandemic-related restrictions such as community lockdowns, social distancing rules, travel and mobility restrictions, and stay-at-home orders by the authorities. These measures have led to the temporary closure of many hospitality businesses (Gursoy and Chi 2020). For that reason, data collection was completed during the periods when the restrictions were eased. Fourteen face-to-face interviews took place in November and December 2019 before the pandemic, while eight interviews were carried out in December 2021 (during the pandemic) when pandemic restrictions had eased in the UK.

Upon receiving approval from the Bournemouth University ethics panel, participants were contacted via email to invite them to take part in the study. A Participant Information Sheet (PIS) (see Appendix A) detailing the purpose of the research was attached to the invitation email. Prospective participants were then contacted either by telephone or face-to-face. This initial contact was significant as it served to break down barriers and enabled the first steps in building rapport. This also allowed the participants to confirm their volunteer participation, arrange a suitable time for the interviews and give them the opportunity to make any inquiries regarding the research. For the women who fulfilled the criteria and were interested in participating in the study, an interview day and place were arranged to conduct the interviews.

Furthermore, I contacted some potential participants through my professional network. Leveraging my existing professional networks to find initial participants enabled me to arrange in-person meetups with potential participants before scheduling the actual interviews. This approach not only ensured better communication but also helped clarify any queries participants might have had about the study, thus promoting higher participation rates. This pre-existing

network also recommended others who might be willing to take part in the research. Additionally, during the informal meetups, there was an opportunity to conduct actual interviews. Four participants volunteered to take part in the study during these initial meetups without needing to arrange another time for the actual interviews.

Interviews were carried out at a time and place convenient for both the participants and the researcher and in an environment in which they felt relaxed and comfortable. Before the interviews commenced, the researcher reminded the participants once again about the aim and objectives of the research. The structure of the interview was explained, and they were assured about the confidentiality and anonymity of their identities. The participants were also informed that they could request that the interview be paused or ended at any time during the interview. It was emphasised that they were free to withdraw from the study at any time and were under no obligation to continue the interview if they felt it was distressing and causing any harm or discomfort. The participants were asked to read through the Participant Information Sheet (PIS) again to familiarise themselves with the interview topic. If they agreed to participate, they signed the Participant Agreement Form (PAF) (see Appendix B) to confirm that they voluntarily gave consent for the interview to be digitally recorded and for their data to be included in this thesis.

Before the formal recording of the interviews, time was spent in an informal conversation with each participant, talking about their background, work and life experiences and mutual interests as a way to warm up before the interview. These informal conversations sometimes shared over a hot beverage, dessert or a meal served as an icebreaker between the participants and the researcher, who were total strangers.

Given the sensitive nature of the research, the interviews could be lengthy and emotionally straining. A narrative interview guide was developed to maintain the holistic and comprehensive nature of the participants' stories (Jones et al. 2013). It covered five broad themes: working life in the hospitality sector; stories of workplace sexual harassment; reactions to and feelings about sexual harassment behaviours; impacts of sexual harassment, and organisational response to

harassment behaviours. These interview topics were chosen because of the aim and objectives of the research and after the relevant literature was reviewed.

Whilst a list of prescribed questions is used to ask participants in semi-structured interviews, the narrative inquiry researcher allows the interviewee to tell their story fluently and abstain from interruptions without asking more rigid and fixed questions (King et al. 2019). Holloway and Freshwater (2009) state that the researchers should let the storyteller talk without interruptions, and questions are used to prompt the storyteller to elaborate further on the issues they raised. The researcher mostly remains in an active listener position, and questions are only used as stimuli to provide a trigger for the participants' stories (Jones et al. 2013). To preserve the meaning and flow of the shared stories during the interview, researchers can use a small number of questions to continue the narratives without frequent interruptions (Holloway and Freshwater 2009). Therefore, by using a small set of questions as a prompt and/or trigger during the interviews, I intended to enable the participants to share their personal stories with minimal interruption from myself. Employing a narrative approach to the qualitative interview allowed the participants to lead the conversation so that they had control of the interview flow and were able to narrate their personal stories openly and freely (King et al. 2019).

After an informal conversation with each participant, interviews started with two main questions: "*Could you tell me about your working life in the hospitality sector?*" and *"Could you describe any experiences of sexual harassment you have encountered while working in the hospitality industry?"*. If the participant has not experienced but witnessed sexual harassment behaviours at work, then I asked: *"Can you tell me about a time where you have witnessed harassment behaviours whilst working in the hospitality?"*. These questions were designed to encourage female participants to share their experiences regarding workplace sexual harassment with their own terms and voices. The participants were informed that there were no right or wrong answers and that they were free to share any experience in any way that they felt comfortable with. Each interview was approached with the mindset that each woman was a unique individual and required different questioning styles. Throughout the interviews, the tone of the conversation was continually reassessed to ensure sensitivity to these individual differences.

A range of probes were utilised during the interviews, such as "*Who was the perpetrator?*", "*When did it happen?*", "*Where did it happen?*", "*Did you report it?*". These allowed me to clarify meaning, ask for greater depth, and further explore participants' experiences. Additionally, I utilised non-verbal prompts to encourage participants, such as smiling, nodding, making eye contact and using the following prompts and probes like: "*Please continue*", "*That's interesting*", "*Could you tell me more about that?*", "*How did you feel about that?*". These also help to proceed with the flow of the interview (Patton 2015) and to reduce anxiety for the participants and the researcher throughout the interview (Holloway and Galvin 2024).

Although it was never my intention to upset the participants during the interviews, some participants became visibly upset due to the sensitive nature of the topic, which may have triggered unpleasant memories. When this occurred, I stopped the interview by pausing the digital voice recorder so that they could regain composure and resume the interview if they were willing to. Having an ability to communicate empathy with participants, who have emotional distress during the interview, is a significant skill for the interviewer to deal with emotional situations (Holloway and Galvin 2024). Participants who experienced distress were asked if they wanted to continue and reminded that they could withdraw from the interview if they wished; however, they preferred to continue. Corbin and Morse (2003) emphasise that interviews should be tailored to meet the needs of the participants, including taking breaks or postponing emotionally distressing discussions to allow the participants to calm down. It was crucial not to rush the interviewees during the interview process, especially when they needed time to recover from an upsetting event. This approach prioritised the feelings and thoughts of the participants and ensured that they had control over the interview process. Therefore, participants were given the opportunity to take a break if they felt the need to rest during the interview.

The interviews were terminated when the participants were satisfied that their experiences and stories had been recounted. They were asked if they would like to provide further comment. When they had no additional comment, the participants were thanked for their participation in the study. All of the participants seemed grateful that they were able to tell their stories and discuss their previous

experiences in the hospitality environment, and some felt relieved after sharing their more hidden experiences. For some, this was the first time they had had the opportunity to speak about their experiences of workplace sexual harassment thus, the interview provided them a safe and relaxing platform to reflect on their life stories.

This situation can be explained by the fact that narrative interviews provide a therapeutic platform for those who are willing to share sensitive experiences and stories that they have not openly and publicly shared before. As Holloway and Galvin (2024) pointed out, working on a sensitive topic can be challenging for researchers conducting qualitative interviews, as they must consider the interviewee's feelings and emotional reactions. However, participants may feel relieved to disclose their stories to someone who does not judge them.

Data Analysis

The participant interviews lasted between 42 minutes and 2 hours 38 minutes. In total, the interviews resulted in 1338 minutes (22 hours, 18 minutes) of raw recording and 300 pages of full verbatim transcripts over 153,000 words. All interviews were digitally recorded using an Olympus voice recorder and fully transcribed by the researcher. Transcription was carried out as soon as possible after each interview to recall key moments of interviews easily. Comments were added during the transcription, including notes on participants' mood or tone also noted where appropriate.

The transcription process is acknowledged as the initial stage of analysis. The main advantage of transcription is that it enables the researcher to become familiar with and fully immerse in the data (Saunders et al. 2023). This makes it possible to analyse the text both in its components and as a unified whole (Sundler et al. 2019). Through this process, the researcher is able to elucidate the meaning of lived experiences in transcribed interviews (Ho et al. 2017). Transcription is time-intensive, but it is essential to ensure accurate data interpretation by carefully reading through the interviews (King et al. 2019). During the data analysis, I read interview transcriptions multiple times and listened to voice recordings to capture

participants' tones, emotions, reactions, pauses, and nuances while they shared their experiences and opinions. This approach allowed me to immerse myself in the data and grasp the overall narratives of the participants before conducting a detailed analysis to deconstruct and interpret them. It also enabled me to preserve the authenticity and depth of the participants' narratives, ensuring a rich and comprehensive analysis of the data with integrity.

Apart from interview transcriptions, I took summary notes (field notes/observation notes) after each interview before leaving the interview location regarding the main points of the interviews, including the primary themes discussed during the interview, what aspects of the interview went well, and any challenges or issues that arose. These notes were extremely helpful in capturing unique details and the entire process of each interview while everything was still fresh in my mind. These brief notes helped me identify the variations in participant responses and refine my approach for subsequent interviews. Besides, this immediate documentation helped me ensure that significant insights and the context of participants' responses were accurately captured and preserved for analysis. It is important to note that taking reflexive notes during and/or after interviews increases the depth of qualitative data analysis and the overall credibility of the research (Nowell et al. 2017).

The narrative data were subjected to thematic analysis, aiming to categorise raw data into meaningful patterns and descriptive units (Braun and Clarke 2022). Thematic analysis is one of the most common approaches to qualitative data analysis, and it offers a logical and systematic approach to qualitative data analysis (Saunders et al. 2023).

Thematic analysis can be used to analyse large qualitative data sets, as well as smaller ones, leading to rich descriptions, explanations, interpretations, and theorising (Gibbs 2008). This process is a sophisticated, multifaceted and dynamic endeavour that hinges on the researcher operating in a methodical, organised, and structured manner (Braun and Clarke 2022). The thematic analysis encompasses several key steps in order to identify meaningful and systematic patterns in the collected data and provide a coherent and analytical explanation of social reality (Miles et al. 2014; Marshall et al. 2021). Braun and Clarke (2006; 2022) divide the thematic analysis into a six-phase process: familiarising with the data set;

generating initial codes; generating initial themes; developing and reviewing themes; defining and naming themes; and producing the report. These stages are presented in the table below (Table 3.2).

Table 3.3 Phases of Thematic Analysis

Phase	Description of the process
Familiarising with the data set	Transcribing data; reading the data multiple times; listening to the recordings at least once; noting down initial ideas
Generating initial codes	Coding interesting, relevant and meaningful features of data in a systematic and analytical order; collating data relevant to each code
Generating initial themes	Collating codes into potential themes; gathering data relevant to the potential theme
Developing and reviewing themes	Checking themes in relation to the coded extract (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2); generating a thematic map
Defining and naming themes	Refining each theme and clarifying the names and definitions of the themes
Producing the report	Selecting vivid and compelling data extracts to create a coherent, persuasive and analytical narrative of the data; final analysis and linking the analysis to the literature, research questions and conceptual framework to produce a scholarly report

(Source: Adopted from Braun and Clarke (2022, p.35-35) and Braun and Clarke (2006, p.87)

Data analysis followed the guidelines established by Braun and Clarke (2022, p.4), who defined the process as *"a method for developing, analysing and interpreting patterns across a qualitative dataset, which involves systematic processes of data coding to develop themes - themes are the ultimate analytic purpose"*. In interpretivist qualitative research, analysis involves categorising the data into themes and categories, which serve as the foundational elements for developing conceptual insights (Rubin and Rubin 2012). As my role was to illuminate the key findings across interviews in order to tell the participants' stories of being sexually harassed in hospitality settings, this method was particularly valuable for examining people's narratives in a systematic way and understanding complex experiences within a specific context (Braun and Clarke 2022). By doing so, I aimed to present

a comprehensive narrative that highlights the prevalence, forms, and impacts of sexual harassment in the hospitality industry. Through thematic analysis, I was able to draw meaningful connections between individual stories, uncover common patterns, and provide a deeper insight into the socio-cultural dynamics at play in the workplace. I opted not to use any software programme for data analysis to prevent the analysis becoming too mechanistic and to prevent myself from being distanced from the data. Instead, I adopted a manual process of analysis.

As mentioned previously, the first phase of thematic analysis took place during and directly after the transcription process allowing me to familiarise myself with the data and gain a holistic view. Listening to voice recordings, reading interview transcriptions multiple times and noting down initial ideas allowed me to develop an organised coding strategy before generating initial codes from the data. The codes and themes of this research were data-driven and developed inductively, and no attempt was made to predetermine or anticipate the findings. (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane 2006).

In the second phase, the relevant codes were generated by scrutinising the transcripts. Reoccurring words or statements were higlighted in different colours in Word documents and noted down in separate documents using a pen. Digital note-taking/typing (laptop note-taking using a keyboard) and traditional note-taking (longhand note-taking by using actual pen and paper) strategies were used to identify patterns of meaning across the full dataset. Handwriting has been linked to enhanced conceptual understanding (Mueller and Oppenheimer 2014), more effective creative meaning-making, and deeper cognitive comprehension compared to digital note-taking methods (van der Velden 2023). Hence, utilising longhand note-taking techniques during the coding and theme-creation stages of data analysis has helped to create a deeper connection with the transcripts. This allowed me to have a more comprehensive engagement with the data, resulting in a more robust interpretation and leading to richer, more authentic insights into the participants' narratives. I worked systematically through each transcript and reviewed it on a number of occasions to ensure that I had not missed any relevant data from the raw data. The field notes were also used to enhance the coding process.

Once all the data were coded, the codes were combined into the potential themes during the third phase of the analysis. Similar codes were grouped together and labelled to identify the emergence of a theme. Throughout this process, I noted ideas and organised the grouping of codes into sub-themes and/or themes. This was a constant process of moving backwards and forwards across the data set. After the revision of themes in relation to the research question (the fourth phase), the themes were refined to clarify the names and definitions during the fifth phase. This stage of thematic analysis requires more critical thinking, reflexivity and a deep understanding of the data set (Braun and Clarke 2022).

As a result, the report of the analysis was produced in the final phase by linking to the participants' extract, the related literature and the research question. During the process of reflexive thematic analysis, I felt a great responsibility to remain truthful to the participants' stories that they had shared. As the participants placed their trust in me as a researcher (a stranger from their point of view) while sharing their personal experiences on a sensitive topic, I was mindful of the ethical implications and the need to handle their narratives with care and respect. This commitment ensured that the participants' voices were authentically represented and that their experiences were accurately reflected in the research findings.

Through thematic analysis, three overarching themes were identified from the twenty-two narrative interviews: being harassed in the workplace; the perceived impact of workplace sexual harassment; and ignoring vs. confronting: the organisational response to workplace sexual harassment. These themes were further broken down into sub-themes and presented as the basis for each findings chapter. The first findings chapter (Chapter 4) discusses being harassed in the workplace related to three major sub-themes: gendered spaces and perspectives of labour, perception of harassment and types of harassment experienced. The second findings chapter (Chapter 5) explores the perceived impact of workplace sexual harassment in relation to two major sub-themes: the immediate impact of harassment and the long-term impact of harassment. The final findings chapter (Chapter 6) discusses organisational response to workplace sexual harassment broken down into two major sub-themes: confronting harassment cases and ignoring harassment cases. A

thematic framework (see Table 3.4, p.80) has been produced to illustrate the main themes and sub-themes developed through analysis.

Ethical Considerations of the Research

Narrative inquiry is entirely composed of eliciting people's experiences, thoughts, and feelings in their accounts of events (Gubrium and Holstein 2009). As Brinkman and Kvale (2018, p.23) state 'an interview inquiry is a moral enterprise' and ethical issues in interview research arise the entire process of an investigation. Thus the ethical practice of social research with human participants is of utmost importance concern and is a demanding responsibility that the researcher needs to consider (King and Horrocks 2010). The significance of ethics when dealing with a sensitive research topic that intrudes into the private sphere or delves into some deeply personal experience (Hammersley and Traianou 2012), such as sexual harassment, cannot be underestimated.

Respecting ethical considerations is an integral part of any study and is paramount as it demonstrates how researchers value and treat their participants (Ritchie et al. 2013). Adhering to ethical guidelines is essential to protect participants from any harm. As per the Nuremberg Code and Principles, researchers must demonstrate the highest degree of skill and care throughout all stages of research when conducting a study on human subjects (Ghooi 2011).

Ethical requirements for research are generally mostly outlined in a comprehensive manner. These include following professional codes of ethics, obtaining ethical approval from committees, ensuring informed consent, providing participants with the necessary information, maintaining anonymity, privacy and confidentiality, and ensuring data security (Hammersley and Traianou 2012; Brinkman and Kvale 2018). In accordance with the Bournemouth University Research Ethics Policy and Procedure (BU-RECP 2023), the researcher is required to fulfil the ethical requirement process prior to any fieldwork involving human participation. The process of research ethics policy aims to protect the researcher, the university, the participants, and their organisations. The application for ethical approval was obtained through clearance from the Bournemouth University ethics panel in May

2019, and ethical considerations were highly featured during the data collection process.

Given the sensitivity of the research topic, a strict protocol was adhered to minimise emotional and psychological distress to the participants. Participants were informed of the research aims and process and the potential emotional risk associated with the interview prior to the start of each interview. All participants were provided with the Participant Information Sheet (see Appendix A) and the Participant Agreement Form (see Appendix B). The Participant Information Sheet was presented to the participants before the interviews. This allowed participants to familiarise themselves with the scope of the research and the interview process. They were further informed about their withdrawal rights, confidentiality, anonymity, and data security. The Participant Agreement Form was signed by the participants prior to the interview to confirm their willingness to take part in the research. The signed agreement forms are kept with the researcher as support evidence, and copies of the signed form were given to the participants as per their desires.

Before commencing the interviews, participants were again reminded of the interview structure and the overall aims of the research. They were further informed that they could withdraw from the interview and the research itself at any time without giving a reason if they felt uncomfortable. The importance of anonymity and confidentiality in reporting personal narratives was explained. Participants were informed that their stories would be digitally recorded to ensure accurate transcription and thorough data analysis.

The interviews could be lengthy and emotionally draining due to the depth of the participants' stories. Given the crucial importance of ethics in handling such a sensitive topic, I made sure to take the necessary steps in this regard. Each participant was assured that they could take a break, end the interview or reschedule for a more convenient time. None of the participants terminated the interview or withdrew from the research. When I noticed that some participants becoming upset, sighing or heavy breathing, long poses or changing body language and posture while sharing their experiences with workplace sexual harassment behaviours, I asked if they needed a break.

On these occasions, the interview was paused to allow participants time to rest and calm down. The interviews resumed once participants felt ready to discuss their experiences and emotions. Each interview was conducted in a sensitive and tactful manner to ensure the emotional well-being of participants. It is significant to acknowledge that when conducting research on a sensitive topic, sharing negative experiences with another person might inadvertently impact the participants' well-being, with potential repercussions beyond the research process (Jones et al. 2012). Therefore, it is the researcher's responsibility to maintain the equilibrium of the conversation. Although the priority of the research was to gather rich and in-depth data, I maintained a balance between empathy and neutrality during the interviews to avoid causing risky or harmful consequences for participants.

Upon completing the interviews, it was significant for me to have in place an exit strategy with a good impression. Therefore, I expressed my gratitude to the participants for their willingness to openly share their experiences. As recalling and recounting experiences on a sensitive topic might have caused emotional strain and traumatic consequences to the participants, I made contact with them a few days after the interviews as a follow-up strategy. This allowed me to thank them again for their voluntary participation in the study and to check their mental well-being. Since the interviews were held in the Dorset region, I had ready information about a local NHS counselling service called Steps2Wellbeing as a safeguard plan. I also had personal contact with a clinical psychologist who welcomed direct referrals should this have been required. Though some participants had negative emotions during interviews, none of them sought a referral.

It was also important to assure participants from the outset that their anonymity and confidentiality would be maintained in the reporting of personal narratives. The data must be managed in a way that prioritises the prevention of any unintended identification of a participant (Flick 2023). This was specifically significant when the participants shared sensitive and personal experiences related to their previous workplace, their employer, and colleagues. For this reason, I guaranteed all participants that their individual stories and experiences would not be shared with their current and previous employers and managers.

In that way, no personally identifiable data was collected from any of the participants. The collected data pertained to the participants' experiences, opinions, and feelings about sexual harassment incidents in the hospitality sector. Participants were assured that their identities would remain anonymous in any presentations of the data. They were informed that pseudonyms would be used in the thesis and any subsequent publications to ensure their anonymity. Furthermore, any personal details and organisational information that could potentially identify the participants were omitted.

Trustworthiness of the Research

Trustworthiness is a significant criterion in qualitative research, reflecting research reliability and validity (Holloway and Galvin 2024). It demonstrates the study's rigour and represents the methodological soundness and adequacy of qualitative research (Rose and Johnson 2020). This is achieved by developing the concepts of dependability, credibility, transferability, and confirmability (Given and Saumure 2008); Creswell 2013).

Trustworthiness in interpretivist research is widely debated (Carcary 2009) and there is no consensus over the terms and criteria that best assure trustworthiness (Jones et al. 2013). Lincoln and Guba (1985) refined the concept of trustworthiness by introducing more naturalistic axioms, including dependability, credibility, transferability and confirmability, to parallel the conventional quantitative assessment criteria of validity and reliability. Since this trustworthiness technique proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985) is aligned with a constructivist/interpretivist paradigm, it was applied to this study to evaluate the research's reliability and validity and is explained in the following sections.

Dependability in qualitative research refers to the consistency and trustworthiness of the study's findings (Bell et al. 2022). To achieve dependability, all phases of the research process should be consistent and accurate (Holloway and Galvin 2024). In this research, dependability started with a clear articulation of the research aim and objectives, which were well-aligned with the research design and methods. The process included careful selection of research participants, formulation of interview

questions, transcription of interviews, and detailed explanation of the data analysis process, all of which are elaborated upon in this chapter. During this process, an audit trail was kept to track the decisions made and the path followed from the beginning to the end of the research. As the audit trail also provides confirmability for the research, adopting an 'auditing' approach enabled me to ensure that the research process was logical, traceable, and clearly documented (Tobin and Begley 2004).

The audit trail is the detailed record of all phases of the research process, including problem formulation, research design, data collection and analysis (Bell et al. 2022). Holloway and Brown (2012) state that record-keeping and storing ideas are significant actions throughout the research process. This process made me more accountable for the decisions that I made at each stage of the research. It enabled me to record internal discussions and their connections with the contextual, methodological, and analytical processes. The maintenance of an audit trail was particularly important during the interview process. It was emotionally and physically draining to actively listen to participants' stories and journeys on a sensitive topic. During the thematic analysis, field notes (observation notes), document memos, raw data, recordings, and interview transcriptions were retained for cross-checking, serving as an important and proactive method of organising the data and identifying the themes and codes. This process was particularly useful in reflecting meaningful and integrated narrative findings (Holloway and Brown 2012).

Credibility refers to the confidence of the findings (Holloway and Wheeler 2002). This means that the researcher has accurately and richly described the phenomenon in question and represented the data (Given and Saumure 2008). The researcher's findings should be compatible with the perceptions of the people under study (Holloway and Galvin 2024). As such, one of the responsibilities of any qualitative researcher is to establish a high level of harmony between the participants' expressions and the researcher's interpretations of them (Davey et al. 2010). In this way, selecting participants through the purposive and snowball sampling method allowed me to interview relevant participants about the phenomenon investigated.

Recorded interviews increased the credibility of the research by using the participants' quotes while analysing the data.

In order to ensure that research is conducted according to the canons of good practice and to confirm that the phenomenon under study is investigated correctly and understood in its social context, some techniques would be helpful to enhance the validity of research (Saunders et al. 2023). These techniques include activities such as prolonged engagement, constant observation, triangulation, member validation, examining referential adequacy, and peer debriefing (to provide an external check on the research findings) (Lincoln and Guba 1985; Bryman 2016). Nevertheless, these activities serve as a guide and may not all be applicable to every qualitative study. I undertook peer debriefing to enhance the validity of the research.

Peer debriefing entails sharing and discussing research findings, interpretations, and methodological approaches with peers. It can be conducted with more experienced individuals such as supervisors, domain experts, or experienced colleagues to provide an external perspective on the research process (Patton 2002). At the data analysis stage, the research findings were discussed multiple times with the supervisory team. The themes and sub-themes were checked by the supervisors, and modifications were made based on their feedback during the data analysis. In addition, as submitting and checking findings with participants was not practical, I was able to gain comments and input from my colleagues with knowledge of gender, organisational behaviour and health and well-being research. This approach helped to ensure the the rigor and accuracy of the research findings.

Transferability reflects the extent to which the findings of the qualitative research can be transferred to other settings and/or participants (Miles et al. 2014). Qualitative inquiries are often tailored to a specific environment or a small group of individuals, making it difficult to demonstrate that the findings are applicable to other situations and populations (Saunders et al. 2023). While the researcher may not know exactly which other settings the findings can be transferred to, however, it is the researcher's responsibility to provide a thick description of the study context. Therefore, this thorough documentation allows others to determine the applicability and transferability of the findings to their own contexts (Bryman and Harley 2022).

In order to demonstrate how this research findings and conclusions can be transferred to similar settings and contexts by other researchers, the scope of the research, research design and the criteria for participants were thoroughly provided. The research findings (Chapters 4, 5, 6) were explained by using thick descriptions to enhance the transferability of the research.

Thick description gives the reader a full and purposeful account of the research context, process, participants and their emotions, meanings, and intentions in a specific environment (Holloway and Galvin 2024). Narrative research relies on thick descriptions of people's lived experiences and stories within a specific social context. Thick description enables detailed and comprehensive descriptions of the narratives of individuals, providing a deeper understanding of the cultural context of the participants. Beyond the researcher's interpretations, incorporating direct quotes from participants about their stories of sexual harassment in the hospitality industry ensures that the voices of female employees are clearly heard. Detailing participants' emotions, feelings, and actions increases the potential for readers to assess the degree to which the findings can be applied to their own contexts. Preserving the participants' voices in their narratives also allowed me to fidelity to the research context.

As is common in qualitative research, this study does not seek to produce statistically generalisable information. Instead, the research focuses on exploring, interpreting, and understanding the experience of sexual harassment among female employees working in the hospitality industry. The research findings and conclusions chapters provided a detailed description to increase broader applicability. It is important to note that the findings from this study may not be entirely applicable to all female hospitality employees from different backgrounds and cultures, and this is something that other researchers should be able to make a valid judgment on the transferability of the findings. The transferability of the findings for making possible connections to other hospitality settings and other female hospitality employees is appropriately left to the reader.

Confirmability refers to the researcher's awareness of and reflection on their role, values, and beliefs during the interaction with the studied social world (Saunders et al. 2023; Denzin et al. 2024) as well as their own subjectivity potential bias within

the study. Reflections upon the underlying axiological belief system within the constructivist / interpretivist paradigm and the ontological critical lens adopted were thus critical.

Confirmability is also related to the transparency of the research process by clearly describing how data were collected, analysed, and arrived at the findings in the final document (Jensen 2008). With this aspect, confirmability overlaps with dependability (Jones et al. 2013). The interview guide, the interview process, and how thematic analysis themes were derived were described in this chapter to enhance the research confirmability. The research findings and conclusions have reflected the perspective of the participants who shared their experiences of the phenomenon being studied.

The researcher's pre-existing knowledge and/or experience is an essential resource for the research. This allows the researcher to empathise with the participants; however, it is important for the researcher to recognise the boundaries of their assumptions and to examine their own perceptions because these assumptions strongly influence qualitative research (Holloway and Brown 2012). Reflexivity allowed me to recognise my own biases during the data collection and interpretation of the findings.

Reflexivity is a significant aspect of qualitative research and involves researchers' critical reflection on their preconceptions, actions, feelings, values, and decisions, as well as monitoring their relationships with the participants and their reactions to participants' accounts and actions (Holloway and Galvin 2024). It is a form of self-monitoring reflecting the researcher's involvement in the study during the data collection, analysis, and interpretation stage (Corlett and Mavin 2018).

As Jones et al. (2013) stated, reflexivity in qualitative research means being aware of oneself and one's connection to the research and its processes. It also involves a degree of self-criticism and reflection on the researcher's own assumptions within the cultural, temporal, and spatial context, which enhances the trustworthiness of the research. Rossman and Ralis (2012) acknowledge that every researcher has their unique perspective, shaped by their personal background and directly impacts how

they see the social world. This perspective affects how they analyse, interpret, and report their research.

Self-reflection played a crucial role in ensuring the rigour of this study. My personal experience as a female employee in the hospitality sector and an academic scholar in the same field has shaped the choice of topic and the aims of the study. I have for some time been interested to discover the stories of sexual harassment that women might have encountered and/or witnessed in the hospitality workplace, particularly regarding workplace well-being concerns. My insider perspective, derived from my role as a female employee, allowed me to witness both positive and negative aspects of the sector for female workers.

Through my experiences, I have observed that the tourism and hospitality industry provides significant opportunities for women, both migrants and natives, to advance economically and socially within a country. However, I have also realised that women have more harassment stories and are not willing to share them; they are more often hesitant to speak about it openly. Therefore, I was motivated to explore this research topic thoroughly because my goal was to amplify the voices of female employees in the UK's hospitality sector, whatever their cultural background and experiences.

In this sense, researchers cannot completely exclude themselves from the research process. However, it was significant through the analysis to ensure that priority was given to the participant's voice, and hence my assumptions needed to be placed aside when working with the data. This self-monitoring allowed me to recognise my own assumptions and preconceptions throughout data collection, analysis, and interpretation. For example, the research findings shed light on the sociocultural context of sexual harassment from diverse perspectives shared by participants. The narratives revealed that gendered and societal norms, cultural expectations, power dynamics, and rigid hierarchical structures in various social settings significantly impact the perception and response to sexual harassment behaviours. This was not something that I would have expected to arise. This unexpected revelation emphasises the importance of considering broader sociocultural influences in understanding and addressing sexual harassment. Reporting such findings challenged my own assumptions and provided additional insight into the area. This

awareness has shaped the analysis of results by giving primacy to the participants' voices and perspectives and offering my personal interpretation.

