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# Self-Worth and Identity: The Influence of Workplace Violence and Harassment in Canadian Workplaces

Chelsea Reid, *Western University*

Supervisor: Scott, Katreena, *The University of Western Ontario*
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Self-Worth and Identity: Influence of Workplace Violence

## Abstract

As innately social beings, individuals crave acceptance and yearn to find a sense of purpose in life. More often than not, this sense of purpose is linked to careers or roles within a system. Examination of individuals' perception of self-worth following acts of violence in the workplace is limited. The gap in the literature on self-worth following experiences of violence and harassment is critical to explore because not only is self-worth linked to overall well-being, but individuals also vary in outcomes following the survival of violence (Breines et al., 2008; Sojo et al., 2016). Violence within the workplace is evident within all systems and becomes increasingly difficult to navigate as power, intersectionality, and organizational structure intertwine (Sojo et al., 2016; Gunnarsson, 2018). Each of these pieces plays a role in how individuals conceptualize their identity and their beliefs around their self-worth. This project aimed to identify how workplace violence impacts self-worth, including how identity factors contribute to the perception of self-worth and violence. Results demonstrated that harassment directed toward intersectional aspects of identity was comprehended as an attack on the entire group of individuals who share that identity factor and contributed to feelings of ostracization. Additionally, survivors of workplace harassment and violence reported negative outcomes on their self-worth and overall mental well-being. Overall, participants perceived harassment in the workplace as necessary to ignore in order to avoid additional conflict and consequences.

*Keywords*: violence, harassment, self-worth, identity, intersectionality

## Summary for Lay Audience

Individuals are social by nature and wish to be accepted and find a sense of purpose in life; this may be linked to one's future career or work. Scientific information on individuals' self-worth after experiencing violence in their workplace is limited. This gap in information on self-worth after experiences of violence and harassment is important to explore because not only does self-worth contribute to overall well-being, but individuals experience varying outcomes following the survival of violence (Breines et al., 2008; Sojo et al., 2016). Workplace violence appears within all organizations and becomes more difficult to interrupt and identify when individual power, intersectionality, and the workplace environment overlap (Sojo et al., 2016; Gunnarsson, 2018). Each of these pieces plays a role in how individuals envision their identity and their beliefs around how worthy they are to themselves and others. The goal of this research project was to identify how workplace violence impacts self-worth, including how intersectionality changes an individual's approach to self-worth and violence. This project demonstrated that violence directed toward identifying characteristics, such as race or gender, was seen as an attack on the entire group of individuals who share that identity factor. This contributed to feelings of being rejected and ignored by peers. Additionally, survivors of workplace harassment and violence reported a decrease in their self-worth and overall mental well-being. Overall, participants perceived harassment in the workplace as an act that was necessary to deal with in order to protect themselves from more conflict or consequences.

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To those who participated in these interviews, thank you for sharing your experiences and reliving what for many of you, may have been the most traumatic point in your life. The hours spent interviewing you and hearing your stories have forever changed me. Thank you for not only providing me with these valuable pieces of knowledge, but also for your vulnerability, strength, and bravery that fostered my passion for this project.

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## Workplace Violence and Harassment: Impacts on Self-Worth and Identity

One of the most basic, fundamental human needs is to believe that one is worthy and valuable as an individual in society (Leite & Kuiper, 2008). Typically, individuals begin working during adolescence and continue until they are middle-aged; a considerable percentage of their lives are consumed by work (Lucas et al., 2013). As such, a person's sense of worth as an employee is critical. When an employee's self-worth is high, it can help to mitigate the onset of burnout, as well as promotes a positive stay at work, overall life satisfaction, and the employee's well-being (Molero et al., 2018). Additionally, self-worth also impacts a worker's ability to adapt to job-specific stressors and take their failures as a learning curve rather than view them as inadequacies (Molero et al., 2018).

There is a common misconception that violence and harassment in the workplace is a rare occurrence. This misunderstanding stems from the societal presumption that for an experience to be considered violent, it must occur in a physical or sexual form (Gunnarsson, 2018). In the structural context - the complex systems in a society where individuals interact with one another through norms and values and with institutions (i.e., education, religion) - there is hesitation and fear when it comes to the repercussions of reporting, such as employees being victim-blamed or labelled as a snitch or liar. More specifically, when it comes to gender harassment, it is often downplayed or encouraged to be swept aside because it is seen by organizations as less problematic to pretend that it has not happened than it is to report and cause a rift in the workplace environment (Sojo et al., 2016). Many organizations also overlook gender harassment because of the normalization of sexist jokes and language in the workplace environment (Sojo et al., 2016).

The Respect at Work project (Berlingieri et al., 2022), which formed the foundation for this research, surveyed 4878 Canadian participants who were over the age of 18 and had been employed during the past 12 months. Results demonstrated that in the two years before taking the survey, 71.4% of participants had experienced at least one instance of violence and harassment (i.e., sexual, or non-sexual in nature ranging from verbal intimidation to physical assault) at their place of work. Moreover, it was discovered that nearly half (43.9%) of the participants who experienced violence at their place of work had experienced a form of sexual violence. The Respect at Work project also found that gender-diverse individuals reported more instances of violence and harassment at work (82%) than their female (76%) or male (67%) counterparts Participants reported long-term consequences following experiences of violence and harassment in areas of finances, mental well-being, and physical health. Examples of consequences included termination, loss of relationships, suicidal ideation, and coping through alcohol or drugs.

This research project examined the ways in which harassment impacts self-worth and explored how intersectional identity moderates the impact of violence on self-worth. The ways in which harassment and violence in the workplace impact self-worth may differ for specific groups; for example women, low-wage workers, workers facing structural violence, and for workers in workplaces with low dignity. Harassment in the workplace can be directed at several characteristics such as gender, sexual orientation, age, ability, and skin colour, therefore harassment toward intersectional identities may have a greater impact on self-worth. This means that individuals who feel experience violence toward their identity factors may be impacted to a greater extent than individuals who do not feel as though their identifying aspects are being

targeted. Additionally, those who experience intersectional violence likely experience greater impacts on self-worth.

**Definition of Terms**

For this paper and project, several terms will be defined. *Self-worth* is defined as personal judgements and evaluations of one's sense of competencies, which influences how people feel they deserve to be treated by themselves and others, and the actions taken that reflect this, including actions aimed at instigating changes they wish to make in themselves and others. Self-worth includes both self-esteem and self-confidence (how we evaluate our qualities and characteristics) and self-efficacy (our belief that we can perform an action or task effectively) as both contribute to the perception of self-worth.

*Workplace violence* is defined as all occurrences of verbal, physical, and sexual violence, or harassment, in which the individual felt threatened, intimidated, or at risk of harm. This includes perceived risks, whether it be social harm (i.e., reputation), emotional harm (i.e., humiliation), or physical harm (i.e., assault). The terms violence and harassment are used interchangeably throughout this paper as the International Labour Organization (ILO) has maintained you cannot have one without the other (Carlson, 2018).

*Harmful gender-based workplace experiences* are classified as unwanted and harmful events that are predominantly aimed toward women or female-identifying individuals (Sojo et al., 2016; Gunnarsson, 2018). This includes all incidents that perpetuate devaluation and objectification of individuals due to being women and can be sexual or non-sexual in nature (Sojo et al., 2016). This is a subset of violence where the acts were specifically committed against the survivor due to their gender. For example, referring to sex-specific body parts or development in a derogatory manner or forcing an individual to wear clothing that objectifies

them (Ending Violence Association of BC, 2019). It is important to note that harmful gender-based workplace experiences do not typically stem from sexual attraction, but rather from aversion toward a gender (Ending Violence Association of BC, 2019).

**Statement of Positionality**

At any time, it is critical to acknowledge the ways in which we hold power and where those privileges are coming from. Though each identity we carry can be examined individually, as these categories intersect, it works to shape our way of knowing and how we view oppression. For this reason among many, it is important that I recognize the privilege I hold as a cisgender, heterosexual, middle-class, able-bodied white woman. My knowledge of the experiences of those who have faced workplace violence and harassment is primarily a result of an extensive literature review, my education and professional work, and the narratives that have been shared with me. I would like to acknowledge that throughout the research and interview process, I was consistently reminded of my positionality, and strived to maintain awareness that as an educated white woman in the workforce, I am at less of a risk of experiencing harassment and violence than members of non-dominant groups. The awareness of intersectionality allowed me to work from an anti-oppressive lens and try to understand how participants' identities may shape the way they viewed their experiences and how many of them likely would not have been in these unwarranted situations if it was not for membership in a non-dominant group.

**Theoretical Orientation**

This qualitative research project was derived from interviews and upheld the idea that social phenomena are a multidimensional issue (Wuest, 2007). The project took an anti-oppressive stance, in that it sought to understand how intersectional identities are associated with harassment and violence, individual discrimination, and structural inequalities (Potts & Brown,

2005). Using an anti-oppressive stance had the benefit of providing insight into how self-worth

was impacted by violence and harassment directly from those who have experienced it while

ensuring that the impact of power, inequality, and oppression was taken into account (Khan,

2014). Additionally, using this approach allowed each interviewee to define violence and

harassment on their terms rather than being told what counts as this, giving them the freedom to

name their own experience in the way that they chose (Wuest, 2007). The theories behind self-

worth that are drawn out below will be considered while analyzing the interview findings.