In addition to personal reflexivity, reflexivity in qualitative research should also focus on interpersonal dynamics. Interpersonal reflexivity mainly refers to how power dynamics between the researcher and participants influence the research context, the relationships formed, and the resulting data (Walsh 2003). Although these dynamics are neither universal nor fixed, researchers often hold positions of power relative to participants as the interpreters of their views and arbiters of what is deemed 'valid' data (Olmos-Vega et al. 2023). My insider position within the hospitality industry gave me a deep understanding of the work environment and the systemic issues that might happen. This shared context might have helped research participants feel understood, enabling them to open up about their experiences without needing extensive contextual explanations. On the other hand, those who viewed me primarily as an academic researcher and lecturer or an academic authority may have hesitated to discuss experiences that they deemed unprofessional or inappropriate. Alternatively, they may have felt compelled to provide 'correct' or 'well-articulated' answers, which could have led to suppressing their raw reflections and opinions. Some participants may have avoided discussing certain aspects of their narratives for fear of judgment.

Furthermore, my pre-existing relationship with some participants through my professional network could have introduced both opportunities and challenges. While these pre-existing relationships could have fostered a sense of trust and made initial rapport easier, participants with prior connections to me may have hesitated to discuss negative aspects of their experiences or workplaces, fearing repercussions or breaches of confidentiality. Therefore, participants' willingness to share deeply personal experiences on a sensitive topic depended heavily on the trust and rapport I could establish.

Consequently, I had to consider how these existing relationships, power dynamics and my position in the context shaped my interactions with participants during the interview process. Navigating this dual role required striking a delicate balance between showing empathy and maintaining professional boundaries. By prioritising transparency and trust, I aimed to minimise the influence of power dynamics

between the participants and myself, ensuring their experiences were represented authentically and with respect. Ultimately, this approach not only enriched the research data but also reinforced the ethical responsibility of representing participants' experiences with authenticity and respect.

Limitations of the Research

Although this research provides deep insights into the narratives of female employees working in the hospitality sector, the research has some limitations that should be addressed.

In qualitative research, one of the common limitations is the reliance on participants' recall and their reflective nature during interviews. Dealing with sensitive data could be affected by distortion or memory attrition in testimonies during the interviews (Fasting et al. 2007). In this study, the participants' experiences were not restricted to specific dates, and the time elapsed since the events varied considerably. Some participants in this research recalled events that occurred up to fifteen years in the past, while others referred to instances of sexual harassment that happened just months, a year or a couple of years before the interview date. Although my intention is not to invalidate their experiences, it is important to acknowledge that time could have an impact upon their recollections of experiences. As Jones et al. (2013) emphasise the challenge of establishing truth in qualitative research, given that narratives are deeply rooted in participants' memories and perceptions of events. The key point to understand is that this study does not aim to uncover an absolute truth, but rather to shed light on participants' experiences. The focus is on the truths as perceived and constructed by the research participants.

Narrative inquiry aims to understand individuals' life stories and realities concerning a specific social phenomenon within a particular socio-cultural context constructed by those individuals (Bold 2012). By utilising narrative research, I gained valuable insights into participants' personal experiences on a sensitive subject. Although narratives were shaped through a collaborative dialogue between me and the participants during the interview process, each story was unique and had

its own costs for the individuals after experiencing sexual harassment behaviours. Therefore, it is important to note that this study was carried out with twenty-two participants who had been most affected by workplace sexual harassment and volunteered to be interviewed on a sensitive topic. This could have created participant bias, therefore having an impact on the findings, which is common in qualitative research. Nevertheless, this aligns with the qualitative and inductive research process which seeks in-depth and rich meaning of the subject since the aim of this research was not to generalise.

The reluctance to participate in this research due to the fear of identification could also have impacted the research findings. The sensitive nature of the topic at times presented challenges in finding participants who were open to sharing their experiences with another person. Although necessary steps were taken to ensure participants' confidentiality, some women were put off from participating in the research for fear of being identified. Some participants were not willing to take part in the research at the very beginning of the data collection process, and others (one Italian, one Turkish and one Indian female employee) shared limited experiences about the subject matter due to privacy concerns during the interview. Those participants were hesitant to talk about their experiences of physical sexual harassment, even though they said they had been subjected to it at some point in their working lives. However, they openly shared stories, mostly about verbal and emotional harassment that they had experienced or witnessed. This distinction between the types of harassment behaviours that participants were willing to share might indicate a broader issue concerning the perceived seriousness and social stigma associated with different forms of harassment. Physical harassment, often acknowledged as more traumatic and offensive, carries a heavier stigma in the social environment, making individuals more reluctant to share such experiences. In contrast, verbal and emotional harassment, while still harmful, might be perceived as less severe and, therefore, easier to talk about. This difference emphasises the complexity of addressing workplace harassment comprehensively.

The overlapping nature of different forms of harassment could complicate the understanding of individual experiences, potentially limiting how these experiences are reported. Additionally, categorising these different sexual harassment types into

distinct categories might oversimplify what is, in reality, a complex and intertwined experience. The overlap between different types of harassment behaviours in the findings chapter (Chapters 4, 5 and 6) has been highlighted, and the participants' voices have been preserved through vignettes to demonstrate the complexity of the experience. Considering the sensitivity and complexity of the research subject, meticulous planning and execution of the research process have been prioritised to ensure the integrity of the study, capturing an honest and detailed account of sexual harassment cases in hospitality settings.

Given that this research had a mix of participants who have diverse backgrounds and demographics in terms of age, race, ethnicity, nationality, education level, and migration status, and different experiences with workplace sexual harassment, it would be difficult to assume that all female employees would experience and be affected by it in the same way. A future investigation may consider the inclusion of migrants from inside and outside Europe and those native to the United Kingdom to enhance the issue of validity. Although the sampling strategy for this study was clearly through out, it is important to note that people's experiences exhibit heterogeneous tendencies, even within the same or similar cultural groups and social contexts. These differences may be more salient amongst women who come from different cultural backgrounds and demographics.

The language barrier was also noted as one of the limitations of the research. While English was the lingua franca for all participants and the researcher, it was not the native language for the majority of participants, with the exception of four British participants. During the interviews, some participants struggled to express their thoughts and feelings in English, encountering difficulties in translating from their native language. Some words and expressions did not have exact equivalents in English, potentially causing a loss of meaning when translated from a native language. This thus could have influenced the conveyed thoughts and feelings, leading to a loss of the original and deeper meaning present in their native language.

Conclusion

This chapter presents in detail the methodological approach employed in this research. An interpretivist-inductive qualitative research design was adopted for data collection through the use of narrative inquiry. Twenty-two in-depth interviews were conducted with female employees working in the hospitality sector in order to generate an understanding of their experience of sexual harassment in hospitality settings. The participants were selected based on their relevance to the research topic using purposive and snowball sampling techniques. The data were analysed using thematic analysis, resulting in three key themes: *being harassed in the workplace*; *the perceived impact of workplace sexual harassment*; and *ignoring vs. confronting: the organisational response to workplace sexual harassment*. A thematic framework (see Table 3.4, p.80) has been produced to illustrate the main themes and sub-themes developed through analysis and interpretation. The chapter also discussed the ethical considerations, issues of trustworthiness, and the research limitations. Findings from the empirical research are presented and discussed in the following three chapters, where the structure is true to the narrative form.

Before moving onto the findings chapters, it is pertinent to signpost the readers to the structure of the results and the subsequent chapters of the thesis. The results derived from the analysis of the data represent the participants' collated responses in order to share with the reader the story of sexual harassment in hospitality settings. It was my intention to take the readers on a journey to explore female employees' experiences and perceptions of sexual harassment in the hospitality sector and its perceived impact on individuals. In addition, participants' narratives provided insight into the complex dynamics of organisational responses to workplace sexual harassment in the hospitality industry, where sexual harassment towards women occurred. It is important to note that the number of sub-themes within each theme does not suggest or influence the relevance of that theme. Instead, each theme was identified based on the interpretation of the data at the time of analysis.

Table 3.4 The Thematic and Sub-Thematic Framework

Theme	Sub-Theme	Chapter
Being Harassed in the Workplace	Gendered Spaces and Perspectives of Labour	4
	Perception of Harassment: Home country versus Host country	
	Types of Harassment Experienced (Verbal Harassment, Physical Harassment, Emotional/Psychological Harassment	
The Perceived Impact of Workplace Sexual Harassment	The Immediate Impact of Harassment: (Impact on Individual Well-being, Impact on Occupational Well-being)	5
	The Long-term Impact of Harassment (Impact on Intimate Relationships, Impact on Career and Financial Ramifications)	
Ignoring vs. Confronting: The Organisational Response to Workplace Sexual Harassment	Confronting Harassment Cases	6
	Ignoring Harassment Cases	

CHAPTER 4: Being Harassed in the Workplace

Introduction

As discussed in Chapter 2, sexual harassment is a prevalent problem in the hospitality workplace, and female employees are more likely to be subjected to some form of sexually harassing behaviour by people from within an organisation or outside an organisation. While some social movements (e.g., MeToo and Time's Up) put a new light on sexual harassment in workplaces through social and mainstream media in order to raise awareness of the severity of the issue, women in hospitality organisations are still confronted with harassment behaviours. Besides, many women still hesitate to share their experiences of sexual harassment or do not talk with anyone, and very few of them share their personal stories (ILO 2020) and/or report incidents of sexual harassment in their working lives. Therefore, this chapter seeks to understand the linkages between sexual harassment and the hospitality industry and how female employees experience and perceive it.

Through the individual narratives of twenty-two research participants, this chapter presents the process of *"being harassed in the workplace"* with three related sub-themes of the thematic framework. Firstly, *gendered spaces and perspectives* of labour are identified. Secondly, the perception of the harassment with regard to *the home country and the host country* of narratives is discussed. Thirdly, the *types of harassment* experienced are explored in relation to existing typologies for understanding harassment in the hospitality workplace.

The thematic diagram below (Figure 4) offers an overview of the themes and sub-themes of this chapter, but it should not be interpreted as hierarchal in nature; equal emphasis is placed on each sub-theme. It is also acknowledged that there is a cross-over between the sub-themes when exploring being harassed in hospitality settings.
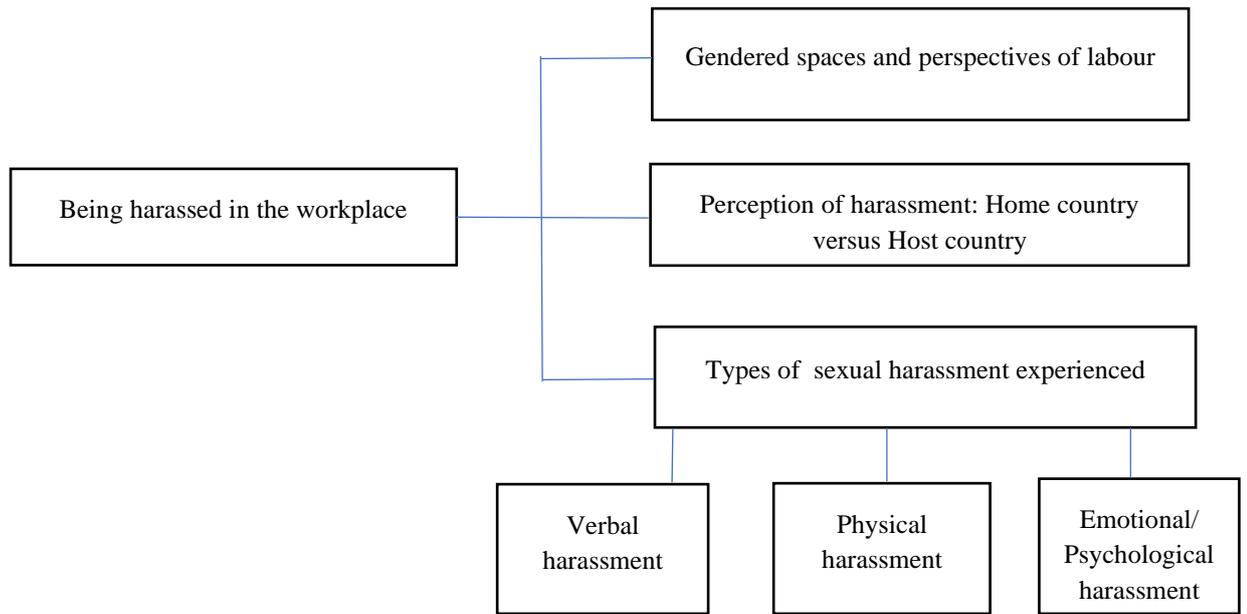
Figure 4.1: Thematic diagram for Chapter 4 (Source: Original)

Gendered Spaces and Perspectives of Labour

> "*...being a woman in this sector (hospitality) is tough...*"
>
> Daphne
>
> "*...workplace harassment...either you live with it or leave it.*"
>
> Hazel

Gender inevitably shapes individuals' lives, including women's experiences in work settings (Adkins 1995; Duffy et al. 2015). Jenkins (2008, p.83) states the significance of gender identification in human lives:

> "...all human communities and local views of the world are massively organised in gender terms. This is a collective matter. Gender is one of the most consistent identificatory themes in human history, and one of the most pervasive classificatory principles –

arguably the most pervasive – with massive consequences for the life chances and experiences of whole categories of people."

Gender is a complex and mostly controversial concept (Edley and Wetherell 2008) that encompasses a spectrum of identities, behaviours and expressions beyond the biological sex (Charles 2014; Calás et al. 2014). It refers to socially and culturally constructed behaviours, roles, expectations and norms with a particular gender in a given culture, including an organisational culture (Britton 2008; Acker 2012). Therefore, for the purpose of this study, gender is not considered only in terms of biological differences between women and men. It is considered a holistic notion, including gendered norms for women and men that are socially constructed and performed (Gherardi and Poggio 2002; Calás et al. 2014).

Since gender is rooted in people's experiences, social interactions and societal structures, the stereotypes and perceptions of women and men can produce different points of privilege and disadvantage in social settings, including our working lives (Dashper 2019; Opara et al. 2019). These gendered environments thus shape gendered hospitality practices and workplaces around the world (Morgan and Pritchard 2019; Alrawadieh et al. 2022). The narratives referred to two primary relationships regarding gender in which harassment occurred: the gendered hospitality practices and gendered perspectives of work. The findings align with research that acknowledges the persistence of a gendered division of work, occupational segregation, and power inequalities that give rise to disparities between female and male employees in the hospitality workplace in which sexual harassment behaviours can mostly occur (Pritchard 2014; Kensbock et al. 2015; Costa et al. 2017; Mooney et al. 2017; Morgan and Pritchard 2019).

The journey of the research participants in the hospitality industry was varied, and they had unique trajectories in their work life due to individual choices, circumstances and external factors. As the representation of women for this study mostly consisted of migrants coming from different parts of the world (except for four British women), they had different cultural backgrounds and sector experiences working at different levels across various hospitality organisations. Some started their hospitality career at an early age (17-18 years old) in their home country and proceeded in the UK, while others started to work in hospitality when

they moved to the UK for postgraduate study or work reasons in their late twenties. Each woman had a different amount of experience with the hospitality industry, as some of them have worked/been working for one year. On the other side, there was a front office manager with 25 years of experience in the industry. What is interesting is that each participant had a different story to tell about workplace sexual harassment, and these stories reflected the challenging aspects of being a woman in hospitality work.

Throughout the conversations with the participants, the existence of gendered roles and divisions of hospitality work and its consequent assumptions was the central topic, representing a constant throughout their work lives. Most participants believed that the division of work based on gender is a common and unavoidable practice in hospitality, which can trigger workplace sexual harassment. They highlighted how the common stereotypical allocation of work according to gender is considered predominantly either feminine or masculine in a hotel.

> *"There is a big hierarchy in certain departments, especially in the kitchen. When I was in the kitchen department, it was male-dominated. So, all my chefs and my kitchen managers are all men. They were in their 50s and 60s. There were a couple of female chefs, but they were never the kitchen managers. So, all my managers in the kitchen were men in their 50s-60s, and they had sort of a big hierarchy in the kitchen. It is like running a military. You have the head chef as your general or commander. Then, he has his colonels and captains. I am maybe somewhere as a lieutenant of someone's."*
> (Evelyn)

As a female member of the kitchen team, Evelyn expressed that the hospitality industry predominantly considers the kitchen department a male-dominated environment. She stated how having gendered allocation and roles in the department could be challenging to find herself as one of the few people on the team in terms of 'navigating a sea of men'. She commented that this sort of male-dominated environment could create a 'feeling of pressure to conform to male norms' in order to fit in by emphasising, "*I am maybe somewhere as a lieutenant of someone's*", and she added:

"To be honest, it is very hard for a woman to be part of them as they (male colleagues) have their own kind of clicks to carry on the stuff. So, you should align with the kitchen rules and your colleagues' rules in order to fit in, which could be challenging sometimes".

Ely and Meyerson (2000) elaborate on the lack of women's representation in male-dominated settings, especially in some strict hierarchical structures, which leads to emotional strain on female employees, and they might be compelled to suppress their actual personalities, behaviour or values to fit into the molded workplace norms. Therefore, suppression of authenticity may occur at work to maintain their social connections as a particular pressure or power dynamics to fit in organisational norms (Pilgeram 2007). These could be confirming the gender norms in the workplace, adopting more masculine attitudes and behaviours to fit in and be taken seriously by colleagues from the opposite sex (Berdahl et al. 2018). Moreover, this involves being prudent in demeanours and actions in order not to expose unwanted attention; remaining silent about their identities, values, and beliefs with the fear of rejection, judgement, conflict and retaliation; and pretending to agree with a decision or concept that is not genuinely endorsed due to the awareness of power disparity or fear of possible adverse outcomes from expressing disagreement (Kligyte et al. 2013).

Although the pressure to conform to workplace norms and practices and suppression of authenticity can have various consequences for individuals, it is evident that working in a kitchen as a woman under a male-dominated hierarchy can have a negative impact on a woman's individual experiences and coping strategies. This situation was echoed by Evelyn in terms of being cautious regarding attitudes and behaviours while giving service:

"...Kitchen...always hectic and male-occupied. As a woman, we always have to be very very careful because it is very hierarchical and gender-biased. And, I would say that there is always a field where your colleagues can come in and try to flirt with you. I mean, women always are and will always be in a disadvantageous situation in which you have to be very careful because you are always giving service. So, if you give too much nice and friendly service, people

> *then think you are flirting with them, and they try to take advantage of you."*

This also created occupational stress as Evelyn stated: *"They all have sort of attitudes. A department full of men. You should always be careful about what you are saying and doing, which gives extra tension when you are working."*

Alice similarly commented on the disadvantages of the positions female workers face in the housekeeping department. Unlike the kitchen, some of the departments in hospitality, such as reception, housekeeping, food services, human resources and sales, are mostly occupied by female employees, which is considered predominantly feminine work (Mooney et al. 2017). She stated how a female-dominant environment fosters certain conditions and behaviours towards women from their customers:

> *"We were all women. Almost 10 years ago, all shifts were being run by women employees in our department. But now, you can see male workers in the housekeeping department, especially in big hotels, big chain hotels. Their number is still low compared to women, but they are. This is good, really good. If you have a shift with one of your male co-workers, who is a decent colleague, you feel more secure than you are alone. You know, room floors or guest bedrooms are the isolated and silent areas in a hotel, and some of your guests have a perception that they can make inappropriate, sexual offers to the workers."*

In a similar way, Daphne, who used to work in the housekeeping department as a manager, agreed with how the housekeeping work creates an environment in which some customers and some male colleagues would be encouraged to deploy harassment behaviours, commenting:

> *"Housekeepers, for example, are considered in the lowest position in the hotel. The male perpetrator would think that 'nobody will ever see me, nobody will ever notice' because they work alone in a close environment (hotel rooms). So, mostly female workers receive*

attention, sexual attention, and the perpetrator is trying to touch you, to grab you..."

In addition, she noted this setting could perceived as a sort of *'playground for adults'* by some male colleagues, which leads to misbehaviour and harassment, and adding: *"...come on, it is a little bit of fun while we are working."* She also stated that *'it was just a joke'* was the common realisation used by individuals who engaged in inappropriate conduct. Although this perception is not representative of all men (perpetrators) as individuals' attitudes and acts differ widely, some male employees may perceive sexual harassment behaviours as trivialisation or joke. Therefore, they do not grasp the harmful nature of their reactions that can cause serious emotional and psychological impacts on victims. From the narratives, it was clear that some private working areas, such as hotel rooms, have the potential for workplace sexual harassment. Housekeeping work is generally held by women. Therefore, the hotel bedroom is mostly associated with 'a potential place for sexual activity' (Guerrier and Adib 2000,) and some housekeepers were afraid to work alone in the guests' room (Onsoyen et al. 2009).

The isolated areas of the hotel, such as guest rooms and corridors, can make female employees more vulnerable to harassment behaviours as there may be fewer witnesses or colleagues nearby to provide support or step in. There is also a dilemma working with colleagues in this space, as Alice highlighted: *"...If you have a shift with one of your male co-workers, who is a decent colleague, you feel more secure than you are alone."* Working with a *'decent'* male colleague during the shift could be an advantage for females to feel more secure, but there is a potential risk likelihood of exposure to inappropriate and unwanted behaviours from colleagues who try to act in an unethical and harmful manner. Therefore, in certain departments dominated by women (such as in housekeeping or food services), employees are in a disadvantageous position compared to their male counterparts, as they run a potential risk of being exposed to harassment behaviours from male colleagues or customers. This makes women employees alert for any negative circumstances that might occur.

As Camilla indicated that there was always a situation that she needed to be prepared for and pretend to be *'fine'* for unexpected and unwanted behaviours from the opposite sex: *"This is the hardest part of the job you need to find a quick solution to get away with and carry on."* Her reproach was evident in her stern tone during the interview when addressing the reckless customers' approach towards her:

> *"I am taking more inappropriate invitations from guests than my male colleagues in the reception. Mostly, they (customers) are asking me to go to their* room."

Similarly, Dora (front office supervisor) noted:

> *"We all (front office employees) are ready for any irritating and disgusting approach from customers. I have seen some guests who were flirtatious and making dirty jokes to some of my female colleagues."*

When gendered organisational settings are interconnected with the features of work and the nature of service delivery in the sector, sexual harassment can be seen more often in operational roles (Kensbock et al. 2015), either masculine or feminine role settings. In commercial and contemporary hospitality settings, staff, who are working in operational roles, are generally considered to be of lower status than customers; therefore, they could be undervalued by management and customers (Nimri et al. 2020). Emily explained how such sexual harassment from her boss to female workers was common and how they coped with it while she was working as a waitress in a restaurant early in her career:

> *"...My boss was called a womaniser. He was trying to get close to female colleagues of mine and myself as well, and we were trying to kind of push him back. When we did this, he started to treat us like in a really bad way; he was shouting at us, trying to find our mistake, and he could easily find a reason to be shouting at us."*

Chloe (barmaid) commented similarly on the exploitative interactions by customers on the job: *"...sometimes customers can treat barmaids disrespectfully, which can be unbearable, but you must be strong enough to overcome the issue."* She believed that the intense interactions on the job and gender differences create negative experiences and inequality. When such behaviours are accepted as an organisational and/or sectoral culture of practices, it can create a working atmosphere where women are unlikely to accept and tolerate inappropriate behaviours throughout their careers. She stated:

> *"You should always interact with people and have a chit-chat in the hospitality, but I do not see myself as a woman working here in the long term trying to deal with silly behaviours."*

Alice had similar concerns about the experience of harassment by customers and some colleagues while she was working both the front desk and the food and beverage department in hotels. Although she had decent memories and experience about her job in hospitality, she did not prefer to stay in the sector throughout her professional career due to the high level of social interaction within the hotels that creates a more susceptible environment to harassment:

> *"...I cannot call every experience negative I have. There are also lots of pleasant memories. If the interaction of the people (team and customer) is positive, then I think it is rewarding for me. I believe that there is a high level of interaction within the team and with customers. It is a people industry. You never walk alone, you are constantly part of a team. So, you can eventually see yourself in a position that you never want to. Someone can touch you, offer you a date or tell you sexual jokes, and many more...I think every woman in hospitality goes through something like this. This poor quality of the job was getting too stressed and leading me to the decision to take a break and look for different opportunities."*

Restaurants and bars are widely perceived as places where unwanted sexual behaviours are anticipated and tolerated (Woudby and Poulston 2017). There is a

persistent view that restaurant and bar employees should be outgoing, personable, and energetic (Argusa et al. 2002), which can potentially stimulate harassment behaviours. Similarly, Evelyn stated that social/big customer groups also had a tendency to show power over female employees, and this power encouraged negative pack behaviours. Harassment might become more distressing when customers are in social groups and consuming alcohol:

> *"...Unfortunately, many of us know that when you are working in the industry (hospitality), you always get unwanted attention in some ways as people expect to flirt with you. The more friendly you are, the more attention you get. Because you are a woman, there is always a chance of you getting harassed by customers who are tipsy or drunk. And you know, especially when they come to a big group...They called the lad culture they would gang up and then try to tease you, flirt with you...If you think that they are harassing you, they always say; 'Oh, I am just joking. I am just playing around with you. Why can you not take a joke? Oh, you are so serious, or you are so bitchy, or you are so stuck up'..."*

Evelyn added that she did not experience harassing behaviours from female customers. This aggressive and rude behaviour typically came from male customers. When the service provider is expected to act in a friendly manner towards customers but then refuses some of the customers's requests, it may lead to the customer becoming angered and offended by this change in behaviour, potentially resulting in an aggressive response, such as '*Why can you not take a joke? Oh, you are so serious, or you are so bitchy, or you are so stuck up'*. It is clear that this result stems from the tolerance of customer (mis) behaviour in the hospitality industry. This is often associated with efforts to ensure customer satisfaction, make guests feel at home, and accommodate customer behaviour within the mentality of "customer care" ideology. These norms and culture of hospitality may easily encourage some customers to approach the hospitality staff in an inappropriate way. They may also genuinely assume that this sort of interaction with staff is acceptable, lighthearted, and tolerated as being 'banter' or just 'a joke' in hospitality settings. When this ideology and assumption are

combined with alcohol consumption in a social atmosphere, customers may have more right to behave freely in an abusive manner to restaurant and bar employees. According to Murray (2015), the vast majority of employees in bars have experienced or witnessed one or more behaviours of sexual harassment in their working life. This situation is similar for restaurants, clubs and hotels (Minnotte and Legerski 2019; Baltag et al. 2021; Worke et al. 2021). One of the reasons for harassment cases in the hospitality industry is related to the customers' perception that there is no need to behave professionally towards staff at restaurants, bars, clubs and hotels, although they would not pursue the same actions and behaviours in other environments (Topping 2018). This is also closely related to the organisational climate for sexual harassment, where customers can take advantage of the power involved in customer-employee relationships (Yagil 2008; Wolkowitz et al. 2013). The power facilitates a situation in which customers pay for service, creating a status differential between the servers and those served (Waudby and Poulston 2017). Hence, the female participants in this study were keenly aware of the ongoing issue of sexual harassment, which is an unwelcome and unacceptable aspect of their line of work. Hazel (the assistant manager of the F&B department in a hotel) described this as a natural consequence of being a woman at work because gender role is more dominant during service delivery. She found the climate of hospitality work tough for women if they wanted to survive in it. She also emphasised giving a reaction to harassment behaviours needs a sort of ability to deal with it in order not to lose her job. Although she found workplace harassment behaviours unpleasant and uncomfortable, she commented on the consequences of it as either '*trying to survive in the industry*' or '*if not, moving away from the sector*' and therefore normalised and acceptable norms of the sector:

> "*This sector is so demanding. As a woman, you should make many sacrifices to manage your life in hospitality work. And, there is no mercy in it. If you can not, you are easily replaceable. You should know how to manage when you get attention from one of your colleagues in your team or from customers, which is not easy indeed. Mostly, you are just giving reactions to them to protect yourself from more serious cases. To be honest, there is no perfect guideline for this. Because many people going into the hospitality industry do not*

know what sexual harassment is - When it happens, either you live
with it or leave it."

When sexual harassment happens in any male-dominated (masculine) and/or female-dominated (feminine) work settings in hospitality, it is clear that participants showed resilience in order to deal with it. The narratives indicate that women were in disadvantageous positions either in the masculine environment (e.g. kitchen) or feminised roles (e.g. housekeeping, reception, and food services) in hospitality organisations. The impact of sexual harassment on hospitality women workers and the organisational response to this will be discussed in the following chapters, however, these extracts highlight an explicit power imbalance between the two genders as to *'being a woman'* can somehow legitimise the perceptions of objectification of women in hospitality.

The participants of this study highlighted that there were distinct perceptions of women and men in the hospitality workplace. They stated that women employees were considered as objects of sexual desire by customers and some male colleagues. Although the contemporary hospitality workplace has evolved significantly, gender stereotypes and gendered perspectives of roles in organisational settings persist in various forms (Campos-Soria et al. 2011). The conception of power inequality between employee and customer or employee and employee often prevails, when considering the gendered hierarchies and power dynamics within the workplace. Power dynamics in organisations may occur in interactions on the job between colleagues who are at different or the same levels of power and between employees and customers (Acker 2012). Given the power imbalance in terms of gender and occupational hierarchy, gendered asymmetry in job distribution and roles in hospitality organisations can trigger 'sexuality' either as a joke for exploitative purposes or explicit harassment. Therefore, Lucas and Deery (2004) state that power imbalance facilitates sexual harassment, and on the other hand, sexual harassment reinforces power inequality in business.

Furthermore, power dynamics alone do not suffice to explain the persistence of sexual harassment behaviour in hospitality. Whilst it often plays an enabling function legitimising and triggering sexual harassment in different contexts, the

tradition of sexualised and objectified perspectives towards women encourages workplace sexual harassment (Wijesinghe 2017). The majority of the participants believed that most female employees encounter sexual harassment in their professional hospitality career, whether facing mild or severe cases. Some of them stated that while they might not have personally been subjected to harassment behaviours, they have either witnessed or been informed about it through accounts from their friends. One of the factors regarding the gendered perspective of labour is deemed the result of historical/traditional gender roles and expectations from women in hospitality by employing women's sexuality and displaying attributes such as empathy and caring.

The manner in which many hospitality organisations explicitly focus on the appearance and the dress codes of employees tacitly or overtly encourages sexualisation and, therefore, harassment behaviours towards female employees. Daphne said they were required to wear a uniform as frontline staff in the hotel. She added that her managers believed that this was a significant aspect of representing and promoting the company's name and image. This was the sexualised way of pleasing customers and improving business, requiring or requesting employees to wear provocative clothes. She echoed:

> *"There is an expectation for us should be attractive or presentable. You are wearing skirts, for example, they stare at your legs, you are always body figure for people, and they just eat you with their eyes."*

Daphne's experience underscored Daisy's quote regarding the influence of clothing choices on the likelihood of harassment:

> *"Customers... commenting on my boobs. This happens quite a lot from male customers. We (female employees) were wearing low-cut tops at the bar, and I would get nasty comments all night."*

Dress codes, uniforms and having a good appearance are important aspects that favourably appeal to customers' senses and enhance one's attractiveness (Szymanski and Mikorski 2016; Chiang and Saw 2018). The emphasis on looks and

physical attractiveness can serve as a catalyst for inappropriate customer behaviour and sexual harassment.

Besides the dress codes of female employees accentuating their objectified roles, women in hospitality settings were expected to show more care, warmth, empathy and friendliness towards customers than their male counterparts. This, in turn, made frontline female employees spend a considerable amount of time dealing with customers, rendering them more vulnerable to experiencing harassment behaviours, as Dora indicated:

> *"When I was working in India in a resort chain, we had like a balance of female and male colleagues in the front office department in terms of number. However, they (supervisors and managers) always wanted a girl (a young woman) to stand in the front to attract people. Also, we (female employees) were always taking customers' complaints in the first place than male colleagues as our manager had thought that we were very good at caring about customers' complaints and problems inherently and making them calm quickly. This is really odd...Actually, I felt really odd. Because you are a girl and would attract more people, which I was not happy with. Because nobody likes to be treated as an object."*

The discussion above is a reflection on some of the continuities and disjunctions of the roles of women in the contemporary hospitality context focused on gendered spaces and perceptions of labour. As participants stressed, a gendered division of work and gendered expectations and perspectives in hospitality organisations are deeply entrenched. This is an existing and pervasive phenomenon throughout hospitality organisations (Gebbels et al. 2020). Certain aspects of the traditional role women played in hospitality persist in modern hospitality environments. Feminised roles, such as politeness, caring, empathy, warmth, and women's sexuality, are still subjected to common demands of hospitality labour (Good and Cooper 2016). Participants experienced the structure of gender roles and perspectives through their hospitality positions. The existence of a gendered division of work could give rise to a noticeable disparity and inequality between

women and men in the hospitality workplace (Pritchard 2014). In the gendered workspaces in hospitality, either feminine (housekeeping, front office, food and drink services) or masculine (kitchen), sexual harassment towards female employees was salient and prevalent. The roots of the practice of hospitality show asymmetrical power relations embedded within employee-employee as well as employee-customer roles (Wijesinghe 2017). Power differentiation between the two genders may explain why victims of sexual harassment are mostly women. In terms of the relationship between employees, as Pilcher and Whelehan (2004) emphasise, gendered spaces and expectations give male employees advantages over females in working settings, and sexual harassment incidents generally occur in mixed-gender working environments where there is power inequality and gender imbalance (Leskinen et al. 2011). This male-dominant working atmosphere and traditional gendered roles make women employees vulnerable to some form of harassment behaviours from their male co-workers and managers. Regarding the power relations with customers, the long-standing nature of hospitality work emphasising 'the mentality of meeting customers' needs to make them happy and satisfied at all costs' exacerbates the power hierarchy and can induce sexual harassment.

Considering those who experienced or witnessed sexual harassment, the above section supports the work of other researchers and proposes that women are the typical target of sexual harassment behaviours from male colleagues and customers in hospitality work settings in relation to the gendered characteristics and perspectives of work as well as the nature of service delivery in departments and organisations (McDonald 2012; Segovia-Pérez et al. 2019; Opoku et al. 2024). The gendered aspects of work reflected deeply ingrained stereotypes and expectations in any hospitality organisation. Therefore, 'being a woman' prompts participants to take decisive action against sexual harassment in hospitality, as Hazel stated: either *'accept and be strong to cope with it or leave the sector'*.

Perception of Harassment: home country versus host country

Across all participants, perception toward harassment in the hospitality workplace has been displayed in terms of power dynamics, sectoral characteristics and gendered norms within organisational and social settings. However, two participants, Grace and Layla, extensively elaborated on how sexual harassment behaviours could be identified and perceived differently in one's home country versus the host country. They considered traditional, cultural, societal, and hierarchical norms, as well as identity categories, throughout their journey in hospitality. Unlike other participants, Grace and Layla offered more comparative perspectives, highlighting the diversity of experiences within the hospitality sector in terms of these varying norms. From their stories, some long extracts have been presented in order not to disrupt the original flow and the structural and semantic integrity of narratives.

Grace's story

Grace is 29 years old and is working as a supervisor in a hotel bar; she has been in the hospitality sector since she was a child. She was born and raised in Alicante, Spain where she grew up in a close-knit, middle-class family. Her grandmother was a significant role model for her described as the heart and soul of the family. Grace learned from her grandmother how to ensure comfort to their guests as she was renting rooms (holiday apartments) during the summer season. She described her grandmother as full of kindness, and her dedication to serving their guests left an indelible mark on her memories. She was her role model. As she grew older, she began to assist her grandmother in hosting tourists in the holiday apartment. Her professional life in hospitality started when she went to university at the age of 18 to pursue a career in tourism management. She was please to set out on a journey that would take her to some of Spain's big chain hotels, and she added:

> *"My very first job in hospitality, I mean a professional one, was in a restaurant, which was close to where I used to live. I was a waitress on a part-time basis being a university student in Girona. I was earning a good amount of money, though. I mean, as a student, the*

amount of money I would earn was enough to look after myself. Since then, I worked in a couple of restaurants as a waitress, some nice fine dining ones and well-known hotels as well, but mostly worked in hotel bars as a bartender, and I was a bar supervisor in my last job in a hotel in Valencia. Anyway, I moved to the UK six years ago, I mostly worked in bars and hotel bars, too. Next month, I am becoming an assistant manager of this hotel's bar."

Even though she came from a family background where she was familiar with hospitality jobs, she conversely reflected on how initially she failed to have the backing or support of her father as he believed bars to be *'not a good environment for a woman to be part of an employee'* and she stated:

"When I started to work in bars, my dad did not support me working there. He said, 'You are twenty and working in a bar full of men watching football. Is this what you want?' From his point of view, I could have worked in different hospitality places, not needed to be in a bar full of men because he thinks people are going to treat you badly because you are a woman."

Steinfeldt et al. (2012) refer to the gender-role socialisation process and explain how attitudes, behaviour, and beliefs can be shaped by societal messages and expectations about what it means to be female and male. The fact that Grace's choice of being in the bar environment demonstrates how the construction of the gendered perspective of labour (femininity and masculinity) can be shaped by the dominant ideologies of gender and society and are therefore played out within the hospitality setting. Although she was enthusiastic about her job, she stated the challenges of being a woman in the hospitality, supported by some harassment examples in the bar:

"I love my job. I love every bit of it, even though it is really like fast-going work. You know, this is the bar atmosphere and people (customers) come here (bars) to enjoy, to have fun and relax. The challenges were numerous to enable customer comfort and to create

unforgettable moments for them. You know, it is a part of our job to keep the good times for the customer after a long day. However, if you are working in a bar and you are a woman, you know, sometimes you see a couple of people, and they can try things with you. It always happens because you are a woman. This also depends on whether you do this job in a bar or restaurant. If you are a waitress, everything is more easy-going than in a bar, but if you work in a bar, people then try to do more things. They can try to approach you in a different way, in a more intimate way. This always happens like people are more touchy or trying to be intimate with you. This sometimes causes problems between customers and employees if they (customers) get drunk. They really think that they can do what they want. This could be a fight between customers at the bar, which is pretty much possible or some drunk customers trying to flirt with bartenders, for example, 'Oh... I love your make-up today, you look so sexy' or 'Do you have a boyfriend over?' or ask for your phone number or 'Can I get your number or give my number?', then offer you 'Let's have a good time when you off'. Things like that... I also have a story with one of my colleagues when I was in Spain. She was quite charming and was around my age. I have seen it with my own eyes happening in front of me when I was working with her that night on the rota. We had an obsessive customer who was staying in the hotel, and almost every night, he was coming to the bar. And suddenly, she just said, 'Ohh, you know, this guy again. I do not want to serve him. Can you serve him?' she asked me. I said, 'Why? What happened? She said, 'I do not want to do it because he is going to harass me. I think he likes me. He is a troublesome customer' And I said, 'Ok, ok, I will do it'. I was like to him, ' Oh, she is busy now', then the customer said, 'I want her now', I said again, 'She is busy now, you either get service from me or from nobody'.

Grace expressed that the bar environment is not an easy place to work as a woman. She experienced some form of verbal harassment from the customers. She had to frequently deal with unwanted advances and interactions. Bars are often considered

an environment of social interaction and relaxation where sexual harassment can be perceived as a viable action by some men, especially by men intoxicated by alcohol (Mellgren et al. 2018). This environment contributes to the culture of masculinity and sexism, therefore, unwanted sexual advances toward women occur (Graham et al. 2017). The presence of alcohol is one of the main reasons that different types of sexual harassment against women employees can occur on a regular basis (Kavanaugh 2013). Given the pervasiveness of harassment in social drinking settings, research indicates that these types of intimate interactions are often acknowledged by men as normal (Thompson and Crocco 2008) and something that could be accepted and/or tolerated or sometimes normalised by female employees at a certain point (Brooks 2011). Although Grace referred to customer behaviour as unpleasant, aversive and abusive, she acknowledged that it was more likely to be pervasive and perceived as an expected pattern of behaviour due to the distinctive characteristics of bars, including a high volume of alcohol consumption in a vibrant and highly energetic social atmosphere.

Grace was not happy when she got unwanted advances from men, and her colleague was not either. Grace recognised the signs of harassing behaviours, approached the customer in a strict way and refused the service to him. She said: *"I do not appreciate getting unwanted attention or sexual comments, but when I get it, my way is to ignore it in the first place, then get an action. This depends on who you are and how bad the situation can be. Because some people enjoy male attention. I think it is really difficult to say how you might react and be affected "* In essence, the issue is further complicated and disputable because different reactions could be given based on the personal characteristics of women, the severity of harassment behaviour, and the acceptance level of the situation by women. Even though women would regard all of the harassing behaviours negatively, the understanding of female employees (the target/victim) approach to this issue is less well-developed and needs to be explored in detail (Graham et al. 2017). According to Fairchild (2010), individual perceptions, perspectives, and differences might lead women to interpret behaviour as harassment and react to it differently in social settings. In other words, some women may view certain behaviours as compliments and tolerate or accept them, while others may see any harassing behaviours as an invasion of their personal space, depending on the context of the situation (Sue

2010). Neither Grace nor her colleague likes to receive attention from male customers. However, Grace mentioned in the extract, some female employees might be pleased with the male attention during work. She recalled that another female colleague of hers in Spain was overfriendly and she thought that a bit of harmless attention could make the shift more fun:

> *"She was generally cheerful and full of beans. If I remember correctly, she worked with us during the summer, and she was like, 'Do not worry about me. I know how to keep things professional. We are not here to find a date, but a little bit of attention would not hurt anybody. It makes the shift more fun'. For me, that sounds like a headache. I just want to do my job and go home but. Yes, she did not put herself in a difficult situation, nothing serious happened but it could have been...Anyway, I am not here to entertain customers, I am here to make drinks and to serve them by setting boundaries. I told you I love my job, and not every guy is a creep. You just need to know how to handle them. When they (customers) are crossing the line, I call the shots if it is not a serious case."*

Whilst the severity of the attempt is the main concern of sexual harassment, Fairchild (2010) states that some elements need to be elucidated about what contextual effects and variables influence the perception of harassment by individuals. These elements are gender, demographics (age, marital status, occupation) of the perpetrator and the victim/target, attractiveness of the perpetrator, the effect of power and attractiveness (for both harasser and victim), time of the day, whether the victim/target and the perpetrator are alone or with friends and the target's emotions, fears and behaviour that might affect one's perception of sexual harassment. Apart from these factors, based on the narrative above, people's characteristics and personalities might also influence the likelihood of engaging in behaviours that may be perceived as harassing behaviour or not. Therefore, individuals may interpret and approach similar events differently due to potential variables. This might be validating in bar settings where much of the focus is on social interaction and physical attractiveness. This could also support other hospitality environments (hotels, restaurants, casinos, etc.), considering the

connection between female employees' experiences and perceptions of sexual harassment in terms of individual and contextual variables that may affect the reactions. In the narrative above, it can be easily seen that Grace was passionate about her job at the bar, she accepted all norms and characteristics of bar settings despite its challenges, she experienced and witnessed some form of harassing behaviour, and she had her own way and strategy to stop and/or respond unwanted attention in this setting. In another case, some people might enjoy receiving attention from male customers and view it positively, while others may respond directly or aggressively to unwanted attention. This could even result in some female employees deciding to leave the workplace altogether.

Given the individual differences and perceptions towards harassing behaviour, not surprisingly, sexual harassment has been identified and perceived differently between one's home country and the host country, influenced by cultural norms and values and migrant identity. When Grace moved to the UK for work, she behaved more carefully in order to integrate into the work environment. The language barrier was one of the biggest challenges for her, especially understanding some of the nuances, when communicating with customers and colleagues, which can affect her job performance. This could also lead to difficulties in understanding which behaviours are harassment or not. This might have caused stress for her until she adapted to the new system, work environment and culture. In Spain, since she would not face this particular language barrier, her communications were more seamless, comfortable and effective in order to navigate the unwanted approach towards her, as she mentioned below:

> *"First of all, I must say that I am not English and coming from abroad. Being in a country where you do not really know all the rules and you are always like a foreigner, and even though you are speaking their language, you are still nothing worth to them. It is hard to be in a different country, hard to be apart from your family and people who would think best for you. You know, back in my home country, I am used to a more relaxed atmosphere and a more laid-back vibe. Here (in the UK), it is all about professionalism, which took some getting used to... I think that abuse starts when you give a*

lot or when you are misunderstood. For me like, when you see me friendly, that does not mean that you can do whatever you want with me. Because I am friendly and because I am Spanish. When I am in Spain, I can be more direct and persistent if people (customers and team) are bothering me... People always try to approach you in an intimate way. There is no big difference between here and Spain in terms of people's approach. To be honest, as you use your own language, you really know how and where to stop people. I can brush it off easily. As English is not your first language and you are not familiar with the culture, you could not understand things properly, or you did not know what they were trying to say – either verbal abuse, harassment or teasing you. Then, when you are going home and tell your friends about the saying or approach by colleagues or customers, they can say, "Ohh no, they treated you like crap." So, that was a bit weird as I did not understand properly the way of the language they wanted to say. It is frustrating...Here is multicultural. I have been working with different nationalities in the rota. Our manager is Polish, F&B manager is Greek...But I feel like people do not talk too much about it (workplace harassment issues) openly. They prefer to keep quiet and avoid any confrontation. I think no one wants to lose their job. This is what I feel. I prefer to work like in the right manner, and I would not want to do anything wrong and illegal, especially me being in this country as a foreigner and an international person, I prefer doing everything what laws allow me."

It is critical to acknowledge that language barriers and cultural differences can cause a high level of misunderstanding and uncertainty in communications in the workplace (Malik et al. 2017), and in the perception of harassing behaviours as well. Language is acknowledged as a fundamental symbol that constructs a cultural identity for each community (Dawson et al. 2011). When people come from different nationalities and cultural backgrounds and also interact with each other, there might be a lack of knowledge and understanding in both verbal and non-verbal communication styles, as emphasised by Devine et al. (2007). For example, Grace did not realise when her colleagues or customers approached her in a more intimate

way due to the language barrier. Inappropriate comments/jokes or gestures might be brushed off as cultural misunderstandings or accepted as part of the workplace culture in the UK, making it challenging for her to speak out or seek support. Furthermore, being in a multicultural work environment can lead to more discomfort and stress in communication than when in a person's own familiar environment as they have to manage different nationalities in a more culturally sensitive and inclusive way.

Besides, with a fear of losing her job in the UK, Grace may grapple with communication barriers and cultural nuances that could impact her ability to navigate and report instances of harassment effectively. As a result, she was extremely cautious about her words and actions regarding workplace harassment in a multicultural environment. Since everyone has their own cultural backgrounds and identities, this can lead to misinterpretations of intentions and different approaches to resolving issues, ultimately affecting employee morale and productivity.

As she mentioned above, the experiences, perceptions and acts of workplace sexual harassment issues for migrant employees might be shaped when they arrive in a new place by a complex interplay of cultural norms, workplace dynamics, legal frameworks and rights of social settings. The transition period from one's home country to a new host country can be a significant process for migrant employees (Rydzik et al. 2017). It involves adapting to a new culture, understanding daily interactions with locals and colleagues, and potentially changing one's behaviour and approach to handling harassment issues in the new environment. This may lead to being overly cautious or remaining silent until understanding cultural norms and overcoming language barriers.

Layla's story

Layla is 32 years old and has been in the hospitality sector for a long time. She was born and grew up in Malaysia. She reports that patriarchal power has a strong hold on social relations in her home country. She first went into the sector in Malaysia while she was doing her internship during her undergraduate degree. Unlike Grace,

Layla did not have a strong family story in which family members were interested in the hospitality business. Growing up in a culturally diverse community, and personal circumstances led her to take a career in the industry. After completing her studies in tourism and hospitality management, she worked in almost all operation departments in a big chain hotel in Malaysia and Singapore. This included restaurants (as a waitress), housekeeping, front office (reservation clerk), kitchen (being a secretary of the executive chef) and sales department. Her desire for new challenges led her to move to the UK for a postgraduate degree in tourism. Her next journey would be in the UK, where she had a postgraduate degree and did her placement in SouthWest England in the same hotel chain as she worked in Malaysia and Singapore. During the interview research, she discussed some unique challenges for female employees working in the hotel sector. She stated:

> *"I worked in different departments but all in the same company (a big hotel chain). They have almost the same kind of policies when it comes down to; employees and human rights...So, not too bad, but how it is run and how it is carried out is totally different. They are all X hotels but are carried out very differently depending on which place you are in. It could be more strict in certain places, or less strict in other places. So, it all depends on the culture that is run in. When I was in Malaysia and Singapore, the rules were applied more strictly. There were very very strict rules on how employees should behave, like we were not allowed to have tattoos on our bodies that are being shown, or we should know how to greet our guests and we should know how to behave as a woman. We had a rule that the company takes care of their employees, and their employees will take care of the customer, and then the customers will come back. Yes, we always have to hold that rule, but how it is applied in Asia and how it is applied in the West is totally different."*

Layla noted that hotel management approaches differ between Asia and the UK due to cultural differences. The emphasis on employees prioritising customer satisfaction might give customers more freedom to mistreat the staff. The philosophy of 'the customer is always right' emphasises the significance of catering

to customer needs, resolving complaints swiftly, and ensuring a positive experience to maintain customer satisfaction above all else and foster a good reputation and image in the market (Ariza-Montes et al. 2017). However, the intensity of this approach can vary across cultures, leading to challenges in hospitality service, such as encouraging entitled behaviour and undermining employee morale and well-being. It was evident that harassment had more potential when the organisation put the customer first by compromising the integrity of its core values and undervalued its employees. She added:

> *"In Asia, the thing that they uphold very tightly is 'customer is always right'. It comes first in everything. Because of that, even if you are harassed by a customer, or even if you do not like the customer and if they complain, then it is still your ass on the line. That is why I say that basic human rights in Asia are a lot lesser than in the UK. If they (customers) complain about you, you will get fired, or you get there is no explanation whatsoever that you can give. If the customer starts harassing you, if they start catcalling you, or whistling at you, the only thing you can do is just turn your back and walk away. And, do not have any confrontations. The best defence is just to ignore and walk away. If you are not comfortable with the situation and if you are OK with a male employee, a male colleague then handle the situation. And, most of the time, your male colleagues will help you out, but what if you do not have a male employee to help you out, right? Then you will have to face it, and sometimes customers try to touch a female colleague, and then they just laugh about it and walk away. I do not feel that that is right, but in the hotel environment in Asia, it is up to you, up to the female employee to protect herself. So, if you do not want that to happen to you, you either do not serve them or ask your male colleague to serve them. So, you can not really tell the customer like 'Hey, stop doing that!'. If the customer turns around and complains about you, then your ass is in trouble again. I would say that you always have to be careful what you do, and you can not even smile extra with the customer just in case he gets the wrong idea, and then he starts*

*asking for your phone number, and then they start hounding you,
things like that, and you complain to the management, the manager
would just say 'Why did you smile at him in the first place?' So, this
is the service industry, and I am friendly, I am friendly to everybody.
I am not just friendly to one person. People (customers) are paying
and we are in the service industry, so we do want to give as much
good service as possible. I think that is the issue there because you
are not really protected when you are working as a woman in Asia."*

The traditional and cultural norms significantly navigate the whole system where people live, including work settings (Morris et al. 2015). Layla described how social expectations and traditional values are deeply intertwined with hospitality work. In the excerpt, she noted that women are expected to behave in specific ways. Drawing from her own experiences, Layla explained how these expectations influence women's behaviour in the hospitality industry and the challenges they face in meeting organisational pressures (where customers are prioritised), which can limit their freedom to express concerns about harassment and their individual autonomy.

In many Asian societies, women often face social and cultural expectations to adhere to norms of conformity and traditional values, which can limit their ability to express themselves freely due to power differences and inequalities (Ang and Liang 2021). This makes them vulnerable to harassment behaviours in the first place as a result of power inequalities between employees and customer transactions during the service process. When female employees are subjected to harassing behaviours from customers in the hospitality workplace, they are the first ones who are blamed by the management, as is in Layla's extract: *"Why did you smile at him in the first place?"*. This puts them into a *'victim blaming'* position, perpetuating gender-biased inequalities in organisations as the organisational culture does not protect female employees fully nor let them behave friendly. She emphasised that in order not to be harassed at work, female employees should protect themselves first, as this is an unchangeable and unwritten organisational rule that they are obliged to follow:

"Asia is very hierarchical, and you cannot say much about it (the rules of harassment acts). There is no two-way communication there. So, your boss is your boss whatever he says, you must do so. If not, you will lose your job there. You have to be very smart on what you do and what you do not do."

Age and power relationships between women and men were also important factors within this organisation's hierarchy. Senior and male employees tended to assume that female colleagues were inherently inferior to them and should therefore please them. The existence of this situation stated by Layla:

"The hierarchy in the workplace is you always have to please your seniors in a way. If they ask you to do something, you have to do it because of the hierarchy in the system. This could be getting a cup of coffee for them or helping out in their stations, etc. We also had a captain (we called him 'Big Brother') who had a huge ego that I had to polish it at that stage. When I was working in the restaurant (in Singapour), I had to be really sweet and nice to him. Even though I did not want to please him, he would always come to me and ask me; 'Am I handsome today?' and I was saying, 'Yes, big brother. You are so handsome, and the whole world is looking at you'. If I had not said that to him, then he would not have helped me if my station got busy."

Layla also added that if women employees did not please him, then he could behave in an aggressive, exploitative and abusive manner:

"He did not behave toward guys in that way, he only was doing it to girls. So, I was thinking that he was a bit like a perv and I remember there was a girl from Kenya. I think she was working for the hotel for like 15 years. She was quite plump and quite curvy in shape. And I remember, the path was very small and she was leaning on the counter. So, when she was leaning on the counter, her bottom was quite upright and was actually blocking the way. Then, this guy came

and yelled the girl her name and smacked her backside and he said, 'Get your big brown ass out of the way'. I looked at him and thought 'Oh my God, that is sexist, that is racist and that is harassment. There is physical abuse. That is everything in one. I was so shocked by what he said and he did."

The organisational response to workplace sexual harassment will be discussed in detail in the last chapter of findings; however, gendered and societal norms, cultural expectations, power dynamics and rigid hierarchical structures in social settings play a critical role in one's perception of sexual harassment in hospitality settings. While some people are privileged in their own environment (country) to speak up loudly to protect themselves against harassment regardless of the consequences that might be (as is in Grace's story), others might not have the same opportunity in their own country due to societal norms and stigma. For Layla, this was the uphill battle she faced as a woman striving to speak up in such a restricted environment in Asia; however, it was easier to manage in the UK:

"...So, you have to be very very careful about how you handle yourself in situations of sexual harassment where you can get yourself in trouble with customers. I think it is better in the UK, but it does happen as well. However, at least in the UK, when they (customers) start to approach you in a different way, you can say to them, 'Stop that!' or they will just laugh about it and ignore you. At least you can still turn around and tell them to stop harassing you. You have the right to do this. A lot of things are happening here as well. I have seen a lot of sexual harassment cases in the X Hotel in the UK, and I have experienced some of them too. At least we have more support when it comes to it, and your manager has your back. S/he does not order you that 'you should behave in that way as a woman employer or s/he does not blame you like 'you should not have done to the customer in the first place'."

Perception of sexual harassment was mostly based upon both experiences and feelings, and it has varied according to a range of social, cultural and contextual

factors. Sexual harassment is modified by diverse cultural and social variables, and therefore it might be characterised by 'contextual' and 'subjective' aspects. Consequently, the understanding of how sexual harassment is perceived by female employees working in hospitality organisations may be informed by the individual's social, cultural and traditional values in social settings.

Types of Harassment Experienced

This section provides an insight into the experience of sexual harassment in the hospitality work environment and explores how female employees can face harassment across a range of hospitality places. The narratives referred to two primary relationships in which sexual harassment occurred, the employee-customer relationship and employee-to-employee relationships. The findings align with research that acknowledges the employee-customer relationship to be one of the most common sites in which harassment can occur (La Lapa and Gong 2020; Tsai et al. 2023; Opoku et al. 2024). It is acknowledged that much harassment occurs within relationships where there are power differentials (customer-employee relationships), and this was certainly found in this research. It was also noted that female employees working in hotels could experience unwanted approaches and behaviours from agency workers (who were outsiders of the organisation and hired from third-party organisations to support some events happening in hotels). Participants mostly experienced harassment in male-to-female (from male perpetrator to female employee) relationships. This supports the male perpetrator–female victim paradigm that is common in hospitality research (Theocharous and Philaretou 2009; Mkono 2010; Cheung et al. 2018). Participants noted that they experienced sexual harassment directly and that they witnessed others being harassed or they had heard from their colleagues who had been harassed in the workplace.

Evident throughout the narrative accounts is the notion that sexual harassment can be experienced in many different ways within hospitality organisations. Types of harassment have been classified according to existing definitions in the area (The

Equality Act 2010; EEOC 2019a), and these have served as a starting point for organising the narrative data. It is noted that there can be overlap in the types of harassment experienced; therefore, harassment can be co-occurring, and female employees can be subjected to more than one type of harassment at any given time. For instance, if a perpetrator (colleague, manager or customer) makes sexual comments about a female employee's appearance, body or looks, this could be classified as verbal harassment. If, at the same time, this verbal harassment includes a derogative approach comprising offensive and belittling language or behaviour about a person's gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation and other personal traits, this could be categorised as emotional/psychological harassment. Additionally, if this verbal-emotional harassment involves unwanted and inappropriate touching, rubbing or patting, it then could be classified as physical harassment. In this sense, a female employee may experience three different types of harassment behaviours at the same time. This example shows the difficulty and complexity that can be faced when trying to classify or operationalise definitions of sexual harassment. Existing typologies are, therefore, useful for making sense of experience; however, they can sometimes be too simplistic; this is reflected in this research, which demonstrated that individual types of harassment rarely occur in isolation. Studies that have focused on one or sometimes two types of sexual harassment in isolation have potentially missed the co-occurring nature of the experience. These narrative accounts reveal that rarely did a female employee experience only one type of harassment in isolation, thus this PhD study provides a more holistic understanding of workplace sexual harassment than previous studies might have achieved.

Within this study, three types of sexual harassment were identified by the twenty-two research participants: verbal harassment, physical harassment and emotional/psychological harassment. Verbal and emotional/psychological harassment were the most commonly referred to behaviours across hospitality towards female employees and were classed as commonplace in hospitality workplaces. Some of the instances could be classified as physical, and this was a further common form of sexual harassment identified by this sample. The types of sexual harassment towards female employees in hospitality settings will be discussed in turn, drawing on excerpts from the narrative accounts.

Verbal Harassment

Verbal sexual harassment behaviours were among the most commonly referred to harassment types, and the majority of female workers have frequently experienced or witnessed this behaviour. As outlined in Chapter Two, verbal harassment in hospitality settings is the most common form of sexual harassment in hospitality organisations, ranging from unwelcome, sexually explicit, derogative and offensive language, jokes, comments, propositions and gestures that make the recipient feel uncomfortable and threatened (ILO 2020). This type of harassment was presented in this research in terms of 'normalised/acceptable behaviour' and 'unacceptable/not tolerated behaviour'.

All participants of this research (twenty-two interviewees) experienced verbal harassment in hospitality settings, both in their home country and when they moved to the host country as migrant employees. Although participants complained about this situation, verbal harassment was understood as commonplace in the service environment and viewed as a normal action by some female employees based on the common acceptance in societies, which is the objectification of women's bodies by men for sexual desire. As participants argue, female employees have developed mechanisms to accept and normalise men's (customers and colleagues) behaviours in phrases such as 'men will be men'. The participants reflected upon this:

> *"Of course, I experienced and have been experiencing this (verbal sexual harassment) like all other women in the industry. Customers making lewd comments and trying to flirt with me because I am serving them as a woman."* (Anna)

> *"I feel every woman goes through something like this (verbal sexual harassment). I personally have experienced it, and I have seen the person (the perpetrator) who approached somebody else like me."* (Carly)

"They (men) always find a way to reach out if they are interested in you. And, the verbal ones are the most common at the first place to take your attention." (Emily)

"I think everything is related to being a woman. It (verbal harassment) happens in every corner of hospitality. Because a woman's body and appearance have always been attractive. I think this is more societal thing." (Lucy)

The testimonies of the participants above indicated that everyday mundane sexual harassment is deeply embedded like an endemic issue within the sector. This illustrates how verbal harassment towards female employees is commonplace and pervasive. Lucy pointed out how the societal acceptance of the sexual objectification of women's bodies and appearances contributes to the prevalence of verbal harassment. These accepted norms towards gender can perpetuate the cycle of harassment by discouraging the reporting and addressing these behaviours. It can also reinforce a culture where such behaviour is tolerated and even expected (Waudby and Poulston 2017).