### *Theories Behind Self-Worth*

The *self-schema model of emotion* explains that an individual's self-worth is used to

guide, assess, and integrate life experiences (Leite & Kuiper, 2008). Self-worth beliefs directly

determine the evaluative standard that an individual will adopt, yet the extent to which the

individual agrees with these evaluative standards determines how failure will impact their self-

worth (Leite & Kuiper, 2008). For example, if an individual fails at a task yet believes that the

people around them still favourably view them, self-worth will be re-evaluated and affected to a

less extent than if they believe the people around them now view them negatively (Kuiper et al.,

1987). Furthermore, the self-schema model of emotion postulates that some self-worth beliefs

are maladaptive in nature (i.e., 'I am worthless' or 'I cannot change my situation) and that

adaptive self-worth beliefs (i.e., 'I am worthy' or 'I have control over my situation) have an

important role in influencing psychological well-being (Leite & Kuiper, 2008).

The self-schema model of emotion states that when self-worth contingencies are

perceived by the individual to be met whilst perceiving that others view it to be met as well, then

the individual will maintain positive self-worth thinking (Kuiper et al., 1987). However, if self-

worth contingencies are perceived as unmet by the individual and the individual believes others

view them to be inadequate, then rumination around being a failure or unworthy sets in (Kuiper et al., 1987). With the self-schema model of emotion in mind, individuals who have repeatedly experienced violence or harassment will likely adopt negative self-worth beliefs as they will be more inclined to identify with failure as it supports their schema.

*Intersectionality*

Intersectionality, developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw, is rooted in Black feminist theory and Critical Race Theory, and was originally developed to speak to the ways that social advocacy for violence against women had been neglecting to include the unique experiences of women of colour (Bauer et al., 2021; Moradi & Grzanka, 2017; Smooth, 2013). Crenshaw explicates that "intersectionality is a lens through which you can see where power comes and collides, where it interlocks and intersects" (Kimberlé Crenshaw on Intersectionality, 2017; Moradi & Grzanka, 2017). To use it as a way to isolate racial, gender, or class problems in one area is to erase what occurs to people who are subjected to all of these things at once (Kimberlé Crenshaw on Intersectionality, 2017). Sociologist Patricia Collins explained intersectionality as a structural model of power whereby oppression and privilege are both contingent on and centred within power stemming from cultural and historical parts of society (Moradi & Grzanka, 2017).

Using an intersectional lens acknowledges how social positions combine to shape an individual's identity and recognizes how they are consistently heavily impacted by macro and micro-level structures (Bauer et al., 2021; Smooth, 2013). At a micro-level, intersectionality observes identities such as gender, race, and sexuality, and how these reflect at the macro-level through sexism, racism, and heteronormativity (Kelly et al., 2021). Moreover, it examines how structures assert meaning to categories of identity and encourages researchers to analyze systems of oppression, how these systems form classifications, and the intricacy of privileged and

marginalized identities (Shin et al., 2017; Smooth, 2013). The theory of intersectionality encourages the exploration of more than social identities; it includes the notion that marginalization encountered at individual, relational, and structural levels is indivisible (Shin et al., 2017). All work coming from an intersectional basis should be based on one's dedication to social justice (Shin et al., 2017).

Intersectionality acknowledges that levels of privilege and experiences of oppression can vary depending on the social and structural context that the individual is in, meanwhile stressing that all experiences of marginalization are significant (Kelly et al., 2021). Using the framework of intersectionality urges researchers to reflect on the differences that exist within groups, rather than solely focusing on the differences between groups (Smooth, 2013). Furthermore, an intersectional lens allows researchers and those in academia to challenge traditional Western thinking and develop a better understanding of organizational power (Smooth, 2013). As the intersectional paradigm moves across disciplines, there are two critical principles to consider when applying it to social contexts (Kelly et al., 2021). These principles include remembering that social identities are not exclusive and cannot be viewed on their own, but rather are a combination of such and that the focal point is to remain on traditionally marginalized groups (Kelly et al., 2021).

## Literature Review

### Workplace Harassment and Violence

Within the workplace, harassment against women has typically been swept aside despite the notion that unwanted sexual coercion is an ongoing problem (Sojo et al., 2016). Moreover, harassment and discrimination are often viewed as a consequence of working in a merit-based system or a male-dominated field (Sojo et al., 2016; Wright, 2016).  With the "Me-Too"

movement, the impacts and frequency of workplace sexual violence were brought to light by celebrities. This movement aided in the destigmatization of victimization, and sought to facilitate systemic change within the workplace (Basile et al., 2020). There is difficulty in pinpointing the prevalence of harassment within the working population as it is contingent on how individuals define harassment or violence, how it is being measured, the period in which it occurs, and the cultural context (Magnusson Hanson et al., 2020). This difficulty has led to the consensus that to understand workplace violence, a number of experiences need to be understood such as structural violence, cultural violence, gender-based violence, and psychological violence (Klein, 2009; Litwin, 2001).

Structural violence includes exploitation, marginalization, and emotional harm, and is intertwined with cultural violence to create a way for individuals to justify their acts of violence toward another person (Litwin, 2001). Though all genders are vulnerable to workplace violence, female-identifying individuals are most susceptible and more likely than others to be a victim of workplace violence (Litwin, 2001; Wright, 2016). More specifically, women are often the target of sexual harassment, gender-based violence, and sexual violence, and are more likely to be a victim of workplace homicide (Duncan et al., 2019; Litwin, 2001; Sojo et al., 2016). Racially and ethnically minoritized women experience harassment and violence at rates beyond those of white women, white men, and racially or ethnically minoritized men (Siuta & Bergman, 2019). Women are also more likely than men to change workplaces after situations of violence, particularly in situations where their supervisor has been a male-identifying individual (Pinto et al., 2021).

Many theorists argue that violence and harassment in the workplace are used to maintain the hierarchy of power, and to suppress the advancement of women or others who challenge the

power and status held by those at the highest level of the sex-based social hierarchy (Siuta & Bergman, 2019). At the top of the North American, Western social hierarchy is the cisgender, white, heterosexual, Christian, muscular, intelligent, attractive, "manly" man (Siuta & Bergman, 2019). The extent to which individuals deviate from or challenge this norm determines how likely they are to experience violence or harassment (Siuta & Bergman, 2019). The severity of experiences of violence in the workplace differs between organizations and individuals. Low-wage workers have been found to face barriers and types of harassment common among minority populations such as harassment based on factors such as their sex, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, accent or English-speaking ability, ableism, race, and ethnicity (Kristen et al., 2015). However, this does not mean that individuals in high-wage positions experience harassment based on other factors or that they do not experience it at all.

**Self-worth**

Self-worth is individually determined by one's external and internal view of themselves, their successes, and how one believes others think about them. These individual thoughts and feelings about how good one is, are often impacted by societal norms and standards that are set by others (Breines et al., 2008; Crocker & Knight, 2005). Self-worth plays an integral part in the beginning, preservation, and reduction of depressive symptomology (Dance & Kuiper, 1987). Specifically, as workplace violence impacts an individual's self-worth, they begin to believe that they are no longer a worthy worker, they are not important to the workplace, and they are no longer competent to do this job (Dance & Kuiper, 1987). These beliefs often result in the development of depressive symptoms over time. This cycle goes both ways as the stress of workplace violence hinders the ability for self-worth contingencies to be met, thus decreasing self-worth, and increasing depressive symptoms (Dance & Kuiper, 1987).

When the work environment begins to feel institutionalized or militaristic, the chance for the degradation of employees to begin to increase (Lucas et al., 2013). Examples of degradations seen in Western cultures include the removal of identification markers (i.e., loss of name tags, personal clothing replaced with uniforms, etc.), verbal abuse and harassment, or humiliation (Lucas et al., 2013). These degradations are then internalized which contributes to low self-worth and likely amplifies the impact of violence on the individual (Lucas et al., 2013). The psychological harm that results from harassment leaves survivors feeling unsafe, alone, and detached from their workplace; thus, wounding the workplace's environment of dignity and individuals' self-worth (Duncan et al., 2019; Pinto et al., 2021).

**Intersectional Identities**

Conflict in the workplace may surface as a result of demographic differences related to social, ethnic, and cultural identities, and differences in customs, values, languages, or beliefs (Litwin, 2001; Siuta & Bergman, 2019). These conflicts result in a division of workers, resulting in the development of in-groups and out-groups (Litwin, 2001). The power attributed to the in-group in the organization is influenced by the hierarchies formed by Western culture, increasing the risk for marginalized employees to experience prejudice within the workplace (Shaw et al., 2019; Siuta & Bergman, 2019). Intersectionality theory highlights that all facets of an individual's identity, e.g. gender, sexuality, age, race, and ability, are associated with varying amounts of privilege. For example, when looking at gender, a male holds more privilege than a female, but factoring in additional identities impacts this level of privilege (Weber, 1998). A white male is more privileged than a Black male, a white heterosexual male is more privileged than a white homosexual male, and a white, cisgender, heterosexual male is more privileged than a white, transgender, heterosexual male.

Important within this theory is understanding the intersecting of systems of power, as mentioned previously, these systems shape the way we view identity and therefore we must consider both sides (i.e., poverty and wealth or minority and majority) as we do not need to "fix" the person, but rather fix the inequality of power (Moradi & Grzanka, 2017). It is critical to acknowledge that intersectionality is not an attribute that some possess, and others do not, but rather we all have identities that allow us certain privileges (Moradi & Grzanka, 2017). To summarize, the more an individual's identities are seen as less than others, the greater the chance they may experience discrimination based on their combined identity (Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008; Weber, 1998).

Identity includes a multitude of factors that may be visible or invisible and may change over time (Stets & Burke, 2014). First, there is an individual's social identity which embraces gender, race, ethnicity, and other categories of membership (Stets & Burke, 2014). When an individual is accepted for their identity in these categories, they feel validated and accepted, have a high sense of self-worth, and can display their belonging to this group through dress, behaviour, or attitudes (Stets & Burke, 2014). Secondly, there is role identity which is reinforced when an individual identifies with the meanings that are associated with their role and its corresponding expectations (Stets & Burke, 2014). For example, when an employee views themselves as knowledgeable in their work role and is recognized by another employee or manager who shares with them that they think they are very intelligent in this field of work (Stets & Burke, 2014). Lastly, there is an identity that relates to whom an individual believes they are at their core, despite any possible discrepancies between how they view themselves and how others view them (Stets & Burke, 2014).