Similarly, there were normalised/acceptable behaviours within the hospitality context that exist culturally in organisations that could result in the normalisation of verbal harassment as 'an expected behaviour' from customers. Maeve recalled one of her experiences with a golf group staying in the hotel. She believed that this was not harassment – it was a kind of expected joke from a wealthy customer, and it would be pointless to complain, as such a complaint would simply be ignored:

"Every year from Spring to Autumn, we have golfers here – Golf groups. Those guys are a little bit naughty. Once, I came for breakfast, it was in Teras, and there were many golf balls on the table, and I said, 'Ooh, all balls, look nice' Then a guy told me 'If you want, you can touch my balls – they are good, new and fresh' I said 'No' And everyone in the group started to laugh because of his age, he was young. They are naughty, you know. We are expecting this kind of behaviour. This was a kind of joke, not a harassment. Because they do

> *not want to get in trouble, they want to have fun and they are relaxing.*
> *They are also quite rich people with their companions. They just want*
> *to show off in front of the other friends as they are cool."*

Another participant reiterated attempting to accept and justify the verbal harassment within the hospitality setting as a normal part of customer behaviour. She expressed that she did not take it seriously and was offended because she was exposing verbal harassment more often from customers. Therefore, Olivia might normalise such behaviour as she perceived it to be an inevitable part of her work environment without viable means of recourse:

> *"I have never experienced a serious level of harassment or improper*
> *approach from the guests and my colleagues. No one has tried to*
> *touch me or something like that. With the verbal ones, yes, usually,*
> *most of the time while serving guests in the buffet. When I was setting*
> *up the fruit section for lunch, one customer asked me, 'Would you*
> *like me to give you a banana to suck it? Everyone knows that kind of*
> *things always happen. There is no need to take it personally."*

The extracts above highlighted that verbal harassment could be acceptable by some female employees in terms of the acceptance of sex differences between women and men and characteristics of work culture in hospitality settings. As such, female employees have a tendency to tolerate and/or accept some form of harassing behaviours, which can contribute to broader acceptance of verbal sexual harassment in the workplace. Alrawadieh et al. (2022) suggest that the sensitivity and the intricacy of sexual harassment as a concept could account for the ambiguity between its normalisation and the established discussion concerning its harmful effects. Alrawadieh et al. (2022) put forward that the participants initially rejected any encounters with sexual harassment behaviours; however, they later disclosed events that acknowledged as explicitly identified instances of sexual harassment. It thus can be argued that the denials of harassing behaviours (even if it is considered minor occurrences by those involved) might represent a major social failing. As discussed above, this phenomenon could reflect the pervasive nature of everyday sexism, where gender-based discrimination and harassment are normalised and

integrated into daily interactions and organisational and sectoral cultures (Coffey et al. 2023).

The second form of verbal harassment identified was the 'unacceptable/not tolerated behaviour' point of view by the participants. Evelyn described how she felt embarrassed in front of other colleagues while she was working in a hotel kitchen as a pastry chef. She was exposed to verbal harassment several times from a male colleague, who was her superior in the kitchen. She described him as a crude man when he talked to others. She stated that this was the most extreme incident that made her feel humiliated. During the interview, she became visibly furious when recounting a particular experience and described how the anger and humiliation she felt were difficult to contain:

> *"We were preparing for an event in the hotel. It was so rush time in the kitchen. Suddenly, something went wrong, and I cannot exactly remember now what happened or who made something wrong, he (the chef) started yelling at me like; 'Why are you such a pussy, you know? Because you have a vagina, that is why you cannot work like a man here! He said this in front of everybody"*

The chef degraded her performance and harassed her both verbally and psychologically by using repetitive offensive and sexist comments. This sexist and contempt behaviour violated her dignity and humiliated her: *"This is so rude, so disrespectful in front of everybody. One of the most shameful memories I have. I felt extremely embarrassed and upset."* Evelyn stated that the chef would try to embarrass her in front of others or belittle her to gain a reaction; this was also apparent across another narrative as she witnessed his harassing behaviours in a sexist manner towards her colleague, including verbal, emotional and physical harassment at the same time:

> *"There was once we had a new chef coming in. She was a training chef. So, she was the lowest-ranking member of the whole kitchen department. The big chef was calling her 'bitch' like, you know, 'Put this thing in the fridge, bitch; Pass me to this, bitch'...When you start*

using words to put her down, I think it is enough for her to be the lowest rank and sexist kind of joke. His excuse was, 'Here is the kitchen department, we all talk like that'. To me - No, I have worked in the kitchen department in different organisations and in different countries – we are not supposed to talk like that. After two weeks, he was given a warning letter, and I heard because he slapped this training chef's backside."

As mentioned in the 'Gendered spaces and perspectives of labour' section above, women face obstacles in male-dominated environments and strict hierarchical structures within work settings in terms of power dynamics. The extracts above highlighted that they were subjected to more sexist, gendered and derogatory comments/behaviours and physical harassment by their superiors.

A few participants mentioned how often women are exposed to verbal harassment in their home countries related to social and cultural environments and common stereotypes, and they complain about it:

"India has a very bad reputation for its rape culture. Of course, this is a societal thing. People are irrespective of which place they are in. It should not happen in the workplace, but it is happening. I have not experienced this at a serious level, but I have mostly experienced sexual comments and invitations to go out for a drink or dinner. People assume that they are just making a sexist joke. If it is a joke, it will not hurt anyone, right? However, this is not a joke, it does hurt you subconsciously somewhere. It is really sad..." (Dora)

"My country (Thailand) is very well-known for sex tourism and prostitution. We have tourists, mostly from Western countries. So, some tourists just think that they have money and they can buy every woman they like. They (customers) are like very flirty with me and sometimes ask for my phone number or ask me to go to their room. So, people have some weird perspective: I am being nice to you because this is my job. This does not mean that I am interested in

you or something like that. I think, for us (for women employees) is the most common and inappropriate harassment that we are experiencing." (Clara)

The widespread presence of stereotypes about a country's tourism industry, such as Thailand's connection with sex tourism and India's association with rape culture, can influence how tourists to these countries perceive and interact with locals working in the hospitality industry. This can lead to more objectification and exploitation of women employees than others, who are often viewed through the lens of these stereotypes. As Díaz-Meneses et al. (2020) depicted that stereotypes associated with certain countries, particularly related to tourism, can contribute to heightening the structural vulnerability of employees to sexual harassment. Research in a variety of national contexts uncovers that sexual harassment cases could be more endemic, rampant, and uncontrolled, which has a particular resonance for hospitality for specific destinations (see e.g., Good and Cooper 2016; Kensbock et al. 2015; Reguera and Garcia-Izquierdo 2021). This approach can be seen in the extract above, which demonstrates that female employees can be negatively labelled according to the assumed prevalence of stereotypes of a country. This could also make them vulnerable to harassment behaviours through a lens of exoticism, leading to objectified treatment and stigmatisation within the hospitality sector in their host country. Examining the effects of exoticism can provide deeper insights into how cultural stereotypes lead to the objectification and marginalisation of women. This can emphasise the need for comprehensive and culturally sensitive approaches to addressing these issues and can present an interesting line of inquiry for future studies.

Physical Harassment

According to the research participants' narratives, physical harassment in hospitality workplaces could vary depending on various factors, including the specific department within which female employees worked, the work experience in the hospitality sector and the physical appearance (attractiveness) of women. The

spectrum of physical harassment in the work settings is comprehensive and refers to any unwelcome physical conduct and behaviour, ranging from unwanted touching to actual or attempted physical assault, threats and rape (EEOC 2019b; ILO 2019).

It is worth noting that three female employees (one Italian, one Turkish and one Indian) were reluctant to speak out about their experiences with physical sexual harassment. Although they reported that they had been exposed to physical harassment during their working life (they noted that it was not a severe level of physical harassment), they preferred not to share it due to privacy concerns during the interviews. However, they openly shared stories that were mostly about verbal and emotional harassment behaviours that they experienced or witnessed. This highlights the complex impact of harassment on these women and the intricate dynamics of reporting (or sharing) harassment. Although the interviews were intended to provide a safe and supportive space for participants to share their experiences without fear of judgment or retaliation, the truth was that deep-seated fears and concerns still persisted. Despite assurances of confidentiality, fears of retribution, cultural stigmatisation, concerns about privacy, personal boundaries, and so forth might deter individuals from fully disclosing their experiences.

Although the frequency of physical harassment was lower than verbal and emotional harassment, participants in this study highlighted several examples of physical harassment that occurred in the workplace. None of the participants of this research had experienced a severe form of physical harassment (e.g. physical assault and rape). The majority of female employees were subjected to touching, hugging, attempting to kiss, patting, leaning over and cornering. In line with the physical emotional harassment, these behaviours did not always result in physical harm to the individual, yet the potential threat of harm is thought to be equally damaging.

Emma shared her story about a drunk customer, which happened at the end of her work day:

"When I was very young (around 18-19 years old) - it was actually at the beginning of my career - I was working as a receptionist. It was almost like 10 p.m., and we were preparing to finish our shift. I was very lucky that day because I had my colleague, who was a man, and he was a very good friend of mine. Lucky me! This customer came to the lobby with his girlfriend. He got some drinks for her and left her alone in the lobby, then he came to the reception. He was already drunk and started to ask me what I was going to do after work. I said 'Go back home and relax because it was a very tough day for me.' Then he asked me, 'Would you like to come with me?' I took that kind of a joke and I was like, 'No, I do not want to come with you and I am not allowed to go outside with a customer.' and he said, 'No one will know', and he grabbed my hands and pulled me towards him, he tried to kiss me. I was inside the reception, and he was on the other side of the reception desk. He was completely drunk."

Touching and attempting to kiss are the most common types of physical harassment, and the majority of female employees have experienced some form of non-consensual and unwanted sexual touching and physical contact from customers. Emma believed that the main reason was the customer was drunk and she was too young to handle the situation, and she added:

"...when you have experienced something like that, especially when you are very young, you do not think that this could happen to you when you are alone. I was very lucky because my male colleague was coming from the kitchen and he pushed him away and yelled, 'Hey mate, stop! What are you doing here, stop it!' Then, the customer started to say something in German – he was German (the customer) – and my colleague speaks German and he was trying to explain to him that I am too young and his girlfriend was just behind us and better for him to go."

Emma noted that the behaviour and sudden attack of the customer scared her:

> *"I felt terrified. If my colleague had not been there, I could not have defended myself because I was in the middle of 'Should I push him or should I see what will happen.' Because I did not want to lose my job because I did need money. The next day, he (the customer) came back and instead of saying I am sorry, he said, 'I understand that my movements and my situation made you uncomfortable but I will come back for you next year because you did not come with me the last night'. I felt really, really shocked."*

It is evident that sexual harassment has the potential to have a negative impact on the individual when they are the direct target of the harassing behaviour. There are factors that are unique to the hospitality industry that increase the vulnerability of employees to sexual harassment; in particular, the regular and intense relationship with customers and alcohol consumption. Younger and less experienced employees also appear to be particularly vulnerable to most forms of harassing behaviours in the hospitality workplace (Lin 2006; Hunt et al. 2007; Waudby and Poulston 2017; Madera et al. 2018).

It is also noted that there is an overlap in the types of harassment that Emma experienced. This extract highlights the overlap between types of harassment as she was subjected to three different types of harassment behaviours from a customer within a singular case. The customer displayed physical (touching and kissing), verbal (pressure to go out) and emotional/psychological harassment to the target (intimidation and threat) in this instance. According to Glaser (2002), this overlap could be one of the potential difficulties with research exploring abuse and harassment, particularly emotional/psychological harassment, as it frequently coexists with other types of harassing behaviours and, therefore, can be challenging to identify.

The following quote from Amy points to physical harassment by an agency employee (outside of the organisation):

> *"A guy was coming from an agency to work hotel events. He is a very good worker, by the way, but he is a bit creepy. He always gives girls back massages. He sometimes gives me neck massages on my shoulder when I am tired. He would just come to me and start massaging me, and sometimes it is really nice because I really need the massage, but sometimes he starts going down to my bra strap. And then, I was saying, 'That is enough, and I will go away.'*

Amy stated that this situation sometimes made her uncomfortable, and she thought he had crossed the line. His behaviour (touching women's backs and lingerie) made female staff feel uncomfortable and harassed. She added:

> *"It is like he thinks he can touch us whenever he wants. But for him to do that means he has done it before, and people have allowed him to do that. He was quite a big guy, so his hands were quite big. I am quite small, and he would like to touch your back and go lower down to touch your bra strap. And I have seen him doing a full back massage to another person. He does not do it to guys; he only does it to women. I think that he is a bit like a perv."*

This type of touching reinforces the view that men think of female bodies as sexual objects. Amy supported this, stating that he was making a sexual joke during this physical touch:

> *"When other women told them that he had big hands, he would sometimes answer them like this; 'Oh yeah, do you mean mine (penis) is too long for you?' I do not even know what to say, you know. I was so shocked. I do not even know how to react to that. Because it comes into the conversation, he makes it a dirty joke. This is not funny; it is creepy."*

The research participants report that sexual jokes often accompany this type of harassment. This is considered as both psychological and physical harassment. Even though the target may not intend to define it as physical sexual harassment,

these actions are classified as harassment if she feels the behaviours to be unpleasant and unwelcome.

Emotional/Psychological Harassment

In the narratives, emotional (psychological) harassing behaviours occurred mainly along with verbal abusive behaviours. Emotional harassment, also known as psychological harassment, is defined as any form of persistent negative behaviour or mistreatment that causes emotional distress and has a harmful impact on an individual's emotional well-being. For example, emotional abuse includes yelling, nagging, insulting, humiliating, intimidating, aggressive eye contact, spreading negative rumours, ridiculing someone in front of others, giving silent treatment, using emotional blackmail, and others (Choi et al. 2018). Identified within the narrative account from the research participants were female employees being subjected to verbal harassment, including sexual, gendered, and offensive language, which created a toxic work environment. This was also evident in the overlap in the types of harassment in some of the participants' narratives in the first sections of the chapter (e.g. Evelyn and her colleague's stories about the chef). In addition, undermining the professional competence of female employees, such as acts of sexist aggression or anger by superiors toward participants or discounting their contributions, were identified in participants' narratives. This led to a sense of inadequacy and demoralisation of females (the impact of emotional harassment, including verbal and physical, will be discussed in detail in the next chapter). Elaine expressed the frustration displayed by her manager as he was underestimating her skills, capabilities and contributions to the organisation when she was in the position of guest relations in a four-star hotel in Greece:

> *"...I have to say that as a woman, I did feel sometimes that I have been manipulated and discriminated by my managers when I was in the position of guest relations and also managing events. I was interacting with customers in terms of complaints and trying to solve them at the same time. In the department meeting, when I talked or offered some solutions to solve the issues we had, I felt that they (the department superiors) did not take things seriously that I was trying*

to offer for the benefit of the department, to be honest. They always wanted to add something that I did not approve of or just to make me sure very embarrassed in some ways. One of them was constantly criticising my briefing during the meetings. I was feeling that nothing I did was ever enough. He always did find a way to make me feel incompetent. I could not shake off the anxiety I felt whenever he called for a meeting. I think, because of my emotional intelligence, I was able to recognise what those people were doing to me, emotionally manipulating me somehow..."

This extract highlights the overlap between types of emotional abuse, as the department supervisors and managers displayed both verbal (dismissive language and attitude) and emotional (undermining self-worth and manipulation) behaviours toward her competence within a singular case. According to Einarsen et al. (2011), emotional abuse and harassment in the workplace are deemed acts of power generally associated with perpetrators, whereas targets are typically seen as lacking power. As such, an employee is subjected to frequent emotional/psychological harassment behaviour from superiors or co-workers over a prolonged period, and the employee could find it difficult to defend her-/himself against this issue due to an imbalance of power (Nielsen et al. 2022; D'Cruz et al. 2018). It was evident that Elaine was exposed to emotional verbal behaviour from her superior/s. This overlap in harassing behaviours could be one of the potential problems with previous research findings, particularly emotional/psychological harassment, as it frequently coexists with other types of harassment, either physical or non-physical. Interestingly, Elaine explained that she struggled to feel good about herself, and she questioned whether she was good enough or competent enough in her position while trying to overcome 'the feeling of being worthless' for the managers' behaviours when she stated, '*I was feeling that nothing I did was ever good enough'*. Research suggests that this sentiment often causes individuals to doubt their abilities, worth, and competence, resulting in negative self-criticism, emotional strain, anxiety and stress, impacting the overall quality of work/life and well-being (Pilch and Turska 2015).

Customers can make degrading comments to employees (especially to migrant employees). Such comments could often rooted in sexism, racism, and xenophobia, reflecting deeply ingrained prejudices. Customer aggression and harassment within the service sector result from the customers' ability to wield influence when purchasing services, leading to a distinction in power and status between the servers and those served (Waudby and Poulston 2017; Yagil 2008). This power imbalance can empower customers to express abusive attitudes and behaviours, further exacerbating the vulnerability of employees. With the confidence of this power, customers can find the right to humiliate and demoralise employees for any reason. Layla highlighted demeaning comments by a female customer about her migration position in the hotel and described the approach of the customer:

> *"I always think people are always very xenophobic. So, they do not like people who are different from them. Of course, the thing about the hotel industry is that I would say 70% are migrants anyway. But they (customers) always see you as lower than them. Once people have that concept in their mind, they will treat you differently. For example; when I was working in the hotel, I was doing service in the restaurant. Then a lady (customer) came out and asked me something, then we started to talk. She was very friendly with me. And then, she said, 'I am so sorry that you have to come ALL THE WAY HERE (Layla had a sarcastic and biting tone of voice) to find this job'. And I said, 'Oh, no, it is not. I am doing my Masters here, This is just my part-time job'. Because, in her mind, immigrants are only here to get part-time jobs like mine. She did not realise that we might actually be more educated than them. We might actually be richer than them to be able to come all the way here to study."*

The use of derogatory language to undermine an individual's worth and diminish their sense of value within the workplace could be classified as harassment. The narrative accounts suggest that insulting, inappropriate and rude comments referencing race and nationality differences between customers and employees are common. This was supported by Grace, who noted that some customers' approach: *'It is like they (customers) intentionally trying to make us feel small and*

insignificant'. Elaine recalled that *'...and the way they (some customers) behave towards us like they make snide remarks and treating us (employees) as if we are inferior from them... although we are trying to do our best to make them happy and satisfied by delivering good service. It is frustrating and demoralising indeed'*.

It is worth noting that female employees (both migrants and citizens of a country) reported that they had been exposed to dismissive and demeaning language and acts from a superior or a customer during service delivery in the hospitality workplace. The female employees, therefore, experienced both verbal and emotional harassment. The findings support the existing literature, which identifies emotional/psychological harassment as a pervasive problem in the service industry, including hospitality (Yassour-Borochowitz 2020; Worke et al. 2021; Zhou et al. 2021). This harassment type occurred primarily within the employee-manager and employee-customer relationship, in which those who hold power differential constructed within the service triangle. Das (2009, p.910) believes that 'societal norms, organisational hierarchies, or interpersonal characteristics that can involve formal or informal power' create a 'vulnerable victim' situation. Therefore, women can find themselves harassed by those in formal or informal higher positions in the organisation's hierarchy.

Conclusion

This chapter provides an insight into the work life of research participants in hospitality settings. Although this is a small-scale qualitative research, which is not generalisable, but it is a good indicator of the experiences of research participants. The results of this study support the work of other researchers and demonstrate how female employees can be particularly vulnerable to harassment behaviours. Sector characteristics and the gendered spaces and perspectives in the hospitality workplace foster certain conditions in which sexual harassment behaviours towards women mostly occur. The results indicate how the stereotypical allocation of work (feminine and masculine distribution of work), the lack of women's representation in male-dominated settings and some strict hierarchical structures in the

departments lead to emotional and psychological strain on females. Therefore, this finding sheds light on future research on the issue of suppressing the authenticity of individuals in order to conform to workplace norms.

The findings indicate that sexual harassment happens in both masculine and feminine work settings in hospitality regarding the common acceptance of the objectification of women's bodies by (generally) men for sexual desire. As such, female employees showed resilience to deal with it, and most of them took a hard line on the persistence of harassment behaviours in the sector, which is - 'either you live with it or leave it' - The findings provide a unique and interesting insight into the coping strategies that female employees adopt in order to deal with harassment behaviours in the moment and over time.

Participants also demonstrated how social and cultural expectations, traditional values and power dynamics in social settings play an important role in individuals' perception of sexual harassment in their own countries or host countries' hospitality settings. This result makes a significant contribution and allows a unique insight into this phenomenon of sexual harassment in the hospitality workplace. This is suggested as an important line of inquiry for future research.

Finally, the employee-customer was recognised as one of the primary sites in which sexual harassment occurs; in addition, participants experienced harassment behaviours in employee-to-employee relationships, and perpetrators of harassment were mostly male. Three types of harassment behaviours were identified: verbal harassment, physical harassment and emotional/psychological harassment. It is important to note that female employees can experience more than one type of harassing behaviour simultaneously. Namely, verbal harassment can include emotional/psychological harassment, physical harassment can include one of the other two types, and all types of harassment behaviours can be experienced within one case. Therefore, the overlap between types of harassment could create difficulty and complexity to operationalise and identify the case. Also, this could lead to more severe consequences on employees' personal and occupational well-being. This will be the focus of the following chapter, where the impact of sexual harassment

will be explored; alongside the impact it can have on the individual and the coping mechanisms adopted by them.

CHAPTER 5: The Perceived Impact of Workplace Sexual Harassment

Introduction

This chapter presents the second theme and related sub-themes of the thematic framework and explores *"the perceived impact of workplace sexual harassment"*. The narratives demonstrated how female participants experienced an *immediate impact of harassment* in the moment that it occurred and/or during the weeks or months after. A temporal shift in their perception of harassment was also noted: this is identified as the *long-term impact of harassment* and refers to participant accounts of the lasting impact of sexual harassment in their life. As identified in the previous chapter, the participants experienced various types of harassment in hospitality settings. It is also acknowledged that the experience of workplace harassment differed across participants. Some experienced more than one type of harassment at any given time throughout their career, while others reflected upon one type of harassment in hospitality settings. Interestingly, regarding what happened in hospitality work settings, the participants noted similar impacts. Therefore, this chapter will not discover differences in perceived impact between types of harassment and will not serve to grade the severity of treatment. This would not do justice to the methodological approach used and would be impossible to infer given the co-occurring nature of harassment experienced. Instead, extracts will be taken from the narratives to explore the perceived impact of harassment more broadly, based on individual appraisal of the treatment; as such, this chapter will present how the participants of this research can be affected by workplace harassment in the hospitality context. Figure 5 offers an overview of the themes and sub-themes of this chapter.
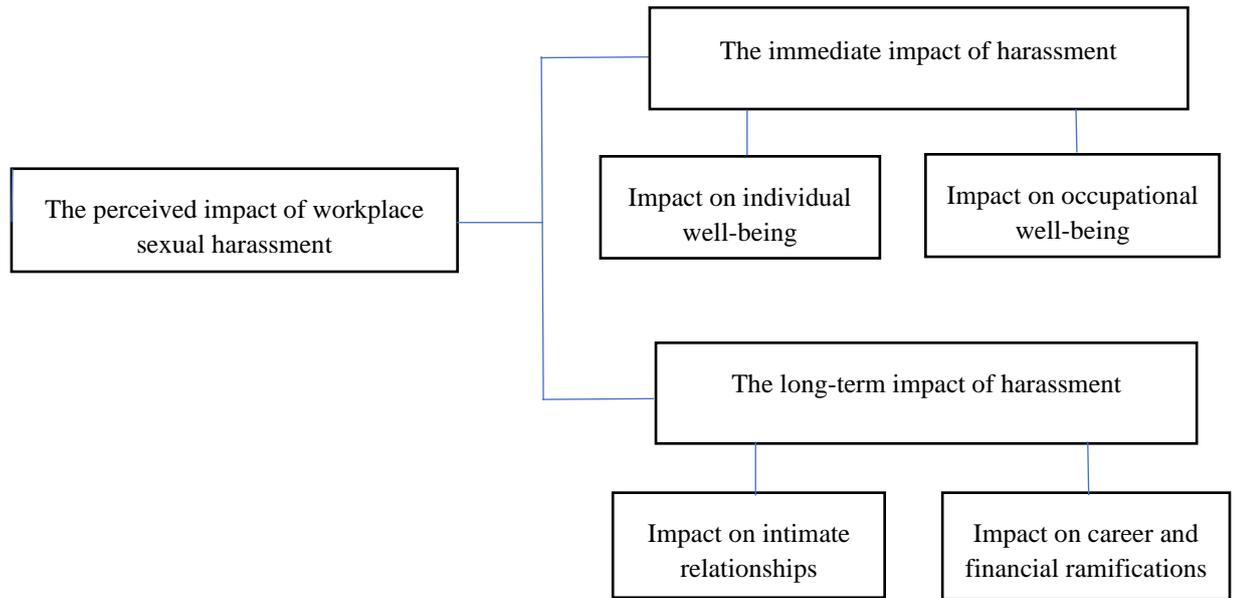
Figure 5.1: Thematic diagram for Chapter 5 (Source: Original)

The Immediate Impact of Harassment

"...It came to the extent that I did not even want to go to work because I knew that he (the harasser) was going to be at work..."

Amy

In this study, the impact of sexual harassment on female employees in the hospitality context is multifaceted. Experiencing sexual harassment can negatively affect an employee's personal and occupational well-being in the short term. The short-term adverse outcomes of workplace sexual harassment appear to be broad and can include a range of psychological, physical, emotional and behavioural effects within women's narratives. This can inevitably affect employee's performance at work. In addition, witnessing the harassment of a colleague can be profoundly distressing. The participants' narratives demonstrate that women suffer greatly from sexual harassment in the workplace, and this can have a significant

impact on all aspects of the victim's life – either in their personal life or work life. Negative consequences could include loss of self-esteem and/or confidence, self-doubt, self-blaming, frustration, fear, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and can also lead to reduced performance in the workplace, lower job satisfaction, and work withdrawal. The impact of sexual harassment on women's well-being will be discussed in turn, drawing on excerpts from the narratives' accounts.

Impact on Individual Well-being

Participants stated that workplace sexual harassment has far-reaching consequences for individuals' well-being, including emotional and psychological repercussions. While the terms *"emotional"* and *"psychological"* are often used interchangeably and are interconnected, they can represent distinct outcomes for individuals' well-being (Feller et al. 2018). The experience of sexual harassment can lead from mild to severe emotional impacts on victims (such as fear, sadness, anger, and frustration) in the immediate instance that it occurred. These emotions might stimulate psychological health disorders (such as anxiety, depression, burn-out syndrome, psychosomatic disorders (fatigue, insomnia, headache/migraine, high blood pressure, etc.) and post-traumatic stress disorder – PTSD) in the long term. Also, the perceived impacts of workplace sexual harassment could be distinguished by emotional shifts in women employees as well as broader psychological impacts when they experienced it. This study, therefore, suggests that emotional and psychological impacts could be separated in order to provide a distinction between the moment-to-moment effects of sexual harassment, which manifested themselves as emotions in the workplace and the perception of the ongoing impact of sexual harassment over time, where women employees experience broader psychological implications. These impacts will be explored later in this chapter.

Emotional Impact of Workplace Sexual Harassment

Participants stated that the emotional impact of harassment on their well-being was characterised by feelings of fear, anger, sadness, helplessness, frustration, humiliation, self-doubt and a sense of security and safety. Daphne recalled how she felt emotionally humiliated and overwhelmed when she was exposed to verbal and psychological (emotional) harassment many times by her manager. She commented that *"this place (the hotel where she used to work) broke my heart really badly. Because of these things (harassing behaviours) happened, I could not bear it anymore"* and stated that at times, she was riddled with self-doubt:

> *"He made me question myself if I was doing something wrong...He made me doubt myself as if I had sent the wrong signals to get his attention."*

During the interview, she became visibly agitated when recounting a particular experience and described how her feelings of sadness, anger and frustration were difficult to contain. All she could do was *"leave the place",* and she stated:

> *"Although I loved my job, I could not stay there. I had to leave..."*

Similarly, Dora commented: *"... this (harassing behaviours) affects you a lot... especially in a way that you feel sad, angry, and helpless afterwards. This is not your fault, but you would think, 'What have I done wrong? 'Am I doing right?' What should I have done or not have done?..."*

Emily recalled the emotional fatigue she felt as a result of experiencing harassment in the workplace. She noted that at times she tried to *"cope with the harassing behaviour of her boss"* when she was working as a waitress in a restaurant early in her career, but she would later quit her job as she felt scared and stated: *"I thought that the right decision would be to leave my job because I constantly feared what might be the next. Because his (her boss's) behaviours made me feel uncomfortable and intimidated."*

When female employees experienced unwanted attention and repeated sexual harassment behaviours, they felt insecure and exhausted from dealing with it. None of the participants were subjected to a severe degree of sexual harassment (sexual assault, attempted rape, etc.). Still, some of them acknowledged that resignation was a realistic response to workplace sexual harassment to protect themselves from the possible serious impacts that could have.

Given the diverse experiences of individuals in hospitality settings, not all female employees gave the same responses to harassing behaviours. However, they faced similar emotional impacts from it. The level of harassment that they experienced and the personality they had affected the decision to combat sexual harassment at work. While some quit their job (either straight away or after a while) due to emotional distress, others could continue working in the same place by cultivating determination. Evelyn described how as a result of the verbal and emotional (psychological) harassment she was exposed to several times by the chef, she tried to *"be resilient"* in order not to show emotional weakness in front of others (her colleagues (mostly men) in the kitchen). She stated: *"...You should be strong enough to deal with the mess (she mentioned abuse, bullying and harassment behaviours), and you should be capable of dealing with some unwritten rude rules to survive there."* Although she stated how embarrassed and upset she was by the chef's constant offensive, degrading and sexist comments, she tried to regulate her emotions in the male-dominated workplace environment in order not to be seen as a weak person. Dealing with gender-biased challenges within environments in which the gendered distribution of labour is the norm, female employees may encounter a range of emotional strengths (Heilman 2012). They can compelled to suppress emotional reactions to navigate stereotypes, biases and conflicts. In order to fit into workplace dynamics, female employees might strive to overcome obstacles, break through gender-biased barriers and prove themselves in male-dominated settings where they are in the minority. Evelyn stated:

> *"I felt extremely sad and humiliated in front of the team when the chef was swearing. At that stage, this did not affect me that much. As I had been working for quite a long time in the kitchen department that was almost full of men, I had seen a lot of sexual harassment*

cases in the hotels. But it affected me during work time because I
was trying to avoid him as much as possible not to hear anything
annoying and humiliating from him (the chef)...Sometimes you just
go along to avoid being the odd one out. This does not mean
accepting those behaviours; this is how most of the guys behave
here...which is sort of toxicity indeed..."

This places women in a situation where they had better either disregard or cope with the harassment to find ways to manage stereotypes and gender-based biases and succeed in environments where they are in the minority. Although the personal characteristics of women and their emotional strengths (resilience, embracing challenges, determination, etc.) had a significant role in understanding the perceived emotional impacts of harassment, trying to regulate emotions in these sensitive situations could have detrimental effects on individual well-being over time. Constantly trying to fit into male-dominated environments and overcome gender-based stereotypes may lead to emotional exhaustion and contribute to heightened stress and anxiety in the long term. This might also impact individuals' lives outside work.

The emotional impact of harassment was deemed to be significant by the participants, especially as the emotions they experienced were unwanted or thought to demonstrate weakness in male-dominated settings. Indeed, in the context of workplace sexual harassment, emotional impacts are essential, but they refer to different facets of the recipients' response. This perhaps highlights the complexity of the experience of workplace sexual harassment and its impact on female employees: feelings of fear, humiliation and self-doubt can intensify the emotional effects of sexual harassment in hospitality settings.

Witnessing harassment behaviours could also be distressing for some participants. While the direct target of harassment experienced the primary impact, bystanders can also be emotionally affected (Ragins et al. 2017). Carly noted how exasperating it was to see some of her colleagues being harassed during the rota:

"We had a problem with one of the agency workers. He was very crude in his wording and would come to you and say, 'Your jeans are so tight, I can see your butt from here,' or he was non-stop asking women colleagues' phone numbers. If you said 'No', he kept saying, 'But I want to see you after the work?' It still annoyed me because he made people uncomfortable working around him."

Similarly, Emma echoed that witnessing others being sexually harassed could be distressing and annoying. She commented on sexualised comments made by a male colleague to another female colleague about her appearance and attractiveness.

"This male colleague, sales and marketing assistant, was making sexual jokes to my colleague. He always found a reason to pop over to the back office where we used to work. He was making certain comments about her dress, makeup and body in front of me, like 'Oh, you look so sexy in this dress'; 'This colour very well suits you' or 'I love your tights', but those comments were not decent, and at some point, he approached her in a very naughty way – he was touchy, and he touched her bottom many times... She got a lot more attention, extra attention from him."

Emma noted that the approach of the male colleague to some women at work annoyed her and other women most of the time. For some, however, this was considered normal, and he was well-known for making inappropriate sexual comments to the women.

A more serious case was witnessed in the hotel setting. Clara experienced many times verbal and emotional harassment directly from her colleagues and male customers working in hotels. This included sexist jokes, inappropriate sexual comments, innuendos and propositions. She did not experience a severe level of sexual harassment, including physical harassment; however, she witnessed one of her colleagues being harassed during a shift. She recalled that her colleague was being forced to have sex by a customer:

"I was working in the guest relations department at a hotel in Greece. In this hotel, we were giving a tour to our customers who had already checked in. It was a small hotel tour to show the property before going to their rooms - it was showing around, basically. We were also going inside the room with the customer to check everything was okay. One day, when I was passing by the corridor, I heard some noise; it was shouting. Then, I realised this was my colleague. She was also one of my good friends...Anyway, the customer – a very tall and strong man, and I can say he was around his 50s – pushed my colleague to the bed, forcing her to have sex after the hotel tour. When I opened the door, she was on the bed and trying to thrash away from him. When I saw her, I panicked and quickly called other colleagues for help. Thank God, nothing happened; we saved her immediately, but it was terrifying to see her in that situation. Poor girl...She was so scared and completely shaking... It is still vivid to me, and I cannot forget this horrific moment."

Clara noted that seeing her colleague being attacked created a sense of panic and fear. Witnessing harassment might have negative consequences for the bystander's well-being, stimulating negative physical and emotional stressors on individuals even if they are not directly affected (see Acquadro Maran et al., 2022). She also emphasised that *"I would say that it does not really matter if it is short-term or long-term affect. The important thing is how intense the feeling was when you witnessed it."* Those who witness harassment at work might have a fear of facing the same mistreatment in the future. Evidently, not being directly harassed did not lessen or eliminate the emotional impact. As Clara highlighted, this led to her becoming more cautious about the coming hotel tours in order not to be harassed by a customer:

"After this case, when I did the tour of the rooms, I would not go inside with the customer. I was always standing in front of the door. Because you have never known what would happen."

Bystanders who may witness behaviours that constitute harassment and bullying have a potential role in stopping the cases in an active and/or constructive manner. However, they might become more passive and/or destructive without engaging in the harassment and bullying process (The National Sexual Violence Resource Centre (NSVRC) 2023; Ng et al. 2020, 2022). Ng et al. (2020) identified four behavioural response typologies in order to explain the bystander's role in the process of workplace harassment: active constructive (e.g. intervening to stop harassing behaviour), passive constructive (e.g. sympathising with the victim but not acting), active destructive (e.g. engaging in re-victimisation) and passive destructive (e.g. ignoring the situation). In this example, Clara intervened in the case in an active - constructive manner, which might have made it less harmful to the person (her colleague) experiencing it. Since witness roles could be seen as the most likely remedy of the cases (The National Sexual Violence Resource Centre (NSVRC) 2023), the impact of workplace sexual harassment affects not only the direct victims but also the witnesses of harassment who see or hear behaviours that threaten or harass in the organisations (Acquadro Maran et al. 2022). This case had a direct impact on Clara's work strategy and left a strong mark on her emotional and/or psychological well-being as she had *"intense feelings"* when she witnessed the harassment case. During the interview, she became visibly sad when recounting this particular experience. Unfortunately, it is noteworthy that while she underwent emotional responses, including fear, sadness and anxiety during and just the aftermath of the case, recounting this moment with intense and sorrowful emotions years later might reflect a long-term effect.

Psychological Impact of Workplace Sexual Harassment

The narratives indicated that not all participants experienced negative psychological impacts on their mental health, even in the face of ongoing harassment experienced in the sector. They faced mixed emotional feelings of fear, anger, sadness, helplessness, frustration, humiliation, and self-doubt and questioned themselves about the harassment they experienced at work. They noted that those negative feelings did not trigger other damaging psychological symptoms on their well-being

(such as stress, burn-out syndrome, depression, PTSD, etc.). This might be explained by women employees' determination and resilience to overcome such negative experiences as well as the level of harassment experienced. As for others, the impact was more serious. Over time, severe psychological impacts (such as anxiety, depression, burn-out syndrome, psychosomatic disorders (fatigue, insomnia, headache/migraine, high blood pressure, nausea/vomiting, etc.) and PTSD were experienced by some female employees. Amy (assistant manager of the back office in a hotel) stated that she greatly suffered from the persistent sexual harassment she was exposed to by her manager. She struggled with anxiety and depression caused by the verbal and physical harassment come-ons of her manager in her previous job. She was exposed to sexual jokes and comments, constant invitations for a date, unwanted touch and patting of her body parts. She stated that as an assistant manager of the back office in a five-star hotel, the harassment and bullying behaviours she faced started to become impossible to cope with and that she found it harder to work under such circumstances: she decided to report her harasser to HR. Amy described the strain she felt in this situation, saying, *'Everything started becoming more nightmare for me after reporting'*:

> *"I tried to put up with to keep my job, you know. Then, I could not bear it and reported him to HR. As soon as he found out that I had reported him, he went crazy and started to harass and bully me more. He started shouting at me all the time and sometimes in front of the other staff, like 'Everybody should know how bitch you are. Because you are a fucking bitch.' He supposed that I would keep quiet and behave like a coward."*

She was visibly upset during the interview and said she had never told anyone about her harassment case. She was in doubt about whether she should tell anyone, saying:

> *"I was having a difficult time because of his threats, so this was the last straw. He shouted and swore at me in front of my colleagues, which was really embarrassing. I did not know how I left that place, and I was really nervous. My heart was pounding when he yelled at me in front of the others. Because I have never been in that kind of*

situation before, I could not even say a word there, and I just left the work."

Amy noted many things she enjoyed about her job as an assistant manager, saying: *"I knew everything that I was doing as that job as mine, you know. It was like not someone else's company – if that were my own company, I would work in the same aspect, with the same effort."* She said that she did not believe her harassment experience would seriously impact her well-being, adding:

> *"...When he started to harass me, I did not think that this was impacting on my wellbeing much. I wondered if I could get over it, but I could not. It affected my mental health. Sleepless nights, self-blaming, and two severe anxiety attacks happened before reporting him. After yelling at me as a 'bitch' in front of the others, I could not go to work, I needed some time for myself, and the doctor signed me off from work...I could not go for like a month, and then I preferred to leave, you know, I could not stay there. During my absence, he did spread rumours about me, which were all lies. You know, he was just attacking me, he was punishing me as I had reported him to HR. So, I could not go back after all these, and I had to leave."*

In the meantime, she was threatened by the harasser: *"...He was constantly texting me, calling me like 'You are fucked up' or 'You are such a slut.' He was telling me these kind of things. He made me feel weak. I felt quite desperate, and I needed to speak with the doctor then. My GP doctor offered to get counselling sessions...I had to take some pills to down my stress and anxiety. I was in depression, according to my therapist...."*

Amy recalled feeling 'weak' and 'desperate' at times. In addition, she noted that she had difficulty sleeping and felt physically and mentally weakened (fatigued) by trying to combat this situation. She had to get professional support to recover. Her therapist informed her that she was suffering from a moderate level of depression, resulting in some physical symptoms (psychosomatic disorders: fatigue, sleep

disorders, migraine, etc.). Workplace sexual harassment had a damaging effect on her psychological and physical well-being as well as emotional damage.

Previous research indicates that sexual harassment is a stressor that can lead to detrimental impacts on one's mental and physical health (Sojo et al. 2016; Agarwal 2022). The short-term negative psychological consequences of harassment are often associated with an increased risk of anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder, as well as diminished self-esteem and self-confidence (Willness et al. 2007; Chan et al.2008; Srivastava and Agarwal 2020). Depression alone can cause sleep disorders (excessive sleep or lack of sleep), low mood and sadness, fatigue and/or loss of energy, changes in weight and appetite, inability to focus, feelings of worthlessness/hopelessness/helplessness, lack of motivation or interest in things, tearfulness, anxiety or worry and suicidal thoughts or thoughts of self-harm (NHS Foundation Trust 2023). There is no single impact of harassment on the victims. The psychological impacts of harassment can be complex and vary widely between those who have experienced it.

Similarly, Elaine (working in the guest relations department in a four-star hotel in Greece) recounted how being emotionally (psychologically) harassed negatively impacted her mental well-being because of exposure to frequent emotional/psychological abuse (dismissive language and attitude towards her and undermining her self-worth and manipulation) by the department supervisors and managers. She stated how she would be anxious and stressed before every departmental meeting due to fear of verbal and emotional harassment from her seniors:

> *"They made me feel like whatever I did would never be good enough.*
> *At the time, I constantly questioned myself and felt quite worthless. I*
> *could not shake off the anxiety and fear I felt whenever I was called*
> *for a meeting."*

Feelings of worthlessness, self-doubt and fear led to mixed feelings about the harassment she experienced. She also felt strongly about wanting to keep her job

and position even in the face of ongoing harassment behaviours that she had to cope with.

> *"... Unfortunately, in this sector (hospitality sector) or not in this sector only, women generally have been discriminated in terms of power, in terms of their knowledge, in terms of their abilities to do things. This abuse was very damaging at that time...I lost so much of my confidence...I felt like I was drowning. It was like burning me out. Although all these experiences, I guess I will continue to be in that industry for many years if I can. I think that is something I have to work on and to be able to tackle those kinds of issues not to happen again."*

Elaine highlighted that the impact was so damaging to her feelings of self-worth that it caused burnout. The ongoing accumulated emotional exhaustion from emotional harassment negatively affected her mental well-being. On the other hand, Even though her seniors regularly harassed her, she resolved to keep her job as she was passionate about it. This self-driven approach demonstrated a desire to be a part of the hospitality sector, although she suffered mental burnout.

Olivia also noted that the harassment she faced damaged her feelings of self-worth:

> *"...when something like this happens to you, it does damage your confidence. It makes you feel like you are not worth as much as others. So, it diminishes your self-worth...I think that happens a lot in the hospitality industry."*

This was not the case for all participants who experienced sexual harassment in the workplace. Even though Elaine and Olivia showed the strength to cope with harassing behaviours, emotional symptoms of burnout were echoed by many participants who experienced it. For some, dealing with harassment made interactions at work difficult and uncomfortable. Ada said, *"I realised that I lost my positive attitude toward my job and colleagues. I suppose I was at the point of*

burnout." Similarly, Clara stated that over time experiencing frequent harassment by her colleague became exhausting, and she did not want to come to work:

> *"I could not concentrate on my work and was trying to avoid him. If I had seen him, I would have run out. It came to the extent that I did not even want to go to work because I knew that he would be at work. I was exhausted indeed."*

Job burnout syndrome is caused by the accumulated emotional exhaustion of work-related stress and pressure over some time, which affects psychological, emotional and physical health (Salama and Abdou 2022). As a result, those who face workplace sexual harassment might feel worn out and have a negative attitude toward their jobs, affecting their ability to maintain their relationships with those around them (Tsukamoto et al. 2021; Chen et al. 2022). Livne and Goussinsky (2018) stated that employees who were exposed to sexual harassment in their workplace had a high level of burnout. Similarly, Jung and Yoon (2020) note that sexual harassment experienced by female hotel employees increased their burnout and triggered their physical and mental exhaustion.

The psychological impact of workplace sexual harassment can also extend the way in which the female employee can involve distressing emotions and feelings within one month of a traumatic event or months and years after the event has occurred, which is identified as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Fitzgerald and Cortina 2018; Hansen et al. 2022; Grech et al. 2023). Experiencing harassment might have the potential to intensify thoughts and feelings that can remind sufferers of the event for long periods after the incident. This is more likely when the harassment comes from colleagues (peers) and seniors at work (Hansen et al. 2022). Although this can vary widely between individuals, Amy stated that being harassed caused severe damage to her emotional and psychological well-being, and she suffered from depression. She explained how this had a profound effect on her mental health condition while she was getting counselling services during that period. The experience of recurrent and unwanted distressing memories of the traumatic event was felt to be unbearable during the first couple of months of therapy:

"...I had to take some pills at that time because of the stress and depression. This period took longer than I thought. After getting the depression diagnosis, I reprogrammed myself like I had to heal myself in time to move forward. It was not easy, indeed...I am still suffering sometimes, like when I am thinking and when I am talking about it, I am still shaking, but at that time, this was worse. This is nothing to compare to that time. Every single day, I was thinking of all those things that happened. And the town that I was living in was very small, and I did have this anxiety like 'if I see him again, what am I supposed to do?' I was really angry at him because he made me lose my job and humiliated me in front of my colleagues, and because he did destroy my work life. My anger and anxiety were also about like 'Am I going to be able to find a job again?' or Could I get a positive reference from my line manager?' or 'My career was going well, and now I am nothing'. You know, these things were always in my mind for a period..."

As can be seen from Amy's quote above, she had to cope with the emotional and psychological fallout from this cycle of events for a period. Severe psychological impacts such as high levels of anxiety and depression and post-traumatic stress disorder can be triggered if the individual has intense and distressing feelings, emotions and thoughts related to their experience that last long after the traumatic event has ended (Fitzgerald and Cortina 2018).

When women suffer from frequent sexual harassment at work and experience severe psychological disorders afterwards, some of them might experience PTSD resulting from such sexual harassment, as happened in Amy's experience. As such, workplace harassment may affect later depressive symptoms. Although those symptoms of PTSD can vary widely between individuals or might not be observed in every individual case, this perhaps highlights the complexity of the experience of workplace harassment and its possible severe impacts on individuals. According to the Royal College of Psychiatrists (2024), post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a mental health condition that may develop after a person has experienced a

traumatic event. The American Psychiatric Association (2024) describes an individual with PTSD as follows:

> '...people with PTSD have intense, disturbing thoughts and feelings related to their experience that last long after the traumatic event (such as sexual assault, abuse, rape, bullying, harassment, an accident, a disaster, or other serious events) has ended.'

The association also emphasises that the likelihood of women experiencing PTSD is twice that of men (American Psychiatric Association 2024). This study demonstrates that female employees may experience a range of emotional and psychological effects as a result of harassment. Since sexual harassment is typically unexpected and violates one's beliefs about a safe and nonviolent work environment, individuals who experience sexual harassment are prone to manifest similar psychological symptoms to those who experience traumatic events (Chan et al. 2008; Agarwal 2022). This thus adds to the existing research that has attempted to identify the psychological impacts of workplace harassment (Fitzgerald et al. 2013; Quick and McFadyen 2017; Fitzgerald and Cortina 2018). It is acknowledged that the psychological effects of harassment could be more complicated to gauge as these consequences are less overt and observable compared to physical symptoms (Einarsen et al. 2020). Worryingly, stressful and depressive symptoms of harassment can increase additional stressors and contribute to poor mental health; therefore, the cost could be significant in terms of individual and occupational well-being.

Impact on Occupational Well-being

Individual experiences of sexual harassment in the workplace can have negative effects on employee's occupational well-being and work performance. Given that sexual harassment is a negative job stressor impairing women's individual well-being (Ford and Ivancic 2020), it is significant to reflect on the stories that affect their occupational well-being. Participants referred to reduced motivation and

productivity and lower effort in their job performance when they experienced sexual harassment. Lucy noted that the harassment behaviours she faced made her reckless and numb to emotions about her performance during the rota:

"...You know, I do not give a shit. I felt like there was no reason to be friendly and helpful to my colleagues anymore. I was at the edge of intentionally working slower but could not do this. The only thing that I did was answer their demand like 'I am busy now, please ask X (another colleague)'. So, when you are unmotivated, you do not put in the extra effort. You think that the minimum is enough – more than enough indeed."

Similarly, Evelyn (pastry chef in a hotel) recalled how her mood and work motivation considerably decreased when she was exposed to frequent sexist and offensive comments from her superior:

"It makes you feel bad. Your energy is suddenly fading away, and you are losing your concentration. The fact is that someone can quickly diminish your energy and motivation somehow."

Evelyn also recalled that the chef was harassing the new training chef. The insulting and bullying behaviour of the chef towards the new chef negatively impacted her female colleague's work performance and reduced her mood; she witnessed:

"...The junior chef that is being harassed and bullied by the big chef...You may not know what happened to her or how she felt, but it seems she had difficulty dealing with his pressure. Her work performance actually dropped so much because she could not concentrate at work, and every time she saw the sous chef, she was sweating."

In addition, she stated that witnessing the harassment of a colleague was profoundly distressing and negatively impacted her work mood for a while*: "It was so sad to*

see her like this. Even after that, I thought, 'Is this chef going to do this to me?' I think that affects people's mental state of mind during the work."

Clara similarly mentioned how the emotional impact of witnessing sexual assault at work decreased her occupational well-being in the short term: *"I was panicked and shocked when I saw my colleague like this, and after that, I felt uneasy during most of the guest rooms tour, fearing that a similar thing - harassment - could occur ."*

Dora highlighted that she was enjoying her job despite intense relationships with customers and colleagues during the service transaction, which is a generic characteristic in the hospitality sector (Brandon-Jones et al. 2016). To date, she has not been subjected to a severe degree of sexual harassment or physical form of harassment behaviour. She mostly and frequently experienced verbal sexual comments, sexist jokes and constant requests for dating from her colleagues and customers. She emphasised that being exposed to verbal harassment during work sometimes affected her work performance and that she could not handle such behaviour, especially on days when she was not in the mood or felt under the weather. She added:

> *"I have experienced and am still experiencing a lot of sexual and sexist sayings at work...I can deal with this by myself unless a more risky or dangerous situation happens. But sometimes, it could be too much to handle if I am not in the mood or things related to my life that keep my mind occupied. It gets really irritating and annoying to hear all crap (sexist jokes, sexual comments) from your colleagues and customers at that time. Then, you might feel shit and want to get away from there. So, it could be difficult to concentrate on your job..."*

She also mentioned that she took *'a longer break than usual'* on those days if she was subjected to sexual jokes and comments from either her colleagues or customers during the service delivery:

> *"If I do not feel very well or cannot bear it, I always take a long break to escape the environment. At least, it helps me to calm down..."*

This was highlighted by Zhu et al. (2019), who stated that having a longer break and being reluctant to come to work are some of the outcomes after exposure to sexual harassment behaviours in the workplace. The understanding of employees' work behaviours and attitudes after experiencing harassment at work is complex, yet decreased motivation and performance could be the outcomes of experiencing harassment. Similarly, Emma recalls how she was scared after a sudden physical attack by a drunk customer and how she was reluctant to come to work for a while after the event had occurred:

> *"I was so scared, and I remember I did not want to go to work for a while in case the same thing happened, but I did not take time off from work, I went...As I told you, I did not want to lose my job."*

The occurrence of sexual harassment in the hospitality workplace directly exerted a negative impact on female frontline employees' job motivation. Women are sexually harassed more often in a bar setting due to the high volume of alcohol consumption in a vibrant social atmosphere, and they are more distressed than their male counterparts by all forms of harassing and abusive behaviours that they face (Beltramini et al. 2020). Grace explained how she had to refuse such unreciprocated sexual requests and demands from customers during the service, which could affect her energy and productivity:

> *"Every night, we have the same story here (in the bar). Some customers are just trying to flirt with you, and others might be bold enough to ask you for sex directly. You know, some customers act like that. I always brush them off. Managing tipsy and drunk customers could be challenging...Sometimes you put too much effort into getting rid of the customer nicely, but then, you realise that you do not have the energy for the next customer..."*

This shows that those who have encountered sexual harassment behaviours in the workplace had lower motivation and job performance after the event occurred. This could mean that sexual harassment might impede a person's ability to perform their job, leading to decreased productivity and difficulty in carrying out their job duties (Agarwal 2022). Notably, the impact of sexual harassment affects not only the direct victim's occupational well-being but also the witness of harassing behaviours, who could be affected or agitated by this unwelcome misbehaviour (Acquadro Maran et al. 2022). Worryingly, the prevailing culture of sexual harassment in hospitality organisations leads the victims of sexual harassment to experience considerable negative repercussions on their individual and occupational health. Since negative mental and physical well-being can diminish job performance and morale, women employees may want to change their jobs and/or sectors prematurely, thereby eventually compromising women's economic prospects (Vagins et al. 2019).

The Long-term Impact of Harassment

"I thought that the right decision would be to leave my job..."

Emily

The long-term impact of sexual harassment on female employees could be profound and complex, affecting various aspects of an individual's life. These repercussions could extend beyond the immediate aftermath of harassment and persist for months or years, affecting personal lives beyond the workplace. The narratives demonstrate that the long-term impact of workplace sexual harassment could permeate women's personal lives, impacting their intimate relationships and career and financial ramifications. It is essential to highlight that while these impacts might lead to distressing and traumatic experiences in some individuals' lives, others might try to cope with them to protect themselves from further harm. Some participants noted that their feelings were still raw, and it was easy to transport themselves back to those times when they were looking for support that would aid recovery. Memories were easily stirred and evoked emotions such as anger and resentment in the

interview process. How workplace sexual harassment affected participants' intimate relationships in their personal lives will be discussed, drawing on excerpts from the narratives' accounts.

Impact on intimate relationships

The narratives indicated that the impact of workplace sexual harassment on women's intimate relationships was highly individualised. Since the decision of whether or not to disclose their experiences of sexual harassment varies from person to person, little is known about the impact of sexual harassment on individuals' personal lives after being exposed to it. Specifically, women who experience sexual harassment at work predominantly choose to remain silent for fear that disclosing their experiences will negatively affect their career advancement, including worry about losing their jobs (McDonald 2012; Cassino and Besen-Cassino 2019; Ford et al. 2021). Furthermore, some women could fear being ostracised and stigmatised because of society's tendency to blame victims rather than perpetrators, which could contribute to silence (Shupe et al. 2020; von Sikorski and Saumer 2021). For example, Hazel chose to avoid speaking up, *"I never wanted to share these things with anybody."*

Over time, some participants noted that the harassment cases that they encountered had a direct and negative impact on the dynamics of romantic relationships. They highlighted that workplace sexual harassment led to disturbance in their mood and reduced their emotional energy available for personal relationships. This was described as *'emotional distance'*. Women who have endured sexual harassment in the workplace might develop emotional distancing mechanisms, affecting intimacy and closeness within their romantic relationships. Amy referenced an emotional distance from her partner after experiencing physical and emotional harassment within the following extract:

> *"After many years, I can say that this is a pathetic experience, which*
> *makes me very sad about how this thing was taking a toll on me. It*

was rough indeed to deal with this in my relationship for a bit. But
what is bothering me the most is that I would become distant from
my partner. I can say that this negatively affected our relationship
and our intimacy. Because I only wanted to live on my own and have
limited interaction with him. I was escaping from him..."

She pointed out the significant lasting impact that workplace sexual harassment can have on interpersonal functioning, including relationship quality and sexual and emotional intimacy. This could lead to poorer long-term romantic relationship functioning and/or having difficulty engaging with romantic partners. Amy coped with this when she was struggling with depression. This points to the significant long-term impact experiencing workplace harassment can have on a woman, resulting in being less motivated to pursue romantic relationships and/or having difficulties in emotional intimacy with her current partner.

This emotional distance towards her partner was echoed by Elaine, who felt unhappy in her relationships, including in her intimate relationship with her partner:

"...I think it (exposure to psychological/emotional sexual harassment
at work) *affected everything, including my relationships...I did feel*
like I was drowning in both the work situation and my relationship
issues. I realised that you are in a situation where your daily
relationships with others, friends, family, and partners do not make
any sense to you. It was like a feeling that you cannot get out. You
know I felt down indeed..."

Elaine added that her partner became aware of her distress and upheaval at work, and he provided emotional support during this period:

"...but when something like this happens to you, I do not think it has
just affected me; it has also affected my partner because he could
see how upset I was. He knew all the situations happening at work
and supported me at that time."

The account demonstrates that the impact extends beyond the individual experiencing distressing events encountered at work. Sexual harassment could also affect those people who are closest to the harassed person, particularly the individual's partner. In Elaine's case, her partner supported her during this challenging period, although she experienced emotional distancing towards him.

Similarly, Emily recalled feeling driven to avoid her boyfriend because of workplace sexual harassment. She described the impact of workplace harassment as a negative driving force that created some obstacles in her intimate relationship when she was younger in the early stage of her career. As she grew older and became experienced in the sector, she realised this should not have been the case:

> *"I suppose when you are young, you put too much meaning into things that you are struggling with or things making you upset, and you think that you cannot cope with it. I wish I would not have let the things make me feel bad, and I wish I would not let the things negatively affect my relationships. But I did. You know, a twenty-something-year-old young woman was hit on by her customers and colleagues. So, you were not used to people approaching you in that way, and this made me feel as if I was an object. These were the early years of my professional career, and you think too much to handle it. I was so down on myself. I remember I was mistreating my boyfriend at that time because of harassment that I had been exposed to in the hotel where I used to work. Because this situation just made me feel angry, stressed and anxious. I was thinking that he was annoying me. I found myself snapping at him over the smallest things. I was trying to avoid him. I did not even want to hug him...You know, now it does not bother me anymore because I am a bit older, not 'older older' of course, you know, but because for a long period after – 20 years around – you can realise that you are much more experienced about your professional career and private life. Therefore, I would never let those things (workplace sexual harassment behaviours) down me or affect my private life at all."*

The adoption of a narrative approach captured the impact of sexual harassment on women's intimate relationships over time. The women employees' narratives allowed for a temporal frame of reference where individuals could recount their experience and compare it with their earlier or later careers. It was evident from the interview data that during their early career, women may find it particularly difficult to cope with the impact of workplace harassment on their personal lives. Some participants referred to being unwilling to speak up or share their experiences with others, including partners, which possibly compounded the situation or at least allowed it to go on for longer. Lucy stated that at the time, she did not want to speak to anyone (including her boyfriend) about what she was experiencing at work:

> *"I did not want to share what was happening at work. I was extremely upset and emotionally overwhelmed. I did not share it with my boyfriend, either. I did prefer to keep things to myself rather than share with people around me. I think the things happening at work affected everything – when I came home exhausted and stressed, he tried to talk to me, but I mostly sneaked off the conversation."*

On reflection, Lucy believed that keeping quiet and trying to cope alone were among the reasons for a lasting impact on her private life, and she added: *"I wish I had spoken to my boyfriend earlier about it because it has affected me and our relationship so much and so badly"*. Emily worried that speaking up might lead to more detrimental harm to their relationships; therefore, she stayed quiet, an opinion echoed by many participants:

> *"...talking to my partner? I had never thought about it. I did not want our relationship to suffer because of work-related issues. Although I had been feeling so overwhelmed, I just shut down. You know, I suppose, keeping it away from him did create more distance in our relationship. I wish I had not..."*

This highlights the participants' coping strategies for dealing with the effects of workplace sexual harassment on their close relationships. When looking back, some participants wished they had been able to talk to their partners and/or boyfriends.

Unfortunately, neither sharing their experiences with their partners nor keeping quiet helped to alleviate the pressure and emotional exhaustion that the participants felt. As a result, the dynamic of intimate relationships was negatively impacted.