The above factors contribute to an individual's identity and are related to self-worth such that they seek to have these factors verified through their actions and the validation of others (Stets & Burke, 2014). Thus, when violence is focused on the aspects of someone's core identity, the impacts on self-worth are likely to be greater. Examples include harassment and violence that are aimed at an individual's sexual orientation through the use of direct or indirect statements or behaviours in the workplace (Siuta & Bergman, 2019). It is important to note that many identity factors are contextual, and the oppression associated with each may change over periods of time and across nations as societies go through economic or political transformations (Robinson, 2006; Weber, 1998). Moreover, many of these identities are socially constructed and defined by the dominant culture to create classifications of good and bad or right and wrong (Weber, 1998). Dominant groups attempt to provide a justification to those who fall outside the in-group, claiming that these classifications are based upon biological findings (Weber, 1998). However, race, class, gender, and sexual orientation cannot be reduced to unalterable characteristics, but rather are social paradigms created to increase privileges for some and hinder power for others (Robinson, 2006; Weber, 1998).

### *Gender and Sexual Orientation*

Discrimination within the workplace is evident, with examples being seen in the gender pay gap, that male-dominated industries are considerably more obvious in society than female-dominated industries, or in the way that many workplaces sexualize interactions between workers and customers (Litwin, 2001; Matulewiz, 2015). When examining differences in harassment toward cisgender males and females, researchers found that females experienced higher rates of physical harassment, objectification, differential treatment, and put-downs, while males experienced more homophobic comments and vulgar verbal harassment (Mitchell et al.,

2014). Furthermore, LGBTQIA+ individuals are at heightened risk for harassment and violence (Mitchell et al., 2014). Lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals experience violence, in general, at higher rates than heterosexuals, with transgender individuals specifically at an increased risk of assault (Menning & Holtzman, 2014; Mitchell et al., 2014). LGBTQIA+ individuals who experience harassment report low levels of self-worth, especially when the harassment is targeted because of their sexual orientation or gender identity (Mitchell et al., 2014).

The job-gendered context is fundamental to power within an institute and determines what actions are considered to be normative within the organization; those who hold power positions are more likely to set the rules, be heard, and contribute to decision-making (Sojo et al., 2016; Gunnarsson, 2018). These power positions perpetuate the gender division of labour and the patriarchal hierarchy within society. Harmful gender-based non-sexual violence may be difficult to identify as it is often seen on a continuum of significance, which is embedded into popular culture and can emerge as sexist discrimination (i.e., devaluing a female employee, holding biases, or creating obstacles to limit a female employee's success or satisfaction) or as gender harassment (i.e., hostile and offensive verbal, physical, or symbolic behaviours that are based on one's gender) (Gunnarsson, 2018; Robinson, 2006; Sojo et al., 2016). In many situations, these actions are embedded within the organization through formal and informal policies, practices, and procedures, thus resulting in a sexist climate filled with negative attitudes and actions (Robinson, 2006; Sojo et al., 2016).

### Race and Racism

Racial identity is one of the many factors that intersect to create an individual's overall identity and is found to be positively correlated with self-esteem (Phinney & Chavira, 1992; Umaña-Taylor, 2004). Previous research found that racial-minority individuals regarded race as

their central identity, additionally rating race as being the most imperative factor contributing to

self-worth (Phinney & Chavira, 1992). In general, racism and race-related pressures influence

the mental health of all minority individuals, regardless of other intersecting identities; however,

it is impossible to isolate one identity without taking the whole picture into consideration

(Onwuachi-Willig, 2018).

The way in which an individual experiences prejudice differs depending on the whole

picture, therefore the impact that this has on the individual differs (Onwuachi-Willig, 2018).

Homosexual Black men and women reported rates of depression that were far greater than

individuals belonging to other racial minorities (Platt & Scheitle, 2018). Many empirical studies

have concluded that the perception of racism has consequences for mental health outcomes

(Lewis et al., 2017). Researchers have further discovered that greater health and behavioural

risks were found in Black, Hispanic, and Asian sexual minority women when compared to racial-

minority heterosexuals (Platt & Scheitle, 2018).

Though harassment in the workplace is becoming more recognized, women of colour are

recurrently overlooked and their increased vulnerability to experiencing harassment in the

workplace is disregarded (Onwuachi-Willig, 2018). Black women, in particular, are more likely

to experience sexual harassment in the workplace than white women and are less likely to be

believed about their experience (Onwuachi-Willig, 2018). Harassment experienced by Black

women stems from a combination of racial and gender stereotypes; with accounts from

perpetrators stating they directed their harassment toward marginalized women because of the

unlikeliness that they'd be believed (Onwuachi-Willig, 2018). The stereotype of the "angry

Black woman" is one of the many explanations used to discredit these experiences (Onwuachi-

Willig, 2018). The unique form of racialized harassment that racial minorities experience is

examined through the lens of harassment toward the majority; for example, harassment against women of colour is evaluated as though it is consistent with the white female experience (Onwuachi-Willig, 2018).

## Research Question

This project aimed to determine if individuals' self-worth was impacted by experiences of workplace violence and harassment. This research project also aimed to identify how intersectional violence shapes an individual's perception of self-worth and may influence how they view experiences of violence. These experiences in turn impact an individual's life current life, as well as their future in a number of ways. For example, having to make a career change due to the belief that one is no longer worthy to work at this company or because one feels as though they are no longer competent as a result of workplace violence and harassment. For this qualitative research project, the question investigated was:

1. How do workplace violence and harassment impact individuals' self-worth?

2. How does identity shape an individual's understanding of violence and self-worth?

## Method

Through the utilization of qualitative methodology, participants' experience of workplace harassment and violence was examined to facilitate an understanding of how this impacts self-worth. This study was designed to determine how harassment and violence within the workplace organization affect an individual's self-worth, as well as how identity influences an individual's experience of violence and self-worth. A qualitative semi-structured interview design was chosen to explore this complex phenomenon, the workplace environment in which it occurs, and the consequences that survivors experienced (National Academies, 2018). This design allowed for

the provision of contextual information from the interviewees, as well as allowed for participants to highlight their individual experiences and perception of the event (National Academies, 2018).

**Participants**

The sample used for this study was comprised of Canadian individuals who were above age 18 and had experienced workplace violence and/or harassment. Participants were not explicitly required to provide demographic information for the interviews, however, all those who were interviewed were between the ages of 18 and 65 years old, identified as female, and consisted of various races/ethnicities. There was variation in the timeline of the experience of violence, such that some participants were now retired, and the violence had occurred a few years ago, whereas others were still involved in ongoing lawsuits. Additionally, there was variation in whether participants lived in rural or urban areas, though the majority of those interviewed lived in major Canadian cities.

Throughout the interviews, it was apparent that the type of violence most commonly experienced was verbal or sexual in nature. These verbal acts of violence included comments on female primary and secondary sex characteristics, birth and/or pregnancy, what one was wearing, or sexual innuendos. Many participants also reported inappropriate, nonconsensual touching while at work or at work events. Depending on the type of setting those individuals worked in, these acts were perpetrated by coworkers, supervisors/managers, and clients or customers. Examples of participants' areas of employment included the education sector, transportation services, business/corporate sector, and hospitality.

*Participant Recruitment*

Fifteen participants were drawn from a list of individuals who participated in the previous Marginalized Workers project hosted by Western University's Centre for Research and

Education on Violence Against Women and Children (CREVAWC). Emails were sent to

participants who completed the previous study's survey and who indicated that they would like

to be contacted if future opportunities arise. Participation was limited to those who were over the

age of 18 and had experienced violence or harassment in a place of work.

Individuals were contacted in June 2022 following the approval from Western's Research

Ethics Board (WREB) (see Appendix A). If participants indicated that they would like to be

interviewed, dates and times for an interview in July and August 2022 were set up through the

use of email. Participants provided their consent to engage in a semi-structured interview with a

trained interviewer. Interviews lasted between forty-five minutes and one hour and occurred both

over the telephone and via Zoom depending on participant preference. Participants consented to

have their responses for the purposes of the present study and to the use of de-identified quotes.

**Semi-Structured Interviews**

Interview participants were contacted via email (see Appendix B) to determine if they

were interested in learning more about the participation opportunity. Participants received the

Letter of Information and Consent form (see Appendix C) detailing the present study. Once the

Letter of information and Consent form had been read and understood, participants provided

their written informed consent to confirm that they agreed to the terms and wished to participate

in the interview. A list of provincial and national resources (see Appendix D) was provided prior

to the interview and was attached to the interview scheduling email (see Appendix E). Interviews

were semi-structured and consisted of open-ended questions asked by a trained interviewer in

private.

The primary question asked to participants was to describe their place of work and their

experience(s) of violence and harassment. Additional questions were asked in order to gain

greater detail including - What were the consequences for you from experiencing harassment?

Have these experiences had an impact on your confidence, sense of self, feelings of self-worth,

or other aspects of how you view yourself? Have these experiences impacted how you view

yourself as a worker? All questions were from the interview and focus group guide (see

Appendix F). At the beginning of each interview, participants were asked if they consented to be

recorded. Once consent was provided, participants were read the questions on the verbal consent

form (see Appendix G) and their verbal consent was recorded, along with a chance for them to

voice any questions or concerns they had prior to start. Interviews were audio recorded via

Zoom, then immediately de-identified and uploaded to a secure drive to which only the research

members had access. Audio recordings were instantly deleted from the Zoom drive and from

personal computers. The recording transcripts were then transcribed using Sonix and then

checked in real-time by the interviews to ensure responses matched the audio.