As can be seen from the quotes above, the experience of workplace sexual harassment may lead to strained communication and diminished emotional intimacy, impacting individuals' ability to connect on a deeper level with their partners. Research that has explored women with a history of adult sexual abuse and sexual assault has suggested that they suffer negative psychological and psychosocial health consequences as well as emotional dissatisfaction or loss of emotional and/or sexual intimacy and increased irritability toward their romantic partners over time (Goodcase et al. 2015: Georgia et al. 2018; Rothman et al. 2021).

It is evident in this study that the negative consequences of workplace sexual harassment are not constrained to the worksite. The narrative interviews uncovered that sexual harassment experiences could negatively affect women's intimate relationships over time. Various studies have explored the impacts of sexual harassment at a multidimensional level, including individual and organisational levels (McLaughlin et al. 2017; Diez-Canseco et al. 2022; Opoku et al. 2024); however, the true extent and potential consequences of workplace sexual harassment on individuals' intimate relationships are still not known. This indicates the invisibility and routinisation of sexual harassment, which is often compounded by a static perspective that does not take structural factors into consideration (Eger et al., 2020). Mostly, instances of sexual harassment pass by unnoticed or unacknowledged, blending into the background of everyday life. This might be explained by the complexity of the experience of sexual harassment and its impacts on individuals' close relationships associated with their emotional and psychological resilience, the personal characteristics, the severity of harassment behaviours they experienced, the acceptance level of the situation, and the dynamics between partners. However, it is clear that more work on potential impacts on intimate relationships needs to be done in order to fully understand the individual legacy that workplace sexual harassment can leave. However, this study suggests that the cost could be significant.

Impact on Career and Financial Ramifications

Experiencing sexual harassment might have long-term consequences for women's careers. It can also include adverse consequences on personal finances that women may face varying financial setbacks following workplace sexual harassment. Since sexual harassment might force some women out of their jobs and cause extra costs for counselling services to improve their mental well-being, it likely affects their long-term career trajectories and earnings. The narratives indicated that not all participants were in seriously disadvantageous positions regarding financial loss as a consequence of workplace harassment; however, for some, the outcomes were more serious. Previous research has predominantly focused on the deleterious consequences of individuals' well-being, including physical, emotional and psychological repercussions (Sojo et al. 2016; Fitzgerald and Cortina 2018). Moreover, given those severe health effects on women, it is not surprising that sexual harassment could cause subsequent career disruption, altering women's careers, such as leaving and/or changing their jobs and therefore resulting in a loss of earnings and financial stress. Since many women targets quit their jobs rather than continue working in a harassing work environment, the findings of this study show how and why workplace sexual harassment affects women's unfolding career and incur economic costs.

Amy's workplace harassment experience led her to quit her job to avoid the harasser:

> *"...I could not work there anymore. I had to leave because my heart*
> *was pounding every time I bumped into this guy."*

Similarly, in her early thirties, Lauren left her F&B manager position in one of London's fine-dining restaurants after experiencing constant and serious harassment. She devoted four years to the restaurant where she was working as a migrant employee. She was facing constant inappropriate comments from her boss. She noted that at times, she tried to leave the job because it was not easy to put up with her boss' behaviour as he was called a *'womaniser'* amongst colleagues. She was not the only target among the staff, and she was witnessing or hearing from her

other female colleagues, who were exposing varying harassing behaviours by her boss. Grabbing her and rubbing up against her, and demanding sexual favours was the last straw. This experience scared her, therefore she left the restaurant.

> *"I had to work there for four years because of my visa situation. We (female staff in the restaurant) all know how flirty he was. In the beginning, I had thought it was just harmless flirting, but it had gotten worse. But it was quite tough to bear that kind of situation. He was the owner of the restaurant, and he was the one harassing me. So, there was no one else to complain about it, and the quick solution was to end up quitting... "*

Lauren stated that leaving the job led to significant losses. Although she worked hard during the last four years, her boss did not provide a positive reference for her; therefore, prospective employers hesitated to employ her, and she faced many rejections in getting a new position. She felt desperate and frustrated by many rejections, and she added:

> *"You know, London is expensive, and I had to carry on living my life somehow... my rent, bills, and other expenses. I lost a lot of money because I had bought a car at the time, and I thought that I had a job and could afford it. But because I needed to leave, I had to pay them from my savings, and I have had a huge loss."*

Despite the setbacks and hardships she endured, she secured a new job in the sector three months later. She contacted the restaurant's other partner to ask him for a good reference.

> *"I had worked hard for four years and felt like it was all for nothing. It was hard not to be frustrated and desperate after facing so many rejections. You know what? He (the harasser) was just trying to punish me, so that I could not find a job. Luckily, the other boss helped me out by providing me with a good reference. He was another partner of the restaurant but was not living in the UK at that*

time. He was managing the restaurant remotely and came to London only a couple of times a year. So, it took some time for me to reach out to him and tell all the story that I had...Anyway in the end, it cost me a lot—a lot indeed...I had spent almost all my savings within three months trying to survive in London."

Lauren's extract highlights how being harassed led a migrant employee to feel trapped due to her visa situation. In fact, immigration status might feed into the individual affected by harassment. Migrant workers, particularly youth and female migrants, are one of the most vulnerable groups in the hospitality labour force (ILO 2017; Rydzik and Anitha 2020; Rydzik and Bal 2023). They are more likely to be victims of harassment behaviours than local workers in a host country regarding employment rights, legal policies and visa situations. Furthermore, targets of sexual harassment are more likely to leave their jobs or their sector entirely, which can result in impede or halt their income (McLaughlin et al., 2017). Job loss and changing jobs are some of the most devastating economic results of workplace sexual harassment during the early and middle stages of a woman's career (Vagins et al. 2019). Even a short time out of the workforce can cause significant earnings loss for women (Vagins et al. 2019). As Lauren noted, workplace harassment contributed to financial stress until a new position.

Similarly, Elaine recounted the negative impact of harassment on her financial well-being over time after experiencing sexual harassment in the workplace. Having to take sick leave and reduce working hours resulted in a deep fear of financial instability:

"If I had quit, I could not have afforded my expenses, and I could not have paid the bills. Therefore, I had to take one month off to get away from everything. However, as my working hours cut and I could not get extra shifts, I was worried about my budget."

The fear of financial instability and uncertainty could be overwhelming, leading to more stress on women who experience sexual harassment. Such circumstances could create more concern even when women choose to remain in their current

positions after experiencing harassment. Getting sick leave, being forced to take unpaid leave, or reduced working hours could heighten anxiety and stress and result in loss of income, debt accumulation and challenges to long-term consequences for women's financial well-being.

The unfortunate reality for some women in hospitality is that leaving their jobs in the face of sexual harassment could be a challenging decision that comes with a variety of complexities, as it often involves the risk of unemployment and financial turmoil. Amy quit her job after exposing a co-worker who demanded to touch her back and mentioned instant sexual favours: *"All the experiences I had drove me to the edge. It was not an easy decision, but I decided to quit without finding another job."*

This was echoed by Helen, who resigned without having a new job lined up due to workplace harassment: *"I just could not take it anymore. It was too much to bear, and I quit."* She found herself in a position where she did not feel safe at work due to ongoing harassment from her colleague. After reporting the case to HR, she endured heightened levels of harassment and intimidation by the perpetrator. The stress and fear of facing her harasser every day made it impossible for her to continue working. In order to avoid her harasser, she decided to resign without having secured a new job. Further, she stated that the situation became even harder owing to the impact on her financial situation while contending with poor mental health and depression during that period, and she added: *"I left my job to escape harassment, but financial difficulties haunted me until I found a new job."*

The participants highlighted that leaving a harassing environment can result in considerable financial losses. McLaughlin et al. (2017) state that women are likely to leave their jobs prematurely rather than continue working in a harassing workplace environment, which might increase subjective financial stress and generate long-term consequences for women's career trajectories. Yet, it is significant to point out that each story is unique and has its own costs for individuals. The adoption of a narrative approach captured the economic and career costs that the participants faced after experiencing workplace sexual harassment. Experiencing sexual harassment at work impacted female employees' earnings and

resulting short and long-term effects on employment trajectories. It is important to acknowledge that challenging a toxic work environment can come with tangible economic costs. Despite the increasing number of women in the hospitality workforce, there is limited research elucidating the concrete economic hardships encountered by women subsequent to experiencing workplace sexual harassment.

In the same vein, the consequences of workplace harassment on women's career paths are complex and multifaceted. Little is known about the impacts of workplace sexual harassment on female employees' careers in hospitality. Furthermore, different outcomes might arise onal The participants' stories allowed for a temporal frame of reference, revealing the need for career shifts after experiencing sexual harassment.

Some of the participants noted that they reached a stage where they could no longer emotionally and psychologically deal with sexual harassment behaviours at work; leaving and/or changing the organisation or the sector became their primary mechanism for coping: this was an avoidance strategy. It is significant to note that when coping is brought up, it is in conjunction with the impact of sexual harassment. This study, therefore, helps to fill a gap in knowledge through identifying how workplace sexual harassment has impacted women's careers and how they react to cope with workplace harassment in the moment and over time.

In fact, sexual harassment can have a profound impact on some women's career advancement by forcing them out of jobs (McLaughlin et al., 2017; Blackstone et al., 2009; Lopez et al., 2009) or disproportionally causing them to change sectors (Ro 2021), which is echoed in the psychology, health and gender literature. The narratives show that women who experienced unwanted verbal, physical, and/or emotional/psychological harassment behaviours at work were especially likely to change jobs or alter sectors.

Emma stated that leaving the job became the only way she could protect herself from further stress and suffering: *"After that, I just could not take it anymore and wanted to leave. You will never know if this is going to happen again, so I had to move on." Similarly,* Lauren noted that leaving was a rational decision to minimise

stress and toxic environment impacts on her well-being; therefore, she changed sector from hospitality to sports:

> *"I must say that my experience in hospitality was a roller coaster. I worked in the Food and Beverage department and Front Desk. To be honest, I found myself in an environment completely different from any other sector that I had worked in. There were also a lot of pleasant moments. It is not about everything negative. But the interaction of people put me in a position where I felt it was getting too stressful. Mobbing, abuse, and harassment were all too much for me. This was the main reason why I left my job in hospitality. Now, I am in the marketing and communication in the sports sector."*

Like Lauren, Dora chose to change the sector from hospitality to retail. After working as a full-time conference and meeting organiser in a hotel for fourteen months, she was sexually harassed by her co-worker who *"was always trying to touch me, making comments about my body...He asked me for a kiss, and I always kindly refused him. Once, he grabbed my hand and made me touch him."* She also described leering and sexual propositions. She added: *"...I decided to take a break. You know, it was about crossing the lines, and I did not want to deal with this at all as it had already been happening for two months."* Dora hoped to return to work in a different organisation; however, she decided to change her sector after receiving an offer from the retail industry.

Clara, a receptionist, quit her job and changed sector after a colleague grabbed her from behind and rubbed up against her: *"...after that behaviour, I was totally grossed out, and quit right away."* She stated that any behaviour without consent is *'unexpected'*, *'inappropriate'*, and *'intolerant'*. She also commented on the sector's characteristics and its links to harassment behaviours :

> *"...The nature of the job, the working hours, the instability that you have and also, you do not have a fixed income because you are hourly paid, and it depends on how busy the business is. So*

we pay accordingly; if they do not need you, they send you home,
so you know. And the level of stress is very high... I believe that
there is a high level of interaction within the team as well. It is a
people's industry. Constantly, you are part of a team. You never
work alone. Overall, all abusive and harassing behaviour comes
out..."

In the above extract, Clara notes that she has always felt financially insecure due to the nature of the hospitality industry. Although experiencing harassment was the final straw that prompted her to leave the industry, various elements of the hospitality workplace may have contributed to her decision. Minnotte and Pedersen (2023, p.604) believe that '...the organisational climate pertaining to sexual harassment matters...contextually, work environments shape the extent to which sexual harassment flourishes or is effectively curtailed... this also characterises the workplace atmosphere pertaining to sexual harassment from the perspective of the worker'. The ability to make connections, identify patterns, find significance and interpret experiences and events in ways that cultivate personal narratives and insights in a holistic way could be crucial for managing and reacting to one's surroundings. This allows individuals to derive a more salient personal meaning by using both tangible and intangible aspects of the environment. This perhaps explains why Clara made decisions and changes about her career after considering the sector's main characteristics and her experience with harassment. After working full-time for thirteen months in the hospitality industry, Clara moved to part-time work. Since she completed her master's in the same area (tourism and hospitality management), she found a position in higher education as a support staff member, marking the beginning of her career in HE.

The narratives above demonstrate that the effects of workplace sexual harassment on female employees could have significant economic and career impacts, but the extent of these impacts varies depending on the individual's experience. Gauging the direct and indirect effects of sexual harassment on women's careers could be challenging since the impacts can be diverse. This study's findings demonstrate that the experience of harassment in the workplace could lead to a significant impact on women in their early careers and experience increased financial stress since they

want to avoid the harasser and escape a toxic workplace environment. This finding aligns with the findings of McLaughlin et al. (2017), who found that workplace sexual harassment could take a concrete toll on the earnings and career trajectories of female employees, and the long-term economic costs could be more substantial for women in their twenties and early thirties.

Clearly, little is known about the tangible cost of workplace sexual harassment on women's earnings and career trajectories, which have yet to be explored within the hospitality literature. Indeed, this could be an interesting line of inquiry in the future in order to increase a holistic understanding of the economic and career effects of sexual harassment related to gender and other social identities.

Conclusion

This chapter shows that there is no single impact of workplace sexual harassment and that the experience is unique to the individual. The findings demonstrate that workplace sexual harassment can have a negative impact both during the experience and in the aftermath. The perceived impact of harassment has been multifaceted, revealing intricate connections between immediate and long-term consequences for participants' individual well-being, occupational well-being, intimate relationships and career and financial ramifications.

The immediate impact of workplace sexual harassment on female employees' well-being is profound and often manifests in various psychological and emotional distress. The experiences recounted by participants underscore the significant toll harassment takes on their mental well-being, leading to feelings of self-doubt, self-blaming, fear, anxiety, and stress. Additionally, experiencing harassment in the workplace exacerbates lower work performance, job satisfaction, motivation and reduced productivity and effort in their occupational well-being.

It is suggested that the long-term impact of workplace harassment is shaped by the immediate impact, and over time, the immediate impact will be affected by the

long-term impact of harassment as female employees can face difficulty in their intimate relationships as well as financial and career trajectories. The impact on intimate relationships is significant and can negatively impact individuals' dynamics of romantic relationships, including emotional distance from their partners and strained communication. This chapter also raises important concerns surrounding the decision to leave a toxic work environment in the face of harassment, which can disrupt women's career trajectories, impeding progression and diminishing earning potential, which need to be addressed.

CHAPTER 6: Ignoring vs. Confronting: The Organisational Response to Workplace Sexual Harassment

Introduction

As discussed in the previous findings chapter (Chapter 4 and Chapter 5), workplace sexual harassment has emerged as a pervasive issue in hospitality organisations and female employees are exposed to various types of harassment in hospitality settings. Although each story is unique and has its own costs for individuals, workplace sexual harassment poses profound implications for women's well-being and their occupational well-being. Through the narratives, this chapter explores the response strategies that hospitality organisations employ when female employees report the case/s to the management team.

As the final stage of the narrative journey, this chapter presents the organisational response to workplace harassment. The chapter delves into the complex dynamics of organisational responses to workplace sexual harassment, focusing on two distinct yet interconnected aspects: *ignoring* and *confronting strategies*. This final chapter offers insights into the dynamics of ignoring and confronting strategies within an organisational context in order to find out how organisations address and respond to harassment cases reported by their employees. These are portrayed in the figure below:
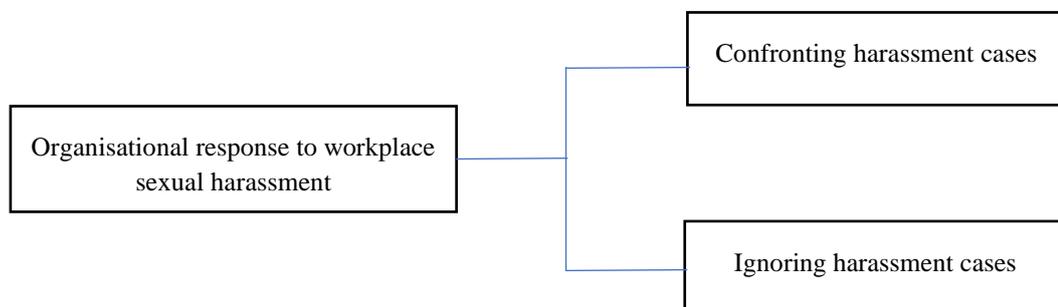

Figure 6.1: Thematic diagram for Chapter 6 (Source: Original)

The narratives referred to two primary responses given by the organisations in which sexual harassment occurred. The findings demonstrated a proactive approach signified by management regarding reported case/s, which was identified as *confronting workplace harassment* cases by organisations. This approach has been defined for hospitality organisations in many ways: taking measures to raise awareness of workplace harassment; implementing comprehensive education and training programmes for managers and employees to recognise, prevent and address potential sexual harassment behaviours in the workplace; establishing clear procedures and policies for addressing and reporting harassment cases; providing help and support for employees who experienced sexual harassment, including counselling and legal assistance to help alleviate the negative impacts of harassment on the individuals and organisation culture and reputation (Buckner et al. 2014; McDonald et al. 2015; Heymann et al. 2023). 'Confronting' is used to organise the research material, but it is not a straightforward process; it is incomplete and nuanced.

An environment where workplace sexual harassment was normalised and/or overlooked by hospitality organisations was also noted: this was termed the *ignoring harassment strategy*. This manifests in various forms, including failing to take appropriate action, downplaying reported incidents, struggling to effectively the issue due to management's failure to prioritise it, acknowledging the mentality of victim blaming and fostering a culture of impunity (Vijayraj and Rao 2015; Clarke 2020; MacDermott 2020). Sadly, this management approach could stem from a combination of factors in such organisations, including (a toxic) organisational culture, lack of management skills, power dynamics, fear of customer loss and ultimately, reputational damage (see Au et al. 2024).

Confronting Harassment Cases

> *"...A lot of people going into an industry do not know what sexual harassment is. They just think that it is something very normal that happens, but it is not something normal that happens, and it is not something that is supposed to happen."*

Workplace sexual harassment has serious implications for employees and their employers. Therefore, effective organisational responses to harassment cases are essential for establishing and maintaining a secure, inclusive and respectful workplace climate (Shaw et al. 2018). Adopting and maintaining anti-harassment strategies associated with the increased risk of sexual harassment in hospitality work settings might help reduce and eliminate the number of harassment cases in the work settings. Although there are no clear estimates of the business costs of sexual harassment, workplace harassment could result in substantial costs to companies, including legal and financial costs, operational costs, employee turnover and recruitment costs, productivity and performance costs related to increased absences, lower motivation and commitment, and overall team disruption, and reputation and brand image costs (Shaw et al. 2018; Au et al. 2024). As this is outside of the scope of this research to review, this chapter will not uncover the impact of workplace sexual harassment at an organisational level. Instead, the specific measures and strategies that hospitality organisations can implement to address and mitigate unacceptable behaviours after reporting will be examined. The findings from this study will also draw a worrying picture of organisations that are not willing to address issues of poor practice of workplace sexual harassment or ignored.

In this research, confronting harassment cases refers to *'the application of effective practices and supportive strategies to enforce comprehensive anti-harassment policies and outline the procedures for reporting unacceptable behaviours and handling complaints'* (EEOC 2024). The narratives referred to specific approaches and strategies that organisations applied to address and mitigate this pervasive issue in work settings. However, some participants stressed that those measures and procedures regarding workplace sexual harassment alone were insufficient to prevent harassment cases as procedures and policies remain theoretical documents rather than practical tools for prevention and response. The findings suggest that the juxtaposition of employees' testimonials and organisations' practices could be too complex to explain the organisations' commitments to address the issue. However, it is acknowledged that the establishment of workplace procedures and policies regarding sexual harassment is a critical first step to creating a work

environment where harassment is not tolerated. Lucy noted that anyone who started work in the hotel should get training on workplace harassment:

> *"We do have proper harassment training, both online and offline, which we do every two to three months. We then finish the training; we have a test that we need to complete."*

The training covered the definition of harassment, reporting mechanisms, legal implications, and case scenarios to recognise any form of harassment in the workplace. She added:

> *"The training starts by defining what constitutes harassment, covering bullying, racism, discrimination and sexual harassment. I can say that the training is wrapping up a little bit of everything...Sort of generic by using the harassment title. Also, it includes two or three different scenarios. There was a scenario in which the perpetrator was male, and the victim was female. So, the scenario was trying to show you what sexual harassment is and what the appropriate way to behave could be through this case."*

Similarly, Alice echoed compulsory training with regards to workplace harassment that employees have to complete: *"...the hotels where I used to work belonged to international chains - they were not local, independent and small organisations - in both hotels, I had to complete online training about workplace harassment, racism, human trafficking, and ethical behaviour in the workplace."* She believed that working in a big organisation is far better than working in a small hospitality organisation in terms of workplace culture and employee rights: *"Our supervisors often check on us during the rota to see if something is not right. They tried to ensure that everything was safe."* Dora remembered a particular training whereby a guest speaker from outside of the company trained all hotel employees regarding workplace harassment by using video demonstrations and role-playing scenarios, and she stated how the workshop was stimulating:

> *"...After the role-playing and watching some videos, the guest speaker facilitated a discussion on what went well, what went wrong, and what could be changed and improved. That exercise really*

helped me understand how to approach a situation and what I should
do if I come across this kind of thing as a victim or bystander. It is
different indeed when you actually discuss it and simulate it."

Engaging employees in hands-on activities and discussions can create an interactive learning environment and foster a greater understanding of the importance of the topic. Using real-world scenarios could also draw attention to inappropriate behaviours occurring in the workplace and inform employees how to take action when necessary. Similarly, (Campbell and Chinnery 2018) states that implementing comprehensive training and education programmes on workplace sexual harassment is essential for creating and maintaining a safe and healthy work environment. A well-defined sexual harassment policy that includes effective enforcement and examples of prohibited behaviour is a necessary foundation for building inclusive and supportive workplaces (WHO 2023). These policies should also empower bystanders by providing training that provides skills to intervene and report harassing behaviour when needed (Vagins et al. 2019).

Conversely, and perhaps somewhat surprisingly, some participants stressed that their employer did not provide any training regarding workplace harassment. In fact, this is a form of ignorance toward the needs of all employees, and this will be articulated in detail in the next section. Daisy recalled that only managers received training on harassment:

"The thing was that when you first come into the X hotel, they would
give you one or two days of induction training. But in that training,
they only talked about the history of X hotel, the policies and how to
behave towards customers. I have never received sexual harassment
training before. There was no training about that at all. I think the
only people who went for sexual harassment training were the
managers to let them know how to handle harassment issues.
However, there were no guidelines on what sexual harassment is for
other workers."

Paradoxically, despite the lack of a training programme about recognising worksite harassment, Chloe stressed that the hotel where she used to work had procedures for reporting unacceptable behaviours from colleagues and/or customers and

handling complaints. She also reflected that procedures for reporting and handling complaints by supervisors and managers were in place; however, without implementing training programmes to address different aspects of workplace harassment, employees could be vulnerable and unaware of how to act when necessary. Chloe stated that the organisation had a critical gap in its approach to workplace harassment:

> "I appreciate that HR handled my complaint about the agency worker, but I think the hotel needs more than just procedures in place. Many of my colleagues did not even realise that what the guy (the agency worker) was doing was harassment."

The stories shared by participants demonstrate that despite having established procedures for responding to unacceptable behaviours and handling complaints, some hospitality organisations do not provide any training on workplace harassment. Although organisations apply procedures and policies for addressing workplace sexual harassment, a lack of training could lead to employees' lack of awareness of how to identify, prevent and address harassment. This could, therefore, undermine the effectiveness of the existing reporting mechanisms and allow unwanted and unacceptable behaviours to persist in the workplace.

The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunities Commission (EEOC) recommends that a holistic strategy, including proactive and comprehensive steps, be followed to confront workplace harassment (EEOC 2020). One core strategy to consider is regular training sessions and education programmes at all employee levels (EHRC 2020). In addition, specialised training for managers and supervisors is significant for handling complaints, assisting and supporting victims, and fostering a healthy, productive and inclusive work environment. Daphne (front office manager) pointed to the importance of having robust procedures and strategies in the hospitality sector due to the high-pressure work environment and constant staff and customer interaction, which could escalate harassment. She mentioned that people in her team should know how to proceed when they are exposed to harassing behaviours either from a colleague or a customer:

> "In the hospitality industry where we work, the environment could be extra demanding and staff interactions are constant. So, it is

crucial to have training programmes to inform employees about their rights and responsibilities. In this hotel, training is mandatory for all employees. We are trying to create a culture where employees feel safe to speak up."

The awareness of workplace sexual harassment has evolved significantly over the past decades. As Maeve (Housekeeping manager) stated, harassment cases in hospitality are complex, and staff needs to be equipped with the skills to handle complaints and issues sensitively and effectively:

"To be honest, when I started my career in hospitality twenty-five years ago, we did not know what workplace sexual harassment was. We often talked about hitting on someone or being flirty, and that was the only way to feel sexually attracted to them in the workplace. I mean it was not something we did hear much in those days. Since then, many things have changed, and many behaviours that were previously overlooked or accepted are now recognised as inappropriate. Therefore, providing clear procedures and policies regarding what constitutes harassment and how to report it is essential for educating employees."

From a management standpoint, the adoption of effective procedures is already in place to enable a positive and safer hospitality work environment, which contradicts some participants' extracts. Interestingly, some participants complained that harassment policies look good on paper; however, there is a need for these measures and actions to be integrated into daily operations, not to exist just as a formality.

Not all female employees cited a lack of commitment to preventing and responding to workplace sexual harassment. Some participants stated that practical measures and procedures to address harassment were effectively put into practice. Emily described her work environment as *'a supportive organisation and team'* where she was working as a conference and banqueting supervisor at a five-star chain hotel. At the beginning of her hospitality career, she had to face several unwanted and inappropriate harassment behaviours from customers and managers, but she described how her career was changed in a positive way when she pursued a full-time contract upon completion of her master's degree. She referred to finding a full-

time position in an international hotel chain, which not only provided her with a supportive work environment but also had effective anti-harassment procedures and actions in place. This combination of a strong organisational culture and proactive measures enabled a reduction in the number of harassment cases in the workplace, allowing her to thrive in her role without fear of inappropriate behaviours affecting her personal and professional well-being and growth:

> *"I would say that, especially if you are a woman employee in the hospitality industry, you could feel very vulnerable if there are no or not enough protection rules against harassment. That was the thing that I felt while working in different types and sizes of hospitality organisations before joining this company...If you are in an environment where you cannot speak up, you cannot express yourself, and you are ignored, you are abused. That is why in this organisation, you can speak up loudly, you can discuss, and you can report to your supervisor, and they bring it up. It does not matter what level you are. And they provide assistance like a 'helpline assistant' so that you feel more comfortable and safe..."*

The role of supportive HR practices and effective procedures in addressing workplace harassment fosters a positive work environment where everyone feels safe and respected. Similarly, Elaine highlighted the support she received from HR when she reported the harassing behaviours that she was subjected to. She had to put up with frequent emotional and psychological harassing behaviours by her supervisor. These were manipulative and made her feel inadequate that she could no longer cope:

> *"It was a really tough situation. I feared that if I complained, it might have backfired, and I might have been fired as I was complaining about my supervisor. I felt trapped and did not know what to do. Then, I decided I could not hold it at all and reported it to HR."*

The fear of reporting due to the power dynamics between the harasser and the victim is a significant barrier to addressing such behaviour, where the harasser holds a position of authority over the victim. The power dynamics between harassers and victims could play a crucial role in perpetuating fear (Hershcovis et al. 2021). Elaine

was afraid to report the harassment due to her harassers' positions of power, fearing that her complaints would not be taken seriously and that she might face retaliation. She had the courage to approach HR, who then provided the necessary support and intervention:

> *"Luckily, the hotel's HR department was very supportive once I finally spoke up by plucking up my courage to approach them to escalate the issue. They assured me that my concerns would be taken seriously and treated confidentially. They arranged a couple of meetings with me by providing a safe space to talk about my experiences without fear of being fired. I did not hear anything from HR about my supervisor, though. However, there were some rumours that HR also initiated an internal investigation to address the issues with my supervisor."*

Similarly, Clara stated that the harassment behaviours she experienced led to emotional strain and burnout. When she reported the case, she felt *'a sense of relief'* due to the support provided by HR:

> *"I did not want to inform HR about it in the first place because I did not want everyone to learn about it. I just stood by quietly. I only shared this with one of my colleagues with whom we had a close relationship. She then encouraged me to report the issue to HR. I did, I talked to HR, and they helped me out to solve the issue I had not expected a supportive approach, to be honest."*

The narratives demonstrated varied experiences among female employees in their interactions with organisational responses to workplace sexual harassment. The approach to confronting harassment cases by organisations was diverse. While some employees did not perceive a strong commitment from their organisations to prevent and respond to harassment, others noted effective and supportive practices in place, indicating that organisational responses can be effective when properly executed.

From a management perspective, there is an ongoing effort to implement effective procedures to create a positive and safer work environment. However, this effort is

sometimes contradicted by employees' experiences, who feel that these measures need to be more thoroughly integrated into daily operations. This shows implementation challenges and differences in terms of managerial approach to workplace sexual harassment cases. In addition, the comparison of employees' experiences and organisational practices unveils a complicated picture of the organisation's dedication to tackling harassment. Some participants perceived the policies as mere formalities rather than practical strategies, indicating a disconnect between the organisation's applications and the employees' experiences.

There is an absence of comprehensive training programs designed to help employees recognise and prevent workplace harassment. Even in organisations with established procedures for reporting and handling complaints, a lack of training could leave employees vulnerable and unaware of how to deal with harassment effectively.