**Role of the Researcher**

Because this research focused on the sensitive topic of violence and harassment and

required the recall of these experiences, there was the possibility that participants may become

distressed and experience anxiety when recalling these events. It was predicted that there would

be individuals who were anxious during these interviews, therefore the researcher emphasized

that participants had the opportunity to take breaks if they found themselves feeling

overwhelmed. The questions in the interview guide were constructed with this knowledge in

mind to mitigate the risk of participants becoming too distressed by the process, and stressed the

importance of allowing space and time for the individual to choose to respond in the way they

wish. Although experiences of violence may result in a number of outcomes, there was an ethical

responsibility for the researchers to use an empathetic, trauma-informed approach to all aspects

of the interview process. Because of the delicate subject, questions and responses were made
from an anti-oppressive standpoint so that the participants would not feel as though they are
being judged or questioned about the legitimacy of their experience. Participants were informed
by the researchers that they did not have to disclose any information that they felt uncomfortable
sharing, that they could withdraw their consent at any point during the research process, and
were given opportunities to ask questions.

Special attention was paid to the approach of the interview to minimize the impression of
a power differential, to reduce feelings of exploitation of survivors' experiences in both the
interview and delivery of results, and to maintain the interview context. To preserve boundaries
and insinuate a business-casual interview environment, the interviewer maintained a
professional, yet warm demeanour and remained mindful that the response to the participant's
answers should not mirror a counselling session. This was important to keep in mind due to the
nature of the subject, the vulnerable position of the interviewee, and the researcher's inclination
to provide talk therapy and support those who appear dysregulated with a therapeutic demeanour.
Participants were provided with a list of bilingual provincial and national mental health resources
prior to the interview, and were reminded of the list before ending the interview as well.

**Coding**

Once interview transcripts were accurately transcribed, they were uploaded to the coding
program MaxQDA. All interviews were read to develop an overall sense of the common themes
and repeated issues. Researchers then met to collaboratively develop a series of codes and
subcodes that would be used to analyze each recording. A total of 28 codes from the 15 interview
transcripts were developed. Those 28 codes were then examined to develop subcodes to cultivate
a richer analysis; these detailed categories resulted in a combined total of 111 codes and

subcodes (see Figure 1). Codes and subcodes went through consistent review to ensure that the themes were relevant and consistent across data and researchers. Throughout the entirety of this project, researchers met weekly to ascertain their individual orientation around their research questions before the interview process took place. Weekly meetings continued throughout the data collection process and the analysis procedures, discussing any thoughts or feelings that arose throughout these progressions.

*Fig. 1 Codes and sub-codes used to examine participant interviews on experiences of harassment and violence.*
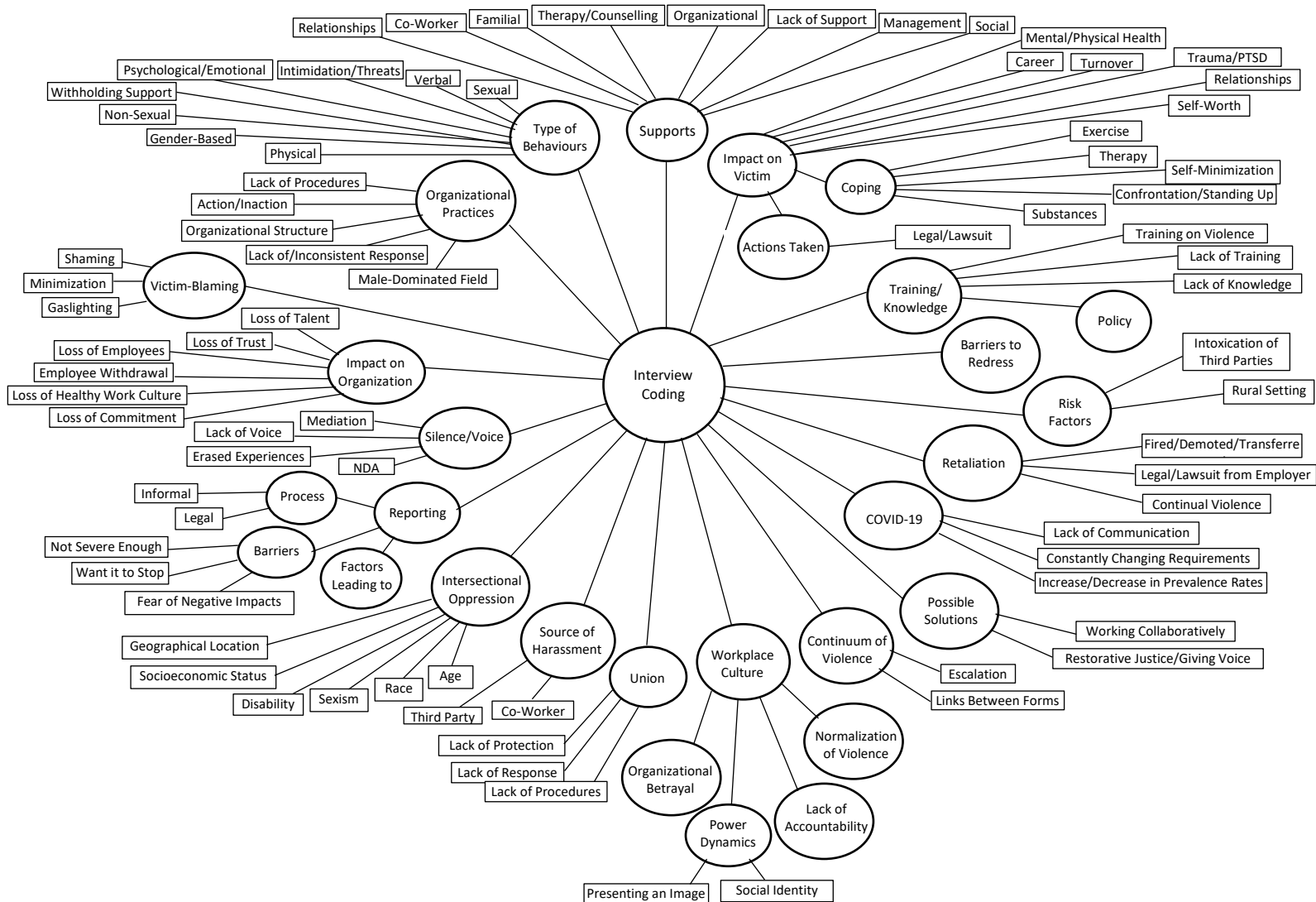
Using the codes and subcodes that were collaboratively developed by the researchers, each interview transcript was carefully read and quotes from participants were highlighted and labelled with the corresponding code/subcode. It is important to acknowledge that the codes highlighted throughout transcripts may have fit into more than one theme, therefore each code was able to be highlighted multiple times and the themes discussed are not mutually exclusive.

For the purpose of this research topic, three of the total 28 codes, and their associated subcodes, were analyzed (see Figure 2). The three codes that were focused on were (1) Types of Harassing/Violent Behaviours/Practice, (2) Impacts on Victim, and (3) Intersectional Oppression. Transcripts were first read and assigned one of the three first-level codes mentioned above. Afterward, transcripts were read again, and the sections assigned first-level codes were then assigned a second-level code that specified what type of harassing/violent behaviour/practice they experienced, the type of impact on the victim, and what intersectional category it related to. Following this careful examination of the transcripts, the sections that were assigned subcodes were looked at exclusively in order for the researcher to develop themes and find reoccurring meanings.

An example of a code used during thematic analysis was, "Impacts on victim." This was chosen as there were varying effects that were detailed throughout the interviews and contributed to the investigation of how harassment and violence impact self-worth. Underneath this code was several subcodes, such as "Trauma/PTSD," "Mental health," and "Self-worth/self-esteem/self-confidence."

*Fig. 2 Codes and sub-codes used specifically to analyze the research questions in this study.*

| Code | Subcode | Frequency |
|---|---|---|
| Types of Harassing/Violent Behaviours/Practices | | 253 |
| | Gossiping | 12 |
| | Intimidation/Threat | 37 |
| | Withholding Support/Ostracizing/Social Isolation | 38 |
| | Psychological/Emotional | 22 |
| | Verbal | 31 |
| | Online | 32 |
| | Gender-Based | 1 |
| | Not Sexual in Nature | 36 |
| | Sexual | 31 |
| | For Career/Financial Gain | 10 |
| | Physical | 3 |
| Impacts on Victim | | 372 |
| | Impact on Career/Job | 37 |
| | Trauma/PTSD | 45 |
| | Turnover Intentions | 20 |
| | Self-Worth/Self-Esteem/Self-Confidence | 118 |
| | Physical Health | 19 |
| | Mental Health | 98 |
| | Financial Loss | 6 |
| | Impacted Relationships | 29 |
| Intersectional Oppression | | 138 |
| | Geographical Location | 7 |
| | Age | 5 |
| | Disability | 13 |
| | Race | 28 |
| | Sexism | 81 |
| | Socioeconomic Status | 4 |

**Data Analysis**

Thematic analysis (TA) was utilized to examine participant responses, which allowed for

the information collected to be identified, analyzed, and interpreted to find meaningful themes

throughout the data (Clarke & Braun, 2017; Ibrahim, 2012). First, data were examined to

collectively create a set of codes and subcodes (i.e., parts of the collected data that are relevant to

the research question examined), agreed upon by all research members, which were then used to

identify the shared themes and patterns (Clarke & Braun, 2017; Ibrahim, 2012). The

identification of shared themes within and across the data required the researchers to use their breadth of knowledge and interpretation skills to detect these codes and themes (Boyatzis, 1998; Ibrahim, 2012; Kiger & Varpio, 2020).

TA was used to gain information about individuals' experiences, which provided a large amount of rich data to assist in understanding their perception of self-worth, while exploring the social, cultural, and structural frameworks that impacted their experience (Kiger & Varpio, 2020). Using a TA methodology for this project was critical because it allowed for the incorporation of previously reviewed literature on violence, self-worth, and identity to guide the way in which the data from participant interviews was examined. Furthermore, using TA to examine the data maintained the importance of prioritizing the information given by the voices of those in oppressed populations (Ibrahim, 2012; Kiger & Varpio, 2020; Sundler et al., 2019).

An intersectional analysis was also incorporated into this research project, which allows for the investigation of the intersecting systems between various constructions of power and the ways in which individuals are positioned by society, and by themselves, into groups (Christensen & Jensen, 2012). Moreover, using an intersectional analysis focuses on how these different groups establish systems of oppression and create social divides (Christensen & Jensen, 2012). The intersectional analysis highlights the importance of hearing narratives from participants directly because it allows researchers to understand how each person uses their intersectional position to shape their life story (Christensen & Jensen, 2012). When looking at identity, it is important to remember that how we view social categories is shaped by what other people have said to us about them, and which narratives we convey about ourselves relative to these categories to which we belong (Christensen & Jensen, 2012).

**Results**

All statements made by the interviewee that described the harassment experienced were coded under the category of "Types of Harassment/Violence" and then further subcoded according to the type of violence experienced. Included in this category were gossiping, intimidation/threats, withholding support/ostracizing/social isolation, psychological/emotional harassment, verbal harassment, harassment that occurred online, gender-based violence, harassment not sexual in nature, sexual violence, harassment used for career/financial gain, and physical harassment. The most common type of violence and harassment that was identified within the transcripts was through the withholding of support, experiences of ostracization, and social (i.e., embarrassing an individual in front of other coworkers).

After applying the first-level code of "Impacts on Victims Self-Worth/Self-Esteem/Self-Confidence" to the interviewee's transcripts, second-level codes were used to categorize what type of impacts were expressed. This included the subcodes of an impact on career/job, trauma/PTSD, employee turnover intentions, impacts on self-worth/self-esteem/self-confidence, physical health, mental health, financial loss, and impacted relationships. The most common impact that was reported by participants was the impact on their mental health. Examples of mental health impacts included anxiety, depression, and panic attacks.

Lastly, the transcripts were coded under the category of "Intersectionality" and further subcoded according to the type of intersectional identity the harassment or violence was directed to. Included under this category was geographical location (i.e., rural areas or being in isolation), age, disability, race, sexism, and socioeconomic status. These are just a few types of intersectional identities and mostly looked at harassment or violence toward minority groups. The most common form of intersectional oppression identified throughout the interviews was

sexism, which included not only acts toward sex and gender, but instances of harassment due to an individual's assumed sexual identity.

The impacts on self-worth, self-esteem, and self-confidence were wide-ranging. Almost all participants reported that following their experiences of harassment and violence they lost trust in others, themselves, and the world around them. The way in which participants spoke about themselves and their feelings toward themselves demonstrated evidence that they experienced an impact on their self-worth; feeling "disempowered [and] vigilant all the time" (P16). Many felt they were obligated to accept this unacceptable treatment because it was part of the work environment and expressed feeling trapped, alone, and as though there was no way out of this situation.

Participants expressed self-blame and ruminated on their experiences, wondering if things would be different had they just responded in another way to their assailant or if they had been of a different race or gender. One individual expressed how despite the "many people [who] said how strong [they] are and how strong [they] were… it [wasn't] without a price… [their] sense of serenity or [their] inner peace is buffeted by events like this" (P3). The strong nature of the words that participants used to describe their experiences and the way that they felt toward themselves provided support that not only did harassment and violence impact their self-worth, but when directed toward identity factors or stereotypical characteristics of identities, participants felt targeted and insignificant.

**Meta Theme of Devaluing**

After the initial coding and searching for meanings, a meta theme that could be seen throughout the five themes and that reoccurred across participant interviews was the pattern of devaluing. Each participant expressed different ways that they experienced being devalued in

their workplace and how this contributed toward impacted feelings of self-worth and the role it played in identity. Although the theme of devaluing could be discussed as a whole, there were a few specific themes that persisted regarding devaluation throughout the interviews. The examination of themes of devaluing resulted in making meanings out of these experiences to describe the devaluing of self as a worker, the devaluing through sexualizing, the devaluing through identity, the devaluing through dismissing concerns, and the devaluing of mental health.

### Devaluing of Self as a Worker: Making "A Little Extra Cash"

Throughout the interviews, participants expressed how many of their male counterparts made statements toward them suggesting that they are simply working to supplement their male partner's income or to "make a little extra cash" (P4). Participant 4 continued to point out the unpaid emotional labour that women continue to lead to this day. This infuriated many of the women as it perpetuated the retired idea that women are homemakers and are not equals in the workforce. Interestingly, these comments were made without knowing the relationship status of these women, for many of them were single parents or not in a romantic relationship at all. Though the idea of the working woman or dual-income household is more common in society today, many participants expressed how their male coworkers "see women as being more role-specific, as opposed to being actual whole people", and furthermore how "they kind of segment what a woman is… a woman is a mom, or a woman is this and that" (P1). The overarching impression that a woman is defined by having children or being a caretaker impacted participants' feelings of self-worth, such that others are "not seeing that a woman is a whole person with her autonomy and feelings" (P1). These comments regarding gender not only impact individuals' self-worth, but also leave an impression on what it means to identify as a woman and how to *be* a woman.

Participants repeatedly acknowledged how as a woman, "[their] worth is tied up in [their] appearance or how other people see [them]" (P1). They felt the need to justify why they were working, why they did or did not have children, why they were in this line of work, why they dressed how they did, and why they would not give in to sexual advances made by male colleagues. To mitigate these unsolicited engagements, participants shared how they had to change the way they appeared at work, whether it was through clothing (i.e., adding layers, subdued colours, or clothing that is not form-fitting) or by physically altering their body (i.e., gaining weight) in hopes of directing attention elsewhere. Specifically, in male-dominant jobs, the motto used was, "the less you portray yourself as female, the better" (P25). Participants were forced to change the way they expressed their identity and manipulate their characteristics to simply avoid harassment and violence. This sent the message that they could not be themselves freely without having to suffer the consequences associated with their individuality; without being forced to take the blame for what was happening to them.

Participant 14 reached out to a women's crisis line one evening to express the pain they felt. The responder on the phone, after hearing the situation, confessed to Participant 14 that many women stop fighting the lawsuits they have started against their place of work because there is a certain standard that needs to be lived up to; for example, the woman is supposed to be the one taking care of the kids, the family, and their husband. It was no surprise to learn that downplaying who they are at their core impacted their self-worth or self-confidence.

### *Devaluing Through Sexualizing: "Too Bad Her Skirt Isn't Shorter"*

"Being a woman in a field that many men don't believe we should be in is horrific. The most horrible actions and words have come from my colleagues" (P25). Interviewees shared feelings of betrayal when sexual harassment was directed at them by coworkers, as some

expected this to happen from clients/customers. Participant 25 shared how in their male-dominated field, male coworkers and supervisors were continuously "touching [their] butt, sidling up against [them], [and] brushing up against [their] breasts". They expressed how whenever they turned down sexual advances, their male colleagues would show resentment (P25). This participant shared a horrific moment that would stay with them forever – as the only female worker on site, her male supervisor asked her to perform a check on the individuals in the criminal facility (P25). As she was a new staff member, she did not know that this was not a time to check on the individual's and the supervisor purposefully sent her to a floor where they knew she would walk in on the male offenders masturbating (P25). These so-called jokes and sexual touching and statements only stopped once she got married (P25). This insinuates that these male workers had more respect for her husband than they did for her, which not only devalues an individual through their gender, but viewing an individual as a sexual object is damaging to self-worth.

The sexualizing of individuals occurred through words as much as it did through behaviours. Participant 9 tried to set boundaries with their supervisor a number of times, yet he failed to respect them and would continue to visit her office, call her pet names, and offer to do things for her like take off her shoes. When denied a hug, the male supervisor responded with "oh come on, give it up baby" (P9). Even when the sexualization happened in moments where it was far-fetched to make a comment in the current conversation, it still occurred and was excused as a joke. For example, Participant 9 mentioned during lunch how they were trying to get concert tickets and their male colleague heard this and suggested to them that they should "put out on Craigslist" to try and secure tickets. Comments would also come from male clients, such as "oh you brought your secretary? Too bad her skirt isn't shorter" (P1).

When responding to unwanted sexual advances from mostly male colleagues, participants described how they received insults such as "slut", "whore", and "bitch" in response to turning the advances down. Additional examples given by participants included verbal harassment and the sexualization of their body parts while pregnant, comments from others based on their clothing or how others felt they should dress, and continuous statements referring to women in different fields of work being viewed as less competent than their male counterparts. One participant, in particular, Participant 1, received an unnerving amount of comments regarding her breasts from her male colleagues and clients while she went through her pregnancy. These repulsive remarks included how her husband must love the changes to her body and how they hope the doctors threw in an extra stitch for him. She shared, "I'm a plus-size woman [and] people make comments about weight… when I was pregnant [people would say] oh, your baby's going to love breastfeeding off of you". Participant 15 stressed how not only do women face additional pressure to choose between their family and their career, but having a family also impacts how your employer views you. "When it comes to family building… we're being looked over because we're going on maternity leave or we've been on maternity leave… she's less than because of that… if you have kids, you're not going to be as productive as everyone else" (P15).