As can be seen from the participants' narratives above, some participants received effective support from HR when they reported harassing behaviour. Participants who experienced supportive HR interventions felt more secure and valued. This indicates that supportive HR practices and effective procedures are crucial in fostering a positive work environment to combat sexual harassment in work settings. Research on workplace harassment has predominantly indicated that when organisations incorporate a proactive approach towards preventing and addressing harassment cases, this could significantly reduce the occurrence of such behaviours and their associated negative impact on employees and organisations. Adopting strong policies and enforcement mechanisms could lead to a more supportive, cohesive and safe work environment (McDonald et al. 2015; Fitzgerald and Cortina 2018; Nielsen and Einarsen 2018; Vranjes and Lyubykh 2021; Cronin et al. 2024). The stories shared by the participants demonstrate how organisations' confrontations with workplace harassment practices may differ in terms of managerial approach, implementation consistency, and overall effectiveness.

Ignoring Harassment Cases

> *"...There was a general lack of training and awareness in workplaces. It is considered like you have to know it by yourself, and you need to know how to protect yourself..."*

> *Clara*

Ignoring sexual harassment refers to *'the failure of an organisation and/or its managerial approach to adequately acknowledge, address, or take action against incidents of harassment'* (McDonald et al. 2015). This type of response to sexually harassing behaviour in the workplace is critical when examining personal experiences of harassment and implementations of the organisation's responsiveness to sexual harassment.

Ineffective practices, inadequate policies, lack of acknowledgement and inaction of complaints to harassing behaviours can have a direct impact on individual female employees working in hospitality settings. This neglect (an organisation's unresponsiveness to harassment) may manifest in more frequent cases of actual harassment, severe consequences for an individual's personal and occupational well-being, including psychological, emotional and physical harm, and lower productivity and performance (Thirlwall 2015; Hodgins et al. 2020). It could also create a hostile work environment, eroding employee trust and potentially increasing turnover rates overall (Coetzee and van Dyk 2018; Ballard and Easteal 2018).

Although preventing and eliminating sexual harassment in the workplace is a requirement in the form of health and safety and ethical, cultural and societal norms, many organisations still fall short in this area. According to the Equality and Human Rights Commission (2020), when an employer becomes aware that harassment is taking or has taken place, they are liable for dealing with it promptly, effectively and sensitively. Four types of neglect by hospitality employers were identified in this study: lack of appropriate action against harassment, normalised harassment behaviours (from employees and customers), downplaying reported cases and victim blaming.

Despite the diverse range of hospitality settings, from small family-owned businesses to large international chains, the types of neglect of harassment cases are consistent across the board. At least one form of neglect was presented in each type of organisation, according to participants' narratives.

Participants stated that the lack of effective steps to prevent and respond to harassment cases is widespread in hospitality organisations regardless of size, type, and organisational culture. For many participants, a lack of effective and well-communicated organisational practices to respond to harassment was most commonly referred to. Clara stated that it was commonplace in any hospitality workplace where she worked - either in her home country or the host countries:

> *"...in every hospitality job I have had, whether it was in Thailand, Indonesia, or here (in the UK), the approach to harassment was pretty much the same. There was a general lack of training and awareness in workplaces. It is considered like you have to know it by yourself, and you need to know how to protect yourself..."*

She emphasised that people have not been trained properly on how to deal with sexual harassment cases or how to report harassment cases if it takes place:

> *"...You have to have a meeting with your own team to say things like, 'This is not allowed, this is considered harassment, this is considered bullying or mobbing'. There was no clear training about that at all. It was just the managers that attended the meeting to let them know how to handle a sexual harassment issue. Unfortunately, there is no specific guideline on what sexual harassment is for other workers."*

Since there was a general lack of awareness and effective training on what constitutes harassment in the workplace and how to report it, most harassment cases have been largely hidden due to under-reporting. Clara believes that low reporting rates have mostly been taken by hospitality employers as a sign that harassment is uncommon in their workplace:

> *"There is a thin line between being friendly and being harassed. Your friend could be very friendly if you are a good friend. You know, sometimes we hug each other, or we tease each other, or we say,*

'Your dress is so tight, you look sexy' or something like that. This is fine when you are friends, but what if somebody says the same thing and you feel uncomfortable? So, at what level does it become harassment? That is the thing...If you do not know or if you do not teach your employees what harassment is in your workplace, there will be confusion about it, like 'Should I inform my supervisor or not?' 'Should I report this to my manager or not?' Therefore, employers could reflect that there are not lots of harassment cases reporting as it is not happening more often..."

This extract points to a lack of effective training and awareness of harassment and addresses the specific context of the hospitality. The following extract from the interview with Hazel centres on the concerns she felt over a lack of management or regulation of policy in the organisation where she was working as a waitress:

"I was given a handbook when I started, but it was very vague about it (sexual harassment). There was no clear explanation of what sexual harassment was. I am still unsure what counts as harassment, and so are most of my colleagues, I suppose. Because I do not want to overreact unless I am certain that what I am experiencing is actually harassment..."

Hazel's quote reveals the need to define the characteristics of harassment in hospitality work settings and to implement proactive procedures to ensure employees have a clear understanding of what constitutes harassment. This highlights the necessity for regular and mandatory training sessions on workplace sexual harassment tailored to address the specific characteristics of the hospitality industry that some organisations might neglect. Given the dynamic work environment and intense relationships between employees and customers, it is important that employers should have access to effective and well-communicated policies and practices, which clearly be adressed within the particular sector characteristics (Van Rooyen and McCormack 2013). Otherwise, the lack of clear guidance and understanding could result in confusion and hesitation to report cases, thereby fostering an organisational culture where sexual harassment is normalised, unaddressed and perceived as rare.

The normalisation of inappropriate behaviours in hospitality organisations could be particularly insidious due to the industry's inherent characteristics. This is often related to prioritising customer satisfaction and profitability over employee well-being (Kensbock et al. 2015; Nimri et al. 2024). Within hospitality settings, service provision could suggest an asymmetric power dynamic between the paying customers and the staff who are there to meet customers' needs (Lugosi 2019). This power imbalance is also intensified among employees representing different ranks. Taking into account the sector's dynamic characteristics (such as gendered working conditions, power imbalances, intense interactions during service delivery, etc.), certain forms of harassment are often tolerated and/or normalised by organisations at specific points.

It is apparent that all participants, at some point in their hospitality careers, had to endure unwanted advances from either colleagues or customers when they reported these incidents to management. Some female employees recounted stories of persistent harassment that were downplayed or ignored by management, which not only failed to address the issue but also implicitly condoned such behaviours. For example, Amy described how her repeated complaints about a colleague's inappropriate comments were met with indifference by her supervisor, who dismissed the behaviour as *"just joking around"*. Similarly, Olivia reported her experience of being groped by a customer, only to be told by her manager that such incidents were *"part of the job"* and that she should *"learn to deal with it"*.

This normalisation of harassment behaviours could create feelings of frustration and underappreciation among hospitality employees. This also causes a discouraging work environment for women. Helen believed that gender-biased issues and sexist attitudes towards female employees in hospitality are commonplace and hierarchical status can significantly impact an employee's experience and treatment. She underscored the perceived lack of respect and support for women in lower-rank positions within the industry:

> *"I firmly believe that hospitality itself is challenging and a kind of flirtiness is going on in the sector. This flirtiness is pretty normal in the sector. I met with my husband at a big chain hotel where I was working as an event coordinator. Nothing wrong with this if the*

feelings are reciprocated. However, when I was bullied and harassed by my supervisor at the early stage of my career in a hotel, it was a very nasty situation. Can you believe that they fired me with no warning when I reported the case to my manager? Because they did not want to lose their experienced staff, and my manager told me that like 'this kind of behaviour is normal in this sector with young staff like you and I do not want to deal with any trouble'."

This extract reveals how an employee's experience of workplace harassment and the organisational response can be significantly influenced by organisational hierarchy. In some hospitality organisations, harassing behaviours may be seen as acceptable or normalised, particularly when it comes to managing young employees. Their complaints are more likely to be ignored or inadequately handled, leading to a higher likelihood of harassing behaviours being dismissed. This means that harassment may be more easily tolerated in hospitality settings than elsewhere, where the power dynamics between staff and management, as well as between staff and customers, could exacerbate the issue. In contrast, employees in higher positions are generally more protected and might have greater access to organisational support, which can help them navigate and address harassment more effectively, as Emma highlighted:

"If I had been in a higher position, I believe I would have been taken more seriously. It is frustrating because if you are in higher positions, you are more protected..."

This can be seen as two different approaches employed by organisations, prioritising the retention of experienced staff over addressing harassment issues. Similarly, Evelyn recounted a case involving a head chef and a sous chef in relation to ranking positions in a hotel's kitchen:

"...The sous chef is lower than the head chef. He (sous chef) was also relatively new in the kitchen at that time; most likely, he started his new position in that hotel a couple of months before those things (harassing behaviours) began. He endured 1-2 months of all verbal abuse and harassment. Luckily, the guy (sous chef) took enough courage to complain to HR after exposing verbal abuse and

harassment. He still felt like he should not complain because it was only verbal, and when that chef smacked his butt, he said, OK, 'that is physical abuse already, physical harassment.' Then, he complained to HR. However, the response from HR was disappointing. It seemed more concerned about the reputation and stability of the kitchen, given the head chef's long tenure and experience. They subtly suggested that the sous chef might have misinterpreted the head chef's behaviour as this is part of the kitchen culture."

Evelyn's account indicates how power dynamics within a hospitality workplace can lead to the normalisation and disregard of harassing behaviour, particularly when the perpetrator is in a position of power or has been with the company for a long time. In this context, the sous chef's lower position relative to the head chef combined with his relatively new status in the kitchen, placed him at a significant disadvantage. This highlights how power dynamics and hierarchical status can remarkably impact on the perception and handling of harassment cases within organisations, often leading to excuses or downplaying of inappropriate conduct (Wright 2020). Furthermore, HR's response, which prioritised the head chef's tenure and experience over the sous chef's well-being, reflects a common organisational tendency to protect more senior or valuable employees where harassing behaviour is normalised and complaints are dismissed or minimised.

Another significant aspect revealed by the extract is the common tendency to underestimate verbal abuse in the early stages of harassment cases. Verbal harassment, often acknowledged as less severe than physical harassment, may create an environment where victims feel their complaints will not be taken seriously (Taylor 2020; Mitsakis et al. 2024). This can result in delayed reporting cases and allow the abusive behaviour to continue and worsen. The experience of the sous chef clearly demonstrates this point; he initially endured verbal abuse without making a formal complaint. Only when the harassing behaviour turned physical did he feel compelled to report it. The sous chef's hesitance to report verbal abuse highlights the need for organisations to treat all forms of harassment seriously from the outset. When individuals start to question *'Should I complain about it?'* and/or *'Am I exaggerating?'*, it underscores a significant issue within the

organisational culture where subtle yet dangerous behaviours are not adequately addressed. This uncertainty can lead to the normalisation of harassment, preventing it from being reported and allowing it to persist. In that vein, proper training and clear policies are essential to ensure that all employees recognise any form of harassment, including verbal harassment as a legitimate form of harassment and have confidence that their complaints will be addressed promptly and effectively.

Evelyn provided an additional example of how management downplayed harassing behaviours from customers. She recounted a case involving a guest at a hotel where she previously worked. She experienced repeated verbal harassment from the customer, including inappropriate comments about her appearance and unwelcome date requests. Despite reporting the harassing behaviours to her supervisor multiple times, the management's response was *'just ignore it'* and that the customer was *'probably tipsy and just being friendly'*.

Layla highlighted a lack of a managerial approach to address harassing behaviours during hospitality service transactions in Asia, considering expected gendered and societal norms and power dynamics between employees and customers. She explained:

> *"...In many Asian countries, a woman's life is bounded by strong gendered stereotypical views and cultural expectations. This means that as a woman, you are expected to behave in a certain way to show your submissiveness and loyalty to society, including hospitality workplaces, as the customer comes first in everything. I would say that you are expected to tolerate inappropriate behaviour from customers rather than confront it...Because when you complain to the management, the manager would just say, 'Why did you smile at him in the first place?'...So, you have to be very, very careful about how to handle yourself in situations where you can get yourself in trouble with customers..."*

In the excerpt above, Layla reveals how societal and cultural norms and expectations place women employees in a vulnerable situation. These norms often pressure women to endure inappropriate behaviour without complaint, reinforcing a culture of tolerance toward harassment. The societal expectation for women to be

submissive and accommodating could create an environment where harassing behaviours are overlooked and even justified by management. This victim-blaming mentality may shift the responsibility onto the women, suggesting that their actions or attitudes somehow caused the harassment. When a manager questions why a woman smiled at a customer, it may imply that her behaviour was the cause of the harassment rather than addressing the inappropriate actions of the customer.

As expressed by Ellemers (2018), social and cultural interactions are gendered and gender stereotypes impact on the expectations of men and women in relation to behaviour and demeanour. When normative role behaviour becomes rigidly defined, there are general expectations of members of social groups. These gendered norms become generally accepted roles and responsibilities assigned to women and men, which are created and endorsed by particular societies and cultures in terms of expected behaviours (Lindsey 2015). As Layla stated women employees in hospitality settings in Asia were expected to tolerate certain inappropriate behaviours from customers and senior colleagues. This may perpetuate a workplace culture where harassment is normalised and downplayed, and victims are blamed for their experiences about it. As a result, this dynamic could create an inadequate response to harassment cases by organisations and lead to systemic neglect of cases that might happen.

Layla's account thus pointed out that cultural norms and gendered roles significantly influence how harassment cases are perceived and managed in the hospitality workplace. Clearly, more research is needed in order to better understand the organisational response to all types of harassment cases (verbal, physical, emotional/psychological) from the perspective of different cultural and societal norms and gender roles, how the organisations act on these complaints, and the effectiveness of their interventions.

Conclusion

This chapter demonstrates the complex dynamics of organisational responses to workplace sexual harassment in the hospitality industry. The findings highlight a

critical dichotomy in the organisational response. The narratives referred to two primary responses by organisations where sexual harassment towards women occurred. There was a proactive approach by management to reported cases, identified as confronting workplace harassment. This approach has been defined in various ways for hospitality organisations: implementing measures to raise awareness of workplace harassment, providing education and training programmes, establishing clear procedures and policies and providing help and support for employees who experienced sexual harassment. While some organisations have implemented proactive policies and supportive measures, some participants in this study indicated that these measures are often more theoretical in nature and may not effectively serve as practical tools for preventing and addressing harassment.

Conversely, the study also notes the environment where workplace sexual harassment was ignored, normalised and/or overlooked by hospitality organisations, termed as management neglect towards harassment cases. This manifests in various forms, including a lack of appropriate action, normalised harassment cases, downplaying reported cases and adopting a mentality of victim blaming. Such responses not only lead to systemic neglect of cases that might happen but also severely undermine the trust and well-being of employees. The findings highlight the importance of committing and implementing a holistic strategy that includes not only applying robust policies but also consistent enforcement, comprehensive training and constant awareness, and a supportive workplace culture that prioritises the well-being and safety of all employees.

The findings of this chapter also underline how gendered and societal norms, cultural expectations, power dynamics and rigid hierarchical structures in different social settings play a critical role in responding to sexual harassment in hospitality settings. This could add to knowledge in this area through providing insight into workplace sexual harassment and organisational response by considering different cultural environments and expectations of women's behaviours and demeanours. However, more research is needed in this area to explore potential differences in organisational response and/or management attitudes towards all harassment types in hospitality organisations.

CHAPTER 7: Conclusion

Introduction

This final chapter summarises the main findings of this study by reviewing the themes that arose from data analysis. Deriving from these findings, a conceptual framework for understanding the experience of sexual harassment on female employees working in the hospitality industry and its impact on individuals has been developed (see Figure 7.1, p.193). Following that, the contribution of the study is explained. Finally, implications for practice and recommendations for further research are highlighted.

An Overview of the Contributory Themes

This research affords a rare insight into the experience of sexual harassment faced by women working in the hospitality sector and its impact on their lives. Participants' narratives showed that sexual harassment in hospitality workplaces is complex and multifaceted and has the potential to pose a significant threat to individuals' personal and occupational lives. The findings consist of three main themes that have emerged from the stories of female employees: *being harassed in the workplace; the perceived impact of workplace sexual harassment;* and *the organisational response to sexual harassment.*

The first theme, *being harassed in the workplace*, fulfils the second and third objectives of the study, which are to identify the nature and forms of sexual harassment in hospitality settings and to explore female employees' experiences of sexual harassment in hospitality in the United Kingdom in order to examine how and why harassment occurs. This theme demonstrated how gendered roles and sector characteristics within the hospitality sector foster certain conditions in which sexual harassment behaviours towards women mostly occur. The stereotypical allocation of work, lack of women's representation in male-dominated settings, and rigid hierarchical structures make female employees more vulnerable to harassment and contribute to emotional and psychological strain on them. The findings support the work of many tourism and hospitality researchers on gender studies (Costa et

al. 2017; Nimri et al. 2021; Morgan and Pritchard 2019). Being a migrant or a UK-born woman in the hospitality sector can bring about different challenges when facing harassment in either scenario. The comparative perspectives shared by participants, such as Grace and Layla, highlighted the significant role of cultural, societal, and hierarchical norms in shaping the experience, perception and reporting of harassment. This comparative insight between participants' home countries and host countries provided a unique perspective on how these norms shape the understanding and impact of harassment. This is a significant finding because studies on tourism research often overlook the intersection of these factors, focusing more on general industry patterns rather than exploring the intricate ways in which cultural expectations and traditional values impact workplace dynamics and employee well-being.

It was found that the research participants experienced, witnessed or heard from their colleagues three main types of harassment in the hospitality workplace: verbal harassment, physical harassment and emotional/psychological harassment. Verbal and emotional/psychological sexual harassment were the most common forms of harassment experienced by female employees in hospitality settings. Participants experienced a variety of types of sexual harassment throughout their careers, and many harassment types were co-occurring and overlapping. Namely, verbal harassment could include emotional/psychological harassment, physical harassment can involve one of the other two types, and all types of harassment behaviours can be experienced within one case.

Sexual harassment mainly occurred in interactions between male perpetrators and female employees. The primary relationships included employee-customer and employee-to-employee relationships. This study therefore lends support to other researchers who acknowledged the employee-customer and employee-employee relationships to be the most common sites in which harassment occurs (McDonald 2012; Segovia-Pérez et al. 2019; Opoku et al. 2024). Female employees demonstrated resilience in coping with harassment, with many adopting a firm stance on its persistence in the sector, encapsulated by the attitude of *'either you live with it or leave it.'* The findings offer valuable insights into the coping strategies these women employ to manage harassment both in the moment and over time.

The second theme, *the perceived impact of workplace sexual harassment,* fulfils the fourth objective of the study, which is to investigate the impact of workplace sexual harassment upon female employees and to analyse the long-term impact of harassment on women. This theme indicated that there was no single impact of workplace sexual harassment and that the experience is unique to the individual. The impact of workplace sexual harassment, which can be immediate, occurs in the moment that the female employees experience negative behaviour or it can be long-term. This study indicates that the impact of harassment is diverse, revealing intricate connections between immediate and long-term consequences for participants' individual well-being, occupational well-being, intimate relationships and career and financial ramifications.

The immediate impact of sexual harassment is broad and affects the participants emotionally, psychologically or in terms of occupational performance. The experience of sexual harassment in the workplace led to mild to severe emotional impacts on participants, characterised by feelings of fear, anger, sadness, helplessness, frustration, humiliation, self-doubt and a sense of security and safety. For some participants, these emotions can trigger other adverse psychological symptoms, such as anxiety, burn-out syndrome, depression and PTSD. Additionally, experiencing workplace harassment resulted in decreased work performance, job satisfaction, and motivation, as well as lowered productivity. These findings support the work of many tourism and hospitality researchers on workplace sexual harassment (Fitzgerald and Cortina 2018; Jung and Yoon 2018; Agarwal 2022).

An important finding was that witnessing harassment behaviours could also be distressing for some participants. While the direct target of harassment experienced the primary impact, witnessing harassment can have negative emotional effects on bystanders. This finding echoes the work of Acquadro Maran et al. (2022) and Nielsen et al. (2023) on perceived consequences of workplace sexual harassment on witnesses. This finding is significant because it demonstrates the far-reaching impact of workplace sexual harassment, not only on direct victims.

Workplace sexual harassment is further suggested to have a long-term impact on participants over time. When female employees experience sexual harassment, the impact may extend beyond the immediate aftermath of harassment and persist for

months or years, affecting personal lives beyond the workplace. The study findings demonstrate that the long-term impact of workplace sexual harassment could permeate women's personal lives, impacting their intimate relationships and career and financial ramifications. Experiencing workplace sexual harassment had a negative impact on the dynamics of romantic relationships for some participants, resulting in emotional distance from their partners and strained communication. The impact of workplace sexual harassment on intimate relationships has yet to be examined within the tourism and hospitality literature. Studies on women who have experienced adult sexual abuse and sexual assault indicate that they often experience negative psychological and psychosocial impacts in the aftermath, including emotional dissatisfaction, loss of emotional and sexual intimacy, and increased irritability towards their romantic partners over time (Goodcase et al. 2015: Georgia et al. 2018; Rothman et al. 2021). This study's findings mirror those research results within the context of tourism and hospitality, highlighting the profound and lasting effects of workplace sexual harassment on female employees.

The findings also revealed that the long-term financial well-being and careers of some women were negatively impacted by experiencing workplace sexual harassment, which forced some women out of their jobs and caused extra costs for counselling services to improve their mental well-being. It affected their long-term career trajectories and diminished their earning potential. Some participants, who were at the beginning of their careers in hospitality, left the organisation and changed their sector after experiencing harassment in order to avoid the harasser and escape a toxic workplace environment. This finding aligns with the research of McLaughlin et al. (2017), which demonstrates that workplace sexual harassment can take a concrete toll on the earnings and career trajectories of female employees, and the long-term economic costs can be more substantial for women in their twenties and early thirties.

The organisational response to sexual harassment is the third and final theme of the research and fulfils the fifth objective of the study, which is to explore the reporting of sexual harassment by female hospitality workers and the subsequent organisational response. This theme highlighted two primary responses referred to by hospitality organisations where sexual harassment towards women occurred. The first response was a proactive approach by management regarding reported

cases identified as confronting workplace harassment. The second one was a failure to adequately acknowledge, address or take action against incidents of harassment by organisations, which was identified as ignoring the harassment strategy.

Regarding the implementation of effective procedures and clear policies by hospitality organisations to address workplace sexual harassment, participants' experiences revealed some contradictions. While some female employees received full support and practical measures and procedures were already effectively in place when they experienced harassing behaviours at work, others did not obtain a strong commitment from their organisations to prevent and respond to harassment incidents. These participants criticised workplace harassment policies, emphasising that they looked good on paper but did not effectively and actively serve as practical tools for prevention and response. Participants stated the need for more proactive measures and actions to be integrated into the daily operations of hospitality organisations rather than theoretical formalities in nature. This finding of the research unveiled a disconnected and complicated picture of an organisation's applications to tackling harassment and the experiences of female employees. This study therefore lends support to other researchers who stress the importance of adopting effective policies and proactive mechanisms to combat sexual harassment and create a more supportive, cohesive and safe work environment for employees. (McDonald et al. 2015; Fitzgerald and Cortina 2018; Nielsen and Einarsen 2018; Vranjes and Lyubykh 2021; Cronin et al. 2024).

Some hospitality workplaces also revealed ineffective practices, inadequate policies, and a lack of action in response to complaints about harassing behaviours. Female employees indicated that workplace sexual harassment was ignored, normalised and/or overlooked, as well as reported cases being downplayed and adopting a victim-blaming mentality by hospitality organisations. This negatively affected women's psychological and emotional well-being and eroded their trust in the hospitality organisation where they were working. This type of neglect of harassment cases was consistent across all types (hotels, restaurants, coffee shops and bars) and sizes (from small family-owned businesses to large international chains) of hospitality organisations included in this study. Regardless of the organisational structure or market position, some organisations failed to address harassing behaviours adequately.

A common organisational and managerial tendency in hospitality organisations was to protect more senior or experienced staff over young and less experienced ones, especially if the victim had a lower rank than the perpetrator. This finding indicated that organisational response to harassment cases can be influenced by hierarchical status. There was also a general lack of awareness and effective training on what constitutes harassment in the hospitality workplace and how to report it. This caused confusion and hesitation amongst female employees to report cases, thereby fostering an organisational culture where sexual harassment is normalised, underaddressed and perceived as rare by managers.

The findings also revealed how gendered and societal norms, cultural expectations, power dynamics and rigid hierarchical structures in different social settings play a critical role in perceiving and managing harassment cases by organisations. Some female participants reported that the rigid normative roles and stereotypes of women and men in certain cultures created an environment where harassing behaviours were normalised, downplayed, and led to a mentality of victim-blaming. This implies that the pressure on women to endure inappropriate behaviour without complaint includes an expectation of them to be submissive and accommodating. Therefore, fostering a culture of tolerance towards harassment in specific societies resulted in inadequate responses to harassment cases by hospitality organisations and engendered systemic neglect of cases in hospitality workplaces. This finding supports the work of Mishra and Stair (2019) and Mishra and Davison (2020), who highlighted the influence of cultural factors and power distance within national culture on perceptions, acceptance and tolerance of sexually harassing behaviours at work.

Central to the findings, and more importantly, critical to the process of workplace sexual harassment, is the notion of the intersection of gendered norms, power dynamics, hierarchical structures, personal resilience, coping strategies, societal norms, cultural expectations, and managerial approach in hospitality settings.

Statement of Original Contribution

In line with the findings and objectives of this research, the contribution to knowledge can be articulated across three domains: theoretical, methodological, and empirical. A conceptual framework of the experience of workplace sexual harassment has been developed based on the findings of this study (see Figure 7.1, p.193).

Theoretical contribution

Given that the findings of this study provide a holistic understanding of female employees' stories and experiences with workplace sexual harassment within hospitality organisations, this study contributes to the body of knowledge on tourism and hospitality, business and organisation, and gender studies.

This study shows that the issue of sexual harassment in hospitality workplaces is complex and multifaceted and has a significant impact on female employees' personal and occupational lives. Although each individual's story is unique, the existence of highly gendered roles, divisions and stereotypes, and power imbalances within hospitality work, combined with tough sector characteristics and the high levels of interaction between employees and customers, foster certain conditions that contribute to the occurrence of sexual harassment behaviours towards women. This study supports the earlier studies on those key antecedents regarding the hospitality sector's conditions impacting sexual harassment cases (Ariza-Montes et al. 2017; Ram 2018; Tsai et al. 2023).

Additionally, the related literature shows that women employees' experiences and struggles tend to be seen as homogeneous rather than heterogeneous in social settings, including workplaces depending upon the interaction between gender, race, class, ethnicity, and other categories of difference in individual lives from an intersectionality perspective (see Crenshaw1989; 1991; Acker 2006; Davis 2008; Choo et al. 2010; Özbilgin et al. 2011; Tatli and Özbilgin 2012; Cho 2013; Cho et al. 2013; McBride et al. 2015; Collins and Bilge 2016). In that vein, previous studies of sexual harassment in the hospitality and tourism industry have also contributed to knowledge in order to understand gender-based violence and power imbalances within varying categories of identity; such as age, race, ethnicity, migration status,

sexual orientation, dis/ability, and others through the lens of intersectionality (Mooney 2016; Mooney et al. 2017; Morgan and Pritchard 2019; Turkoglu 2020).

As mentioned previously, a large number of women working in the UK's hospitality sector come from diverse backgrounds, including differences in age, race, ethnicity, education level, social class, migration status, sexual orientation, and dis/ability, among others. Additionally, the sector is heavily reliant on a migrant workforce, particularly on migrant women (Rydzik and Anitha 2020). Accordingly, it is important to understand individual experiences of sexual harassment within the context of hospitality workplace structures and the diverse demographics of certain groups of women, including migrants. Therefore, there is an interactive pattern between intersections of multifaceted identities and the migration status within a particular social context. That means that multiple strands of diversity intersect to produce differentiated privileges, constraints, power imbalance, violence, oppression, and multiple inequalities experienced by particular groups of women in particular contextual configurations and settings (Collins and Bilge 2016), including hospitality workplaces. For migrant women, the combination of their gender and migration status could amplify their vulnerabilities to harassment and exploitation in hospitality workplaces. These intersecting dynamics mean that experiences of harassment cannot be understood solely through the lens of gender or migration independently but could be analysed as part of broader structural inequalities that shape the lives and working conditions of migrant women.

This study contributes to the body of knowledge on the intersectionality aspect when women are faced with the experience of sexual harassment. However, the findings differ from previous studies by extending these intersecting factors to include additional dimensions such as personal resilience, coping strategies, societal norms, cultural expectations, and managerial approaches in hospitality settings. Therefore, this research provides an understanding of how these intersecting factors collectively influence the prevalence, perception, experience, and response to sexual harassment in hospitality settings rather than focusing solely on more generalised gender identity and industry patterns.

This study also contributes to theories of coping and theories of human resilience to stressful conditions and experiences. Prior studies on resilience and coping strategies within the neuroscience, mental health, medicine, psychology and

sociology literature have examined how individuals respond to various stressors, such as exposure to bullying, harassment in the workplace, dysfunctional or challenging relationships, and other intense and overwhelming environmental stressors (Bonanno and Burton 2013; Southwick et al. 2014; Ford and Ivancic 2020). These studies have collectively focused on both the short-term and long-term consequences of such stressors, emphasising the coping mechanisms of individuals and reflecting the complex nature of resilience. The findings of this study indicate that the impact of sexual harassment is diverse and has a negative impact on women's personal and occupational lives in the short and long term. Female employees demonstrated various coping strategies, including resilience and adaptability, to manage and mitigate the adverse effects of workplace sexual harassment. These strategies were employed in the immediate aftermath of harassment and over the long term, taking place in the context of interactions with other individuals, available resources, specific cultures and societies and hospitality organisations.

Another contribution of the study is the theoretical understanding of how cultural and societal norms and power dynamics within societies influence the perceptions, acceptance and tolerance of sexually harassing behaviours at work and organisational response to harassment cases. The findings illuminate the significance of social and cultural expectations and traditional roles in understanding the process of sexual harassment in hospitality settings. Therefore, socio-cultural theory asserts that sexual harassment is the consequence of gender inequality and sexism that already exist in society (Kapila 2017). The socio-cultural model states that sexual harassment arises from traditional power imbalances between men and women, with harassment serving to perpetuate this power (Butler and Schmidtke 2010). That is, some incidents of sexual harassment can be explained by societal and cultural norms in which gender roles are rigidly defined and maintained. In such contexts, societal and cultural norms often dictate expectations for male dominance and female submissiveness, reinforcing the idea that men hold power over women (Kapila 2017). This power imbalance can create a workplace environment where sexually harassing behaviours are more common, normalised within traditional roles, and even tolerated. This then can be explained by organisational theories in which traditional roles could reflected in the

hierarchical structure and daily operations in organisations, including hospitality settings (Sundaresh and Hemalatha 2013).