### Devaluing Through Identity: "Calm Down, You're Crazy, That's Not Acceptable Behaviour"

Participants noted how there is "this culture of women needing to prove themselves and prove that they're tough enough to be [at the workplace] and to take verbal abuse" (P15). Not only do they have to withstand harassment from workers, but many in the service industry or whose jobs require meeting with clients noted that they have to appeal, both physically and emotionally, to their customers in order to keep their business. Participant 1 described how they were required to take verbal and sexual harassment from clients to keep them happy, and to

refrain from telling the client when they felt uncomfortable; clientele satisfaction was prioritized over employees' feelings of safety. Accepting harassing behaviour was seen as a necessary part of surviving as a woman in a male-dominated line of work and was commonly reported to be reinforced by both colleagues and superiors (i.e., managers and supervisors). Following an experience of verbal harassment, Participant 1 reported the incident to their male boss who told her, "if [you] expect to last as a woman in business, [you'd] better get tougher skin".

These inescapable environments are filled with constant put-downs directed at women, harming their self-worth. Participant 10 expressed how they were one of the only females at their job site and their male coworkers continued to speak about their sexual escapades with women in a derogatory way while she was in earshot. Other male coworkers would put down their wives and relationships without concern for how this contributes to the issues of gender-based violence or the impact it may have on the women who are internalizing the things they are saying. Another participant shared how "[they] had members spit on the floor as they walk[ed] by [her]… threats [uttered]… [and] name-calling [like] "you stupid bitch" (P16).  Participants commented on how employees and workplaces were "okay with the male supervisor being super tough and abrasive, but the opposite is not true… if I (a female) raise my voice to say something, I'd be told, "calm down, you're crazy, that's not acceptable behaviour" (P15). It became evident throughout the interviews that harassment and violence were seen as something that employees had essentially accepted at the time of signing their employment contract.

Moreover, when it came to looking at whom employees would report to, the majority of individuals who held significant power were male. The power positions "go more towards men [because] management still believes that when it comes to running the show, a man should be at the helm of the ship because [others] respect a man's authority more" (P25). Not only was it clear

by participants' story's that they felt like they were deprived of opportunities for advancement because of their gender, but the gender stereotypes associated with being female were automatically attributed to every move they made. For example, participants remarked how their coworkers, supervisors, and workplaces, in general, were "okay with the male supervisor being super tough and abrasive… but the opposite is not true… if I (a female) raise my voice to say something, I'd be told, "calm down, you're crazy, that's not acceptable behaviour" (P15). The dismissing of individual feelings demonstrated to these women that they were less essential than their male counterparts, in turn impacting their self-worth. The message these actions shared to participants was one saying, 'because you are a woman, you are too emotional and cannot fulfil the responsibilities of the job to the same degree as a man'.

As identifying factors became intertwined, other characteristics such as race or ability, acted as a catalyst to the gender harassment experienced. A Black female participant commented on how they spoke up concerning an issue at the office which not only was viewed as going against the female stereotype of being passive, but she then sustained the racial stereotype of "the angry Black woman" (P8). Identity factors play a role when trying to speak up against these unwanted acts; "the women are expired, or the racialized worker is immediately assumed to be the guilty one" (P16). When thoughtfully comparing those who are survivors of workplace violence and harassment and those who are the perpetrators, it became crucial to acknowledge the fact that those who held these experiences are then typically forced to report to individuals with similar privileges as their assailant. For example, a female participant who was being sexually harassed by a male co-worker came forward to the Union for support, however, the union was comprised of a number of middle-aged white males (P26).

This practice of having to explain the uninvited actions to those who are part of the problem resulted in a repetitive assertion from participants; the official and unofficial reporting to those who do not understand the intersectional biases faced on top of the harassment at their place of work was additionally traumatic in and of itself. Pouring their hearts out to individuals who could not empathize with their experiences emphasized how intersectional differences are overlooked, ignored, and contribute to how one understands the world. This lack of consideration accentuated the impacts on self-worth as participants repeatedly expressed how their feelings and fears were brushed aside. Additionally, the reactions they received demonstrated how identity plays a role in how harassment affects self-worth, such that "you can't explain to somebody that isn't in your type of scenario… you say, am I at risk of being murdered or not?" (P14). Though reporting to individuals who are unable to fully understand the reality of the fear of violence was traumatic, having to rely on these individuals for safety, support, and justice was stated to invoke even more concern; those who are feared are those who are in charge.

### *Devaluing Through Dismissing Concerns: "They Came Along and Crushed My Soul"*

Almost all participants reported in their interviews that they were sexualized for being a woman, and when approaching their typically middle-aged, white, cisgender, heterosexual male superiors with these comments, they were told how they are being "too difficult". Some participants who conveyed concerns were told by their employer that they would "look into it", which meant leaving the opportunity for justice and change to those who were contributing to the perpetration of harassment. When asked how it felt to be brushed off by these men in power, Participant 16 shared their disbelief and frustration with the situation, "I used to scream at these men and say, you have daughters, you have children, you have wives, you have sisters, you have mothers. I hope someone does this to them so you can understand what you're doing to me…".

Participants described how when they did come forward and talk to a supervisor or file a report with management, they were either ridiculed by the individuals who are supposed to believe and support them, or the offender was so immersed within the company that the situation was brushed aside. This resulted in feelings of betrayal and confirmed to participants that upholding the company's reputation was more valuable than their well-being. Responses such as these were "career-changing" as an individual's "sense of confidence in the quality of leadership had been diminished heavily" (P3). In cases where participants did not report, they shared that their knowledge of the perpetrator being heavily involved with the company was a huge barrier. Participant 26 knew that their "harasser had been [at the company] for [a long time] and was so firmly entrenched" in the workplace that it took a long time to feel able to report the harassment and gaslighting they experienced. Furthermore, Participant 26 shared how they "already had challenges with [their] self-esteem" before the initial incident and the harassment "greatly caused [them] to doubt [them]self", worsening their self-esteem (P26).

Throughout the interviews, the constant wonder of whether their experience was "bad" enough, if they were overreacting, and if it was their fault, was shared amongst participants. This greatly impacted individuals' relationships with themselves. Following the harassment and violence, Participant 9 shared how they "had to do a lot of and continue to do a lot of work to trust [them]self and validat[e] that [what they experienced] was harassment." They were one of many who mentioned how difficult of a journey this has been for them because of how subjective the conceptualization of harassment and violence can be. Feelings of guilt and shame accompanied their experiences and led to them "doing the comparative trauma thing where [they say], this isn't as bad as other forms of harassment, so maybe I'm just being overly sensitive… it's not a big enough deal to report it" (P9). For some, this was a method of coping with what had

happened to them, but nevertheless, these comparative thoughts acted in a way that reassured

them that what they experienced *should* have been worse to be accepted as harassment.

On top of the self-doubt and distrust in oneself, participants who reported the incident(s)

expressed how they lost trust in their organizations based on their failure to rectify the situation.

Many revealed how their employers would promise that something would be done about the

situation and that the perpetrator would be reprimanded, yet these promises were broken. In one

example, the organization promised that the perpetrator would be dealt with, but when the

participant showed up to the meeting to hear the results of the meeting with the assailant, they

were informed that nothing would be done. Participant 14 described how it felt to be told this

news; the "[organization] came along and crushed my soul… I'm trying not to give up, but every

day I want to just give up the fight. It's too hard. I just want to live my life in peace. I don't want

to fight every day. It's too hard fighting every day." The dismissing of concerns impacted

individuals' self-worth in ways that left them feeling "like a shell of a human" (P8).

### *Devaluing of Mental Health: "If I Had a Gun, I'd Probably Have Put a Bullet in my Head"*

Surviving acts of harassment and violence resulted in debilitating mental health impacts

that targeted not only the individual but also their interpersonal relationships and their careers.

These mental health impacts included both official and unofficial diagnoses of Post-Traumatic

Stress Disorder, Depression, and Anxiety. Unfailingly, throughout the interviews conducted,

participants described how harassment forever changed their lives. For some, these changes

involved an increase in substance use, leaving their places of work, losing relationships, lengthy

lawsuits, and the development of poor mental health shown through depression, anxiety, and

post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (P4 & P25). Participants reported weight gain, difficulties

sleeping and getting out of bed, panic attacks, and an overall decreased sense of safety in their

lives (P16 & P26). Many shared how they began going to therapy that continued for years after the harassment, and how they had to take medication to get through their days. These experiences of harassment created such an abundant amount of stress on the individual that it "brought pre-existing challenges to the fore… the harassment compounded health issues, caused stress, and caused anxiety" (P26).

In the case of Participant 25, their PTSD started following an incident of physical violence by a fellow employee in a workplace bathroom. The symptoms they experienced following this incident included feeling "paranoid, over-vigilant, [unable to] sleep for days, [and] having nightmares" (P25). Their mental health depleted and reached such a concerning level that the therapist they were seeing "told [them] that if [they] didn't promise that [they] would take two weeks off of work and phone [their] boss that night and tell him, she would hospitalize [them] that night" (P25). Participants highlighted how worthless and empty they felt during this painful time in their lives and acknowledged how thoughts of suicide felt like their only way out; "I think how am I still alive? How am I still alive? I asked God one day… just kill me... I was mad at him because I woke up the next day… If I had a gun, I'd probably have put a bullet in my head" (P8). Participant 8 continued, sharing that "it's either I'm going to die because of this job or I'm just gonna take what remnants I have of my soul and try to rebuild my life… [the harassment] has forever changed me". Whether an individual experienced one instance of violence to an extreme degree or several instances of harassment that was subtler in nature, its impact on their lives and self-worth was nonetheless incredibly painful.

## Discussion

This study aimed to examine how workplace violence and harassment impact an individual's self-worth and how identity shapes an individual's understanding of violence and

self-worth. This study consisted of 15 open-ended, semi-structured interviews and implemented the use of Thematic Analysis (TA) for analysis, which resulted in the emergence of the meta-theme of devaluing and the five sub-themes that are related to the devaluing of survivors and their self-worth and identity. The participants in this study did not directly state that they had low self-worth, therefore special attention was paid to the language participants used to talk about themselves, what they focused on, and the mentioned repercussions associated with the violence and low self-worth.

Ultimately, this research study revealed the following – as a woman in a white, heterosexual male-dominated workforce, the options become hide your identity (i.e., body and femininity) or accept the consequences that arise from it. As this becomes normalized, it becomes an expectation that you and others should accept this treatment because others have experienced the same thing prior as well. With these shared experiences, individuals compare whether their experience was traumatic enough to be labelled as harassment or violence, despite the mental health impacts that are reported. It is as though trying to go along with the unwanted actions of others is less problematic than trying to change them, despite it destroying one's self-worth, their feelings toward themselves, and how one identifies. Participants who experienced violence and harassment in the workplace expressed how they felt devalued on a number of levels; they were devalued as employees and individuals, as only earning a supplemental wage, and their self-worth and mental health were devalued as well.

When adverse situations occur in an individual's life, they force that individual to begin to search for an explanation as to why that event occurred, often resulting in the re-evaluation of their sense of worth; this results in lower overall self-esteem and has consequences for well-being, such as the development of depression, anxiety, or paranoia (Dodd & Littleton, 2017;

Leite & Kuiper, 2008). One factor that contributes to an individual's perception of self-worth is the beliefs they hold about themselves and what other people think of them, who they need to be, or what they need to do to be seen as a person of worth (Crocker & Knight, 2005). When participants experienced workplace violence, they began to reconceptualize why this event may have happened to them. One reason that many felt was the causal factor of violence, was their way of identifying; for example, many participants felt that it was due to their gender or race. These attacks toward identity felt left individuals to ask, "why did this happen to me?" or "would this have happened to me if I wasn't Black or female?" and also led many to believe that what they had experienced was not severe enough to be considered harassment or violence. The experience of workplace violence impacted self-worth in and of itself, however, the self-doubt and devaluation that resulted likely contributed to the diminished perception of self-worth.

Although workplace harassment occurs against people of all genders, employers' expectations that female workers cannot meet the same standards as their male counterparts reflect the larger issues of institutional power and gender dynamics (Baines & Cunningham, 2011; Wright, 2016). Being female results in an increased vulnerability to obstacles in the workplace that affect career progression and job satisfaction (Basile et al., 2020; Duncan et al., 2019; Sojo et al; 2016). These gender expectations played a key role in participants' descriptions of who was in power positions and who was allowed to make decisions in the workplace. Furthermore, participants expressed how harassment was swept aside and considered to be a normative aspect of working as a woman in a male-dominated field. This provided support that these expectations along with gender stereotypes implicate the belief that female workers will continue to do what is required regardless of working conditions in order to avoid being seen as

inferior, labelled as emotional or dramatic, or accused of causing unnecessary problems (Baines & Cunningham, 2011; Wright, 2016).

There was a common statement made by participants that harassment seemed to be viewed by many of their coworkers and employers as something to be expected as part of the job. Some expressed how when telling their supervisor that they were uncomfortable with sexual comments made by clients, they were informed that the customer is the most important person and that these behaviours must be put up with to keep them happy. Others had to change the way they looked to try to mitigate harassment, as it was explained away as a consequence of how they needed to dress or act in their place of work (Matulewicz, 2015; Shaw et al., 2018; Smith et al., 2018). Most commonly, verbal harassment within the workplace was experienced through comments made directly to an individual or indirectly in their presence. These comments ranged in levels of severity, yet were all degrading in nature toward each woman's abilities, body shape or weight, gender, and sexual orientation (Baines & Cunningham, 2011; Smith et al., 2018).

Victimization and disapproval from coworkers result in actions like the withdrawal of emotions, increased distress, and feelings of detachment toward the things they love in life or their place of work (Park & Crocker, 2008). Although organizations may not see how their lack of support contributes to the issue, feeling as though one is not protected by their work contributes to the development of physical and/or psychological trauma (Sojo et al., 2016; Suggala et al., 2021). This was supported by the way participants conveyed how the failure of their place of employment to provide empathy, support, and safety resulted in self-doubt, feelings of isolation, loss of trust, and feelings of hopelessness.

As employees continued to endure this mental, emotional, and physical breakdown and continue to feel alone in their experience, the likelihood of unfavourable mental health outcomes

to develop rises (Suggala et al., 2021). It is important to consider intersectionality, such that stressors that minority individuals face (i.e., stigma and discrimination) contribute further to the development of mental illness (Katz-Wise & Hyde, 2012). Minority individuals, such as Black women, are increasingly vulnerable to the development of mental health disorders, substance abuse disorders, and suicidal behaviours or attempts following harassment and violence (Katz-Wise & Hyde, 2012; Platt & Scheitle, 2018). Furthermore, as identities intersect, the likelihood to develop severe mental health side effects that meet the criteria for PTSD increases drastically (Shaw et al., 2018).

The experience of racism within the workplace was evident, with participants of a minority race being subjected to racist comments directly or being forced to witness their superiors make racist comments about others. Comments such as these amplify the message to individuals that harassment is being directed at them *because* they are different, in turn, directing the harassment at more than just the person – the aspects that make up their identity. Many participants expressed frustration and sadness over the fact that they likely would have received different treatment or not even been subjected to harassment if they had been part of a dominant group in society. For those with identifying factors that are able to be disguised, participants confessed to hiding them as best as they could to avoid being further harassed.

Researchers Grzanka, Santos, and Moradi, draw attention to the way that researchers in counselling psychology use the term intersectionality (2017). In the field of counselling psychology, the word "intersectionality" is used as a way to view the different factors an individual is comprised of and how these factors may contribute to oppression and privilege (Grzanka, Santos, and Moradi, 2017). The authors point out how using the language of intersectionality is not rooted in the original development of the term because psychology

researchers are not fulfilling the social justice role that it was developed to promote. Moreover, a divide has been made between "weak" approaches and "strong" approaches to intersectionality. Upon reflection, this research project would likely be considered a weak approach as there was a failure to critique the connection within structural forms of oppression. A weak approach does, however, use the language associated with intersectionality to view interactions of social identities. It was hoped that this study would shed light on the everyday experiences of racism, sexism, and a combination of both. Though this was examined, this study lacked tangible ways of addressing these areas past the form of validation and support.

It is suggested that in order to maintain the truth behind intersectionality, we must return to the roots and politics, so that as researchers we investigate and challenge the dominant structures and power in society (Grzanka, Santos, and Moradi, 2017). Throughout this study the term intersectional identity was used almost synonymous with the word intersectionality; this is common in the field of counselling psychology. However, using intersectionality in the same way as intersectional identities can be harmful as it implies each person is on their own and in order to change the outcome, they must change themselves. A bigger emphasis on power dynamics in the workplace should have been done and included in this project. This study could have shifted from looking at the oppression of identity and instead looked at how those in power positions are expected to act a certain way as well or have been trained to act a certain way. Though this project briefly mentioned how different identities impact one's power, the majority of it was focused on the individual and did not highlight the way that those in higher power positions perceive themselves. It was hoped that this project would provide further support that workplace violence is a common, detrimental experience in many workers' lives, however, the

goal was focused on sharing this information and providing proof, rather than determining ways to prevent this from happening over and over again.

When using intersectionality theory to deliberate the findings, it was important to acknowledge how psychology perceptualizes the theory in a way that differs from other disciplines. Psychology uses intersectionality as a term to recognize the intricacy that is individual's identities and as a way of analyzing these social categories as a big picture to connect or explain different outcomes (Moradi & Grzanka, 2017). The focus on intersectional research must stress that neither the issue nor the solution to marginalization is to stop identifying as a particular gender or race, but rather that there are certain social assumptions we make in terms of what gives someone power (Moradi & Grzanka, 2017). Essentially, when using an intersectional approach, we must look past the individual and see how larger structures have contributed, and look to apply our knowledge toward social justice (Moradi & Grzanka, 2017).

**Limitations**

Because this project was conducted in accordance with the researcher's Master's degree, the amount of time and resources that could be dedicated to collecting data was limited. Hundreds of participants from the original Marginalized Workers study had expressed interest in participating in future research, each researcher was only able to complete 5 interviews for a total of 15. Another limitation that stems from the continuation of a previous project is that the researchers were required to conduct interviews in the way that was put forth by the principal investigator. Since the sample size was small, there were numerous participants whose stories were unable to be heard and included in the collection and analysis of data. These participants may have held critical cultural perspectives and intersectionalities that would have contributed richly to the findings of this project. For example, all interviewees identified as females and the

experiences that other genders have of harassment and violence in the workplace are important to hear.

It is crucial that readers seek out additional literature on the subject and for other researchers to conduct similar studies to further assess the connection between workplace harassment, self-worth, and identity. One limitation of this research project is that the only method of data collection involved was through the use of semi-structured interviews and therefore triangulation could not be performed. Triangulation can be used to certify that there is a level of comprehensiveness in the data collected. An additional limitation is that respondent validation was not performed as the research participants did not review the analysis or results of the research. Therefore, participant accounts of the analysis are not included and there is the potential that researcher and participant accounts differ.