Methodological contribution

This study adopted a narrative inquiry to delve into female employees' experiences of workplace sexual harassment in the hospitality sector. This methodological strategy provided a rich and in-depth understanding of the complex and multifaced nature of workplace sexual harassment. The narrative approach allowed the study to glean rare and valuable insights into the unique and individual stories, experiences, and perspectives of each person related to the subject at hand.

Given the sensitive nature of the research, this approach enabled me to thoroughly and sensitively explore the personal experiences of the participants through in-depth, face-to-face interviews. By capturing both past and present stories of individuals on workplace sexual harassment, the narrative inquiry facilitated a deeper understanding of how these experiences unfold over time and how they are shaped by various social, cultural and organisational contexts.

The use of narrative inquiry as a methodological approach in this study not only provided a platform for participants to voice their personal and mostly hidden stories in their own words but also contributed to the broader understanding of how personal narratives can be instrumental in uncovering the layers of complexity surrounding workplace sexual harassment. This methodological approach stands out as an important contribution to the qualitative research methods used in tourism and hospitality work, particularly in sensitive, stigmatised and mostly hidden areas of study, where the lived experiences of individuals are central to understanding the broader social phenomena.

Empirical contribution

This study provides empirical evidence of the knowledge of the extended effects of sexual harassment on women employees' lives outside of work. This research contributes to the literature on the impacts of sexual harassment on women's personal and occupational lives. The findings show that the impact of sexual

harassment has extended beyond immediate personal and occupational impacts to influence personal lives, intimate relationships, and long-term career trajectories. It reveals the enduring nature of harassment's impact, contributing to the limited body of empirical research that explores the long-term consequences of such experiences, particularly in the hospitality sector.

Regarding the organisational response to harassment cases, the findings of this study highlight the inconsistencies and inadequacies in how different organisations handle harassment cases by employing different strategies. It provides concrete examples of how organisational neglect and systemic issues contribute to the persistence of harassment, offering valuable insights for industry practitioners and policymakers aiming to improve workplace environments.

The conceptual framework (Figure 7.1) below encapsulates the sexual harassment experiences of female employees in hospitality settings.
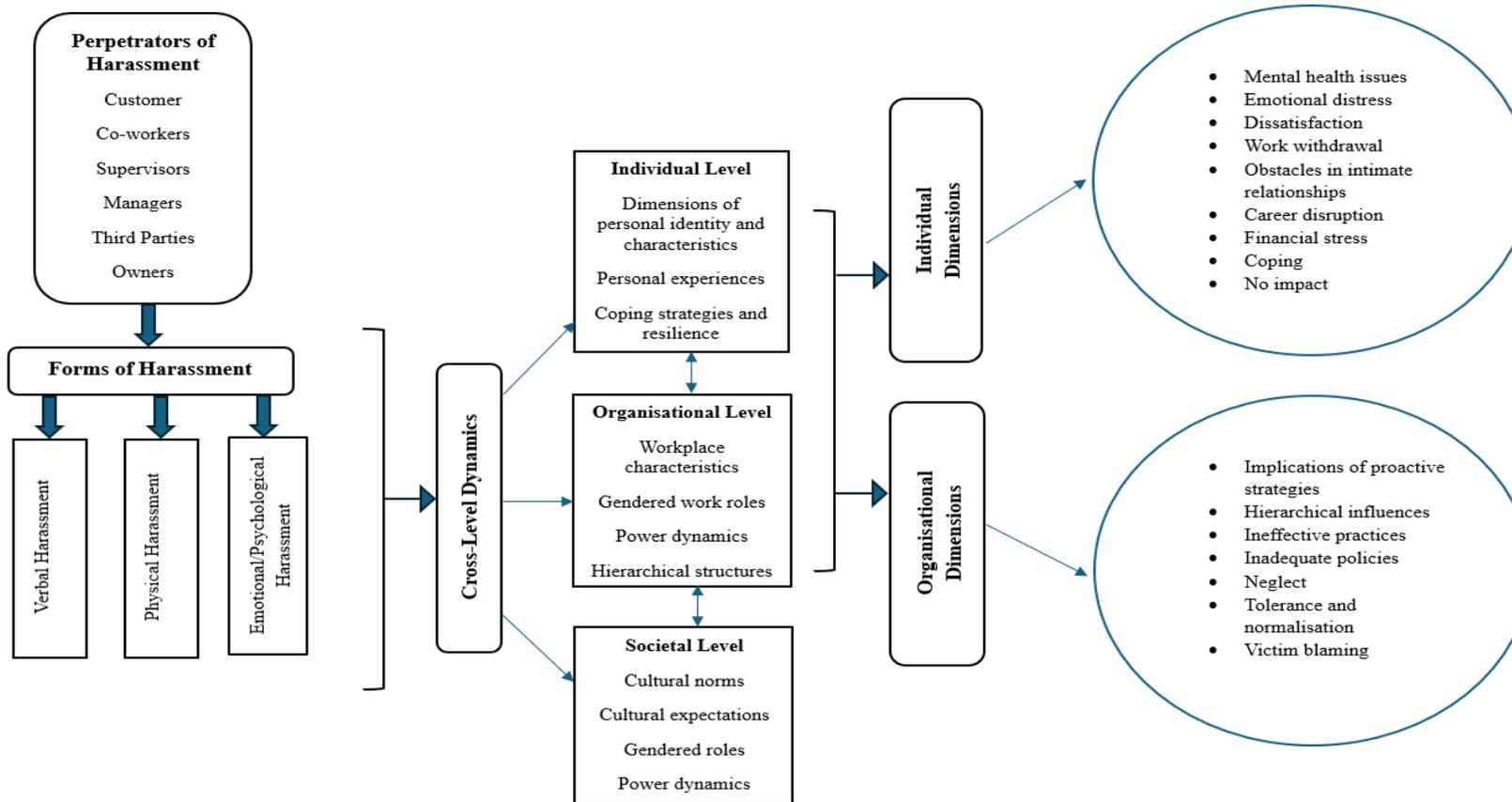
Figure 7.1 A Conceptual Framework of the Experience of Sexual Harassment in Hospitality Workplaces (Source: Original)

To demonstrate the adaptability of the conceptual framework, the participants' sexual harassment experiences in hospitality settings are mapped below.

The conceptual framework demonstrates that the experience of sexual harassment in the workplace is complex, as an individual can experience multiple and co-occurring forms of harassment that interact with various individual, organisational, and societal dimensions. The participants reported some forms of sexual harassment from various perpetrators, including customers, fellow colleagues, junior colleagues, line managers, senior managers, or third-party employees in hospitality settings. These perpetrators engaged in various forms of sexual harassment behaviours, which are classified as verbal, physical and emotional/psychological. Female employees have encountered more than one type of harassing behaviour throughout their careers, often with these behaviours overlapping. This means that verbal harassment could include emotional/psychological harassment, physical harassment can include one of the other two types, and all types of harassment behaviours can be experienced within one case. This overlap highlights the difficulty and complexity in managing and identifying harassment, as it often involves intertwined behaviours that can intensify the impact on victims.

Although the experience was unique to each individual, certain dynamics shaped and influenced the entire experience of workplace sexual harassment. At the individual level, the dimensions of personal identity and characteristics such as gender, age, job grade and position, and migration status, along with prior experiences, coping strategies, and personal resilience, played a critical role in how sexual harassment was perceived, experienced, managed, and responded to. At an organisational level, workplace characteristics, gendered work distribution, power dynamics between employee-employee and employee-customer, and hierarchical frameworks significantly affected both the prevalence of harassment and the effectiveness of responses. Additionally, societal level factors, including socio-cultural and traditional norms, overarching power dynamics, cultural expectations between genders, gendered roles and division of labour, stereotypes and perceptions of women and men within a society, set the broader context in which harassment occurred, affecting both the occurrence and the response to such behaviours. These cross-level dynamics create a complex matrix of influences that impacts the

occurrence, perception, and management of sexual harassment, highlighting the multifaceted nature of harassment in the workplace. Therefore, the findings demonstrate the differences in how workplace sexual harassment affects women and the varying responses from hospitality organisations.

The participants' responses to sexual harassment in hospitality settings revealed a spectrum of outcomes that highlight the multifaceted impact of such experiences on various aspects of their lives. Some participants who were at the beginning of their career in hospitality left the organisation and changed sector. Others, however, tried to keep working despite their dissatisfaction, frustration, and emotional distress in order to maintain financial stability until they found an alternative opportunity. The findings also indicate that some participants employed various coping strategies to mitigate the adverse effects of workplace sexual harassment based on various factors, such as the severity of the harassment, the state of well-being after/during the harassment, personal characteristics, and the acceptance level of the situation by the victim. Although participants found workplace harassment behaviours unpleasant and uncomfortable, sometimes it was tolerated or normalised by female employees at a certain point, perceived as an inevitable part of the hospitality work environment. These diverse responses underscore the deeply layered nature of sexual harassment's impact, shaped by the notion of the intersection of gendered norms, power dynamics, hierarchical structures, personal characteristics, coping strategies, societal norms, cultural expectations, systematic workplace culture and managerial approaches in hospitality settings.

Consequently, this intricate interplay significantly affects the individual and professional well-being of women when they experience sexual harassment at work, as well as shaping the in/effectiveness and nature of organisational responses to it. However, that inference is left to the reader.

Implications for Practice

The findings of this study underline a number of implications for practice for hospitality and tourism praxis. The study revealed that sexual harassment in hospitality workplaces is pervasive, and has a far-reaching impact on both the

professional and personal aspects of the lives of female employees. This is not a new outcome; the discussion of sexual harassment has been a persistent issue in hospitality organisations for decades. However, this study highlights the most overlooked impact, which goes beyond the workplace, deeply affecting the personal lives of victims. The fact that the enduring presence of harassment in hospitality and the adverse consequences for women's lives highlights the need for more comprehensive support systems and interventions that address the full spectrum of effects that sexual harassment imposes on individuals, both within and outside of the workplace. Hence, the outcomes of this study indicate the need for hospitality business owners, HR practices, trade unions, policymakers and stakeholders to address and develop more effective regulations and interventions in order to control and mitigate the occurrences of such gendered harms.

One of the primary implications of this research is the critical need for comprehensive recognition and awareness of the complex nature of workplace harassment. The study identified three main types of harassment; verbal, physical and emotional/psychological. These forms of harassment often overlap and co-occur, creating a hostile work environment for female employees. Yet there is a lack of awareness and understanding among staff what constitutes harassment and how to effectively address it. This gap in knowledge could result in confusion, hesitation to report incidents and the normalisation of inappropriate behaviour. To address this, hospitality organisations should establish clear and detailed definitions of what constitutes sexual harassment. Comprehensive and mandatory training programmes should be implemented to educate employees at all levels about the different forms of sexual harassment, including real examples from hospitality, to help employees recognise and respond to it. Policymakers should consider developing regulations specific to the hospitality and tourism environment that mandate the inclusion of comprehensive and clear definitions of sexual harassment in hospitality organisational policies. These regulations should also be updated to reflect the evolving nature of harassment behaviours.

The study revealed significant inconsistencies in how hospitality organisations respond to harassment cases. Some organisations take a supportive and proactive approach to eliminate harassment incidents, while others have a lack of appropriate

action, neglect or normalised harassment behaviours, downplaying reported cases and adopting a mentality of victim blaming. To combat this, policymakers could introduce legislation that requires hospitality organisations to report harassment cases to a regulatory body, ensuring transparency and accountability in how cases are handled. Regular audits of hospitality organisations could be mandated to assess the effectiveness of their procedures and policies. This could also involve penalties or sanctions for organisations that fail to adhere to established standards. Therefore, proactive reporting mechanisms should be established, and these mechanisms should guarantee confidential and accessible reporting channels in organisations. This should ensure that harassment incidents are reported without fear of retaliation or bias on the part of those who report harassment. Besides, taking decisive actions against perpetrators and ensuring that policies and procedures are applied consistently across all levels of the organisation could be reviewed by senior management.

Additionally, hospitality organisations should cultivate a culture of zero-tolerance and anti-sexual harassment legislation for workplace sexual harassment and mistreatment (Zhou et al. 2021), with clear and detailed policies outlining the consequences for perpetrators. These policies should also address the role of bystanders when they witness harassment. Clear guidance on intervention and reporting should be provided, empowering bystanders to report incidents safely and without fear of retaliation. Such policies could encourage a more proactive stance against harassment and foster a safer and more supportive work environment for all employees. For example, the Equality Act 2010 contains numerous provisions that can be utilised to prevent workplace interpersonal mistreatment in the UK. Hospitality organisations should increase awareness of these legal requirements and ensure that all staff, especially management, are fully informed and trained on their responsibilities under the Act. Therefore, the application and adherence to the legislation within the confines of the hospitality businesses could help to control harassment cases (Opoku et al. 2024). More importantly, from a moral perspective, a safe, harassment-free workplace is a basic and fundamental right (Xu et al. 2018). Hospitality industry bodies and trade unions could launch campaigns that aim to improve the standards of workplace safety and respect across the hospitality sector.

Lastly, previous research and the present study indicate that sexual harassment in hospitality workplaces is generally targeted towards women, which makes them more vulnerable to harassment behaviours. There is growing acknowledgement that sexual harassment is a form of gender-based violence as it disproportionately affects women due to their gender or gender identity/expression (Hearn et al. 2016; Bradbury-Jones et al. 2019; Finniear et al. 2020; Turkoglu 2020). Therefore, hospitality organisations need to implement effective strategies and regulations that protect the population most vulnerable to workplace harassment (e.g. women, young people, and migrants). Hospitality managers could support and help them feel more confident in reporting harassment cases.

Recommendations for Further Research

In addition to the implications for practice, this research demonstrates that the subject of sexual harassment in hospitality workplaces is a phenomenon that calls for greater scholarly attention. Given that research is still emerging, it is apparent that there are many important aspects of this subject that need to be questioned; therefore, a number of implications for future research have been identified.

The findings of this study reflect the experience of a relatively small number of female employees who have volunteered to share their stories about workplace sexual harassment. The sample of this study, though small, is considered common in narrative qualitative research which priorities to explore the depth of phenomenon (Lee and Saunders 2017). Therefore, it is difficult to generalise female employees' experiences to a broader population of women who work in the hospitality sector. Considering the sensitivity and complexity of women's experiences of workplace sexual harassment, future research is recommended to consider a larger sample size to enhance the representativeness of the findings and capture a broader spectrum of experiences of the phenomenon.

Due to the cross-sectional nature of this research, the study's ability to draw causal inferences among the key variables is limited compared to longitudinal studies (Saunders et al. 2023). Future research employing a well-planned longitudinal design to study the dynamics of workplace sexual harassment over time is highly

recommended. Such an approach would help to validate the extent to which harassing behaviours within the workplace influence outcomes like employee well-being (personal and occupational) and decisions to report or leave the organisation. A longitudinal design would provide a deeper understanding of the long-term impact of harassment on employees' mental health, intimate relationships, career trajectories, and financial ramifications, offering more robust evidence of the relationships between these factors.

The findings indicated how gendered roles and sector characteristics within the hospitality sector foster certain conditions in which sexual harassment behaviours towards women mostly occur. Therefore, it is recommended that future research could explore workplace sexual harassment from a broader spectrum of triggers. This could involve not only organisational factors, such as workplace culture and management practices, but also various personal factors, including offender and victim traits, personal characteristics and personalities, the severity of the harassment, the state of well-being after/during the harassment, coping strategies with harassment, the acceptance level of the situation by the victim and broader cultural and environmental influences. This could also explore and compare across different employment types (e.g. full-time, part-time, seasonal) and statuses (e.g. white-collar, blue-collar, long-tenured, and new employees). Investigating these diverse causes can provide a more comprehensive understanding of the complex interplay of factors that contribute to workplace sexual harassment within the hospitality industry.

The study identified employee-customer relationships as a primary site for sexual harassment, with participants also experiencing harassment in employee-to-employee (co-workers, supervisors, and third parties) interactions, where perpetrators were predominantly male. The difference in power dynamics between these groups may influence the antecedents and effects of mistreatment. Therefore, this study calls for more research on the perpetrators, as the current understanding of the perceptions of both recipients and perpetrators across different hospitality contexts and cultures remains limited.

This study has filled gaps in the literature on the long-term impacts of sexual harassment on female employees' personal lives beyond the workplace. The

findings showed how workplace sexual harassment negatively affected women's romantic relationships, as well as their careers and financial situations. Therefore, it is recommended that future research could explore the impact of workplace sexual harassment on women's romantic relationships as to how the emotional and psychological toll of harassment may contribute to difficulties in intimate relationships over time. Additionally, research should examine the decision-making process involved in leaving toxic work environments due to harassment and how this decision disrupts career progression and diminishes earning potential, thereby affecting long-term economic well-being. By addressing these areas, future studies can provide a more comprehensive understanding of the lasting consequences of workplace harassment and inform strategies to mitigate its impact on women's personal and professional lives.

This study also brought to light women's coping strategies to manage harassment both in the moment and over time. Future studies could explore how these rmali mechanisms are influenced by various factors, including the availability of resources, personal resilience, the cultural and societal context, and the specific dynamics within hospitality organisations. Additionally, research should delve into how these strategies evolve over time and their effectiveness in mitigating the personal and occupational impacts of harassment.

Witnessing harassment behaviours was distressing for some research participants. While the direct target of harassment experienced the primary impact, bystanders could also be emotionally affected. Given the distress reported by participants, future research may investigate how witnessing such behaviours impacts bystanders' well-being and workplace dynamics.

The findings also revealed the influence of societal norms and power dynamics within a culture on perceptions, acceptance, and tolerance of sexually harassing behaviours at work. This also highlighted how gendered and societal norms, cultural expectations, power dynamics and rigid hierarchical structures in different social settings play a critical role in managing harassment cases by organisations. Therefore, more research should focus on these factors across diverse cultural contexts if socio-cultural norms lead toward a difference in perception of workplace sexual harassment.

Finally, this research focuses only on female employees because it is acknowledged that sexual harassment is more threatening to women in hospitality settings than it is to men (People 1st 2017; Coffey et al. 2023). Therefore, greater attention needs to be given to other gender identities and groups, such as men, LGBTQ+ workers and those from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, to gain a more comprehensive understanding of workplace sexual harassment in hospitality settings. Investigating the experiences of these groups might help identify unique vulnerabilities, intersectional dynamics, and different patterns of harassment. Such studies can also reveal how harassment impacts various demographics differently, leading to more inclusive and effective prevention strategies that address the needs of all employees, not just women.

Reflections on the Research Journey

Embarking on a PhD journey to explore the issue of workplace sexual harassment perpetuated against women employees in hospitality organisations has been a profound and transformative experience. Having shared my personal rationale for choosing the research topic in Chapter One, it now seems pertinent to discuss how conducting that research progressed, including its various stages, challenges, and insights gained throughout the research process.

I must admit that completing this piece of research has been challenging, and yet it has also been profoundly rewarding. There were many difficult times, too many to count, when I felt overwhelmed by the sensitive nature of the topic, which required constant vigilance and reflection. I recognise that this journey has been instrumental in my personal and professional development through this process. I have gained the experience and skills needed to continue exploring and addressing critical social issues through qualitative research, which has boosted my confidence and understanding of the narrative approach as an academic researcher. I believe there is much more to be done regarding women's experiences of sexual harassment in the workplace, as it is pervasive in nearly every hospitality organisation, yet it is not talked about very openly. Therefore, I am committed to continuing my research journey to ensure that women's voices are heard loudly in order to raise awareness

of such an important topic, and I do believe that this study will take me even further in my research journey.

The process of data collection had a profound effect on me. Working on people's narratives, especially on such a sensitive topic, has taught me the importance of building rapport with participants, which was crucial for eliciting open, honest and detailed accounts of their experiences. Many female participants expressed their appreciation for the opportunity to share their stories, feeling assured that their experiences would be heard and valued. This was not something that I expected at the start of the journey as it is quite a delicate and personal experience of individuals and could have been preferred to be kept it secret. I felt fortunate to have been entrusted with the female employees' stories, and I experienced an overwhelming sense of responsibility for the complex emotional data collected.

Completing this process has made me consider the balance required when collecting the individuals' stories between being in the researcher position and being a woman who used to work in the hospitality sector with a sense of empathy towards the participants. During the interviews, I realised that gathering information from participants was not an easy task, as I felt guilty doing so when I knew that the narratives were sometimes difficult for the participants to recount. This dual perspective has enriched my understanding and reinforced my commitment to approach participants' stories with care and consideration. I have become acutely aware of the delicate balance between being a researcher seeking valuable insights and a compassionate individual recognising the emotional weight of the stories being shared. I strongly believe that good qualitative research requires a researcher to not only gather data but to do so with a deep respect for the participants' experiences, emotions and humanity. My journey through this research process has deepened my dedication to producing meaningful, impactful studies that prioritise the well-being and dignity of participants. This commitment will undoubtedly shape my future research endeavours.

During my PhD journey, I had the opportunity to present my research at a number of conferences focused on gender, tourism, and well-being. This allowed me to discuss the issue within a cross-disciplinary environment, gaining diverse perspectives and insights. It is envisaged that the findings of this thesis will inform

practice through publication and presentation at conferences. In addition, I am particularly interested in expanding the scope to explore women's experiences of sexual harassment on a larger scale across different sectors, organisations, countries and cultures in future research. By employing a broader and more comprehensive approach, I aim to uncover systemic patterns and provide a more detailed understanding of the prevalence and impact of harassment in various work environments and social settings.

In reflecting upon the end of this journey, I realised that every story shared is a step further in breaking the silence and embracing resilience and dedication. Each experience has taught me that strength can be found in vulnerability, the power of perseverance, and the profound impact of sharing our experiences and this kept me going during difficult periods. Finally and importantly, this journey has not only been about reaching a destination but also about discovering the resilience within and the courage to continue forging ahead when times are difficult.

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Appendices

Appendix A – Participant Information Sheet

Participant Information Sheet

The title of the research project

An exploration of workplace sexual harassment against women in the hospitality industry

Invitation to take part

You are being invited to take part in a research project. Before you decide, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

Who is organising/funding the research?

The research is conducted independently by the researcher (Hande Turkoglu), who is a PhD student at Bournemouth University.

What is the purpose of the project?

The hospitality industry has long employed large numbers of women workers. Female employees make a significant contribution to the global hospitality industry. However, some women are exposed to sexual harassment from their colleagues and customers. Women's stories about workplace sexual harassment and its possible impact on their lives are seldom heard. This research aims to critically examine the experiences of women working in hospitality who have been sexually harassed at work. This project will be completed in 3 years.

Why have I been chosen?

You have been chosen because you are a female employee in the hospitality industry and I would like to you talk about your experiences of sexual harassment in the workplace from your colleagues and/or your customers. By being involved in this research project, you as a female worker in the hospitality industry, will help me to understand your experiences of sexual harassment at work and how it impacts on you. You must be over 18 and have experienced sexual harassment in the hospitality workplace. The number of total participants will be 15.

Do I have to take part?

Participation in the research is entirely voluntary. It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part, please keep this information sheet. You will be asked to sign a participant agreement form. You can withdraw from participation during the interview itself at any time and without giving a reason. If you decide to withdraw, we will usually remove any data collected about you from the study. Once the interview has finished you may still be able to withdraw your data up to the point where the data is analysed and incorporated into the research findings or outputs. At this point, your data will usually become anonymous, so your identity cannot be determined, and it may not be possible to identify your data within the anonymous dataset. Withdrawing your data at this point may also adversely affect the validity and integrity of the research. Deciding to take part or not will not adversely affect your position at work.

What would taking part involve?

If you agree to take part, then I would like to meet with you and conduct an individual interview with you. The interview will take place away from the workplace within a relaxed and secure environment of your choosing. I will ask questions about your working life and history and about any sexual harassment incidents that you have faced at work. The interview will last between 45 and 60 minutes. It will be voice recorded if you agree.

What are the advantages and possible disadvantages or risks of taking part?

There are no advantages for you personally participating in the project, but it is hoped that the research findings will be able to contribute to knowledge on the experiences of workplace sexual harassment among female hospitality workers and its impact on them. You may find it therapeutic to talk about your experiences.

Taking part in the research will take up your valuable time. The interview may cause you to remember unpleasant memories that you find upsetting. If this does happen, I will stop the interview and will do my best to help you to recover. You do not have to talk about anything you do not want to discuss, and you can ask me to stop the process at any time. Also, you do not have to answer all the questions and you can ask to take a break at any time.

What type of information will be sought from me and why is the collection of this information relevant for achieving the research project's objectives?

During the interview, I will ask you questions about your working life and history and about your experiences of sexual harassment in the hospitality workplace. I will ask you how this has impacted on you.

Without the participation of women who have experienced sexual harassment in the hospitality workplace, then the aim of the study can not be achieved.

Will I be recorded, and how will the recorded media be used?

I would like to audio record this interview if you are happy for me to do so. The audio recordings will be used only for analysis and the transcription of the recording(s) for writing up my doctoral thesis and in potential publications, illustrations in conference presentations, and lectures. No other use will be made of them without your written permission or oral consent, and no one outside the project will be allowed access to the original recordings.

How will my information be kept?

All the information we collect about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly in accordance with current data protection legislation. Research is a task that we perform in the public interest as part of our core function as a university. Bournemouth University (BU) is a Data Controller of your information, which means that we are responsible for looking after your information and using it appropriately. BU's Research Participant Privacy Notice sets out more information about how we fulfil our responsibilities as a data controller and about your rights as an individual under the data protection legislation. We ask you to read this Notice so that you can fully understand the basis on which we will process your information.

Publication

Research results will be published in scientific academic journals that specialise in the field of hospitality and tourism. You will not be able to be identified in any reports or publications. Information you provide will be included in an anonymous form, i.e. you will not be identifiable.

Security and access controls

BU will hold the information we collect about you in hard copy in a secure location and on a BU password-protected secure network where it is held electronically.

Except where it has been anonymised your personal information will be accessed and used only by appropriate, authorised individuals and when this is necessary for the purposes of the research or another purpose identified in the Privacy Notice. This may include giving access to BU staff or others responsible for monitoring and/or audit of the study, who need to ensure that the research is complying with applicable regulations.

All information in the form of audio record and transcripts collected as part of this study will be seen only by myself and members of my supervisory team. The audio files of our interview will be kept on a password protected device, and it will be destroyed once transcribed. The audio files will be transcribed by myself. The transcription of the recording(s) will be anonymised (referred to only by a number) and to enable confidentially and stored in a locked cabinet. The code-breaker will

be kept separately. Your identity will remain anonymous. I will not use your names and/or any other details about your life and working life that could describe you in any way (pseudonyms will be used to code).

Sharing and further use of your personal information

The information collected about you may be used in an anonymous form to support other research projects in the future, and access to it in this form will not be restricted. It will not be possible for you to be identified from this data.

Retention of your data

All personal data collected for the purposes of this study will be held for 5 years after the award of the degree. Although published research outputs are anonymised, we need to retain underlying data collected for the study in a non-anonymised form for a certain period to enable the research to be audited and/or to enable the research findings to be verified.

Contact for further information

If you have any questions or would like further information, please feel free to contact me directly by email: hturkoglu@bournemouth.ac.uk.

You can also contact my academic supervisors: Dr Lorraine Brown: lbrown@bournemouth.ac.uk, Dr Jayne Caudwell: jcaudwell@bournemouth.ac.uk and Dr Paola Vizcaino-Suarez: lvizcainosuarez@bournemouth.ac.uk.

In case of complaints

Any concerns about the study should be directed to me and my academic supervisors. If your concerns have not been answered by the researcher or the academic supervisors, you should contact Professor Michael Silk, Deputy Dean for Research & Professional Practice, Faculty of Management, Bournemouth University by email: researchgovernance@bournemouth.ac.uk

Finally

If you decide to take part, you will be given a copy of the information sheet and a signed participant agreement form to keep.

Thank you for considering taking part in this research project.

Appendix B – Participant Agreement Form

Participant Agreement Form

Full title of Project: An exploration of workplace sexual harassment against women in the hospitality industry

Name, position and contact details of researcher: Hande Turkoglu [PhD student, Faculty of Management, Bournemouth University, UK, E-mail: hturkoglu@bournemouth.ac.uk].

Name, position and contact details of supervisor:
Lorraine Brown [Assoc Prof, Faculty of Management, Bournemouth University, UK,
E-mail: lbrown@bournemouth.ac.uk],

To be completed prior to data collection activity

Section A: Agreement to participate in the study

You should only agree to participate in the study if you agree with all of the statements in this table and accept that participating will involve the listed activities.

I have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet (v1) and have been given access to the BU Research Participant Privacy Notice which sets out how we collect and use personal information (https://www1.bournemouth.ac.uk/about/governance/access-information/data-protection-privacy).
I have had an opportunity to ask questions.
I understand that my participation is voluntary. I can stop participating in research activities at any time without giving a reason and I am free to decline to answer any particular question(s).
I understand that taking part in the research will include the following activity/activities as part of the research:
• being audio recorded during the project • my words will be quoted in publications, reports, web pages and other research outputs without using my real name.

I understand that, if I withdraw from the study, I will also be able to withdraw my data from further use in the study **except** where my data has been anonymised (as I cannot be identified) or it will be harmful to the project to have my data removed.	

I understand that my data may be used in an anonymised form by the research team to support other research projects in the future, including future publications, reports or presentations.	

	Initial box to agree
I consent to take part in the project on the basis set out above (Section A)	

Name of participant (BLOCK CAPITALS)

Date (dd/mm/yyyy)

Signature

Name of researcher (BLOCK CAPITALS)

Date (dd/mm/yyyy)

Signature

Once a Participant has signed, **please sign 1 copy** and take 2 photocopies:

- Original kept in the local investigator's file
- 1 copy to be kept by the participant (including a copy of PI Sheet)