**Future Implications**

Workplace violence continues to be prevalent despite efforts made to inform organizations of the harmful outcomes to their employees. This research intended to foster support for the Canadian Labour Congress to bring stronger measures of support and prevention into the work sector within Canada for employees at all levels, and to provide additional evidence to demonstrate the impact and frequency of workplace violence and harassment. It is hoped that organizations will become more cognizant of the consequences resulting from violence and harassment that far outweigh the potential legal costs to the association. For example, stronger measures need to be brought forth to support employees' mental well-being following experiences of violence and harassment to try and mitigate the thoughts of suicide, worthlessness, and hopelessness. This project supported the previous findings by Janoff-Bulman and Frantz (1997), that following traumatic life experiences, survivors must confront the

questions that start to develop within their minds regarding what this means for different aspects of their lives, and what it signifies about them. Moreover, survivors begin to question their value, worth, and how they can make sense of this situation (Janoff-Bulman & Frantz, 1997).

Clinicians that support the working population or work in organizational psychology should be aware of how self-worth is affected by violence in the workplace, as this may underlie and facilitate further surface-level implications (i.e., job loss or loss of relationships). There are numerous consequences of low self-worth for the individual, such as depression, anxiety, fear of safety, or a loss of income due to the inability to re-expose oneself to the place they were harassed. These experiences of violence in the workplace and the low self-worth of employees also result in impacts on the employer, such as lower levels of productivity, motivation, workplace satisfaction, and commitment to the organization (Suggala et al., 2021). This is why it is important to examine the individual impacts of workplace violence and low self-worth. Employers must also be aware that these acts have consequences for their organization too.

Furthermore, there is little literature available that directly ties workplace violence and harassment to self-worth and the consequences it has on the individual. A vast majority of research focuses on self-worth contingencies being placed in areas such as academia or appearance and has mainly looked at college or university students. Another advantage of this research is that it is qualitative and provides direct reports from survivors of workplace violence; therefore has the benefit of offering detailed insights into this issue, can be applied practically, and can uncover patterns that qualitative data may leave out. This project will help to contribute to bridging the gap within the literature and provide a basis for scholars and others in academia to use to further investigate this issue. Self-worth is critical to an individual's well-being and informs oneself of what one believes one deserves, and no individual deserves violence.

**Conclusion**

Harassment and violence within the workplace are prevalent and continue to be overlooked as many individuals feel as though it must be accepted and is simply a result of the hierarchy within the workplace (Sojo et al., 2016). Employees reported a common belief that harassment is part of the job, specifically when intersectionality is considered, and the harassment is initiated by others believing that one does not belong in that environment. Most often throughout the interviews, participants expressed how they felt they had little value and had no choice but to brush off the harassment they experienced if they wished to make it as a woman in a man's place of work. Tolerating these environments has harmful effects on an individual's well-being, lowering their self-worth and resulting in a number of consequences in regard to psychological and physiological health. Many who were interviewed expressed how the harassment followed them everywhere they went, whether it was continuously brought up by co-workers and management, or through reliving the experiences during drawn-out lawsuits (Siuta & Bergman, 2019). Participants vocalized how they were continuously devalued and brought down by their superiors – feeling like they were walking on eggshells, trapped in their job, and forced to withstand the harm. For some, the only option was quitting their jobs to escape these detrimental atmospheres.

The increased threat to one's identity lowered their self-worth and resulted in frustration and hopelessness for participants. Harassment and violence resulted in extreme stress on individuals that caused them to re-evaluate their worth and lowered their self-esteem and confidence when it came to doing the job. The harassing experiences that participants were subjected to by offenders, took their intersecting identities and broke them down into separate factors to attack; thus increasing the overall impact on an individual's self-worth. Participants'

identity was targeted through harassment which felt like an attack on a larger group of individuals based on their being different. Experiences of harassment and violence in the workplace impacted the participants' self-worth, such that it shaped the way they began to see themselves and believe that others saw them, and resulted in consequences to participants' overall well-being (i.e., a decline in mental and physical health). Participants who were exposed to recurring violence shared how this had devastating impacts on their lives, for example causing them to feel "incredibly alone, incredibly frustrated, [and] like a shell of a human" (P8). Furthermore, instances of violence and harassment and the lack of action taken by employers were viewed by participants as a consequence of being part of the groups with which they identified.

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**Appendix A**

**Date:** 10 June 2022

**To:** Barbara MacQuarrie
**Project ID:** 116123
**Study Title:** Harassment and Violence at Work in Canada: Vulnerable Workers Project-Phase Two
**Application Type:** NMREB Amendment Form
**Review Type:** Delegated
**Full Board Reporting Date:** 08/Jul/2022
**Date Approval Issued:** 10/Jun/2022 15:23
**REB Approval Expiry Date:** 07/Aug/2022

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Dear Barbara MacQuarrie,
The Western University Non-Medical Research Ethics Board (NMREB) has reviewed and approved the WREM application form for the amendment, as of the date noted above.
**Documents Approved:**

| Document Name | Document Type | Document Date | Document Version |
|---|---|---|---|
| Recruitment_email-workers-V5 | Recruitment Materials | 17/May/2022 | 5 |
| Letter_of_info&consent-written-interviews-workers-V6 | Written Consent/Assent | 10/Jun/2022 | 6 |
| Verbal Consent-Assent Script-REVISED_V3 | Verbal Consent/Assent | 10/Jun/2022 | 3 |
| Interview_Guide-Workers-V3 | Interview Guide | 10/Jun/2022 | 3 |

REB members involved in the research project do not participate in the review, discussion, or decision.

The Western University NMREB operates in compliance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2), the Ontario
Personal Health Information Protection Act (PHIPA, 2004), and the applicable laws and regulations of Ontario. Members of the NMREB who are named as Investigators in research studies do not participate in discussions related to, nor vote on such studies when they are presented to the REB. The NMREB is registered with the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services under the IRB registration number IRB 00000941.

Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions.

Sincerely,
Ms. Katelyn Harris, Ms. Zoë Levi, Research Ethics Officer on behalf of Dr. Randal Graham, NMREB Chair

*Note: This correspondence includes an electronic signature (validation and approval via an online system that is compliant with all regulations).*

**Appendix B**

## Email Script for Recruitment

**Subject Line: Invitation to participate in research**

Hello,

We have received your email (from a survey you completed) indicating interest in participating in a study being conducted by the Centre for Research & Education on Violence Against Women & Children, Western University, and the University of Toronto.  The aim of this study is to improve workplace practices (e.g., policies, procedures, and training programs) to prevent and respond to harassment at work and to support those affected.  Your responses will provide important information to help us assess how well workplaces are meeting the needs of workers.

**Anyone 18 years of age or older who has experienced harassment at work may participate in this study.** If you agree, you will be invited to participate in an interview for the duration of approximately one hour (via telephone or virtually (online) using an online platform).

Please answer the following questions so that we can schedule your interview:

1. When are the best days and times to conduct the interview?
2. We are using Zoom to conduct interviews online. Are you comfortable using Zoom for the interview?
3. Please indicate the province/territory in which you live (so that we can consider the time zone when scheduling the interview):

If you would like more information on this study or would like to receive a letter of information about this study, please contact the researcher at the contact information given below.

Thank you,

Chelsea Reid
Centre for Research & Education on Violence Against Women & Children
Western University

**Appendix C**

## Letter of Information and Consent – Worker Interview

*Study Title:* Harassment and Violence at Work in Canada
*Principal Investigator:* Barb MacQuarrie, Centre for Research & Education on Violence Against Women & Children, Western University

## Introduction

Thank you for your interest in participating in this research study that will examine the types of actions taken by workers who have experienced harassment at work and the related workplace responses, supports, and preventative measures and their effectiveness. You are being asked to participate because you are a member of one of the organizations collaborating in this study or you have previously completed our online survey and have indicated an interest in participating in further research.

This study is a collaboration between the Centre for Research & Education on Violence Against Women & Children (CREVAWC), Western University, and the University of Toronto.

## Why this study is being done

Harassment occurs across all occupations and industries. It can have negative short- and long-term impacts on employees who directly experience harassment and who observe their coworkers experiencing harassment. The aim of this study is to improve workplace practices (e.g., policies, procedures, and training programs) to prevent and respond to harassment at work and to support those affected. Your responses will provide important information to help us assess how well workplaces are meeting the needs of workers and learn more about the impacts of harassment.

## Confidentiality

All information collected during this study will be kept confidential and only authorized members of the research team will have access to it. Anyone outside of the research team (i.e. translator and transcriptionist) will have signed a confidentiality agreement. The data will be stored at Western University on encrypted and password protected computers/servers and any hardcopy material will be stored in a locked cabinet in a locked and secure area at the University. Unless you choose to tell them, no one, including your employer, supervisor, union representatives or coworkers will know whether you have participated in this study. Your name, email address and/or telephone number will be collected only for the purposes of contacting you in relation to this study. You will not be named in any reports, publications, theses, or presentations that may result from this study. The interview transcriptions will not contain actual names or any identifying information. An ID Number and pseudonym will be used in place of original names and all other identifying information will be removed or substituted. A list of ID numbers, pseudonyms, and names will be maintained and securely stored separate from all other data. All data will be destroyed after 7 years. A translator may be present during this interview, if you have indicated one will be with you when scheduling the interview. Delegated institutional representatives of Western University and its Non-Medical Research Ethics Board may require

access to your study-related records to monitor the conduct of the research in accordance with regulatory requirements.

## If you agree to participate

**Anyone 18 years of age or older who has experienced harassment at work may participate in this study.**

If you agree, you will be asked to participate in an interview for the duration of approximately one hour.

Interviews will be conducted via telephone or virtually (online) using an online platform with available security options (e.g. password for entry). It is possible that information could be intercepted by unauthorized people (hacked). This risk cannot be completely eliminated. Interviews will be audio-recorded, if you permit, and will be transcribed in their entirety by a professional transcriptionist who will sign a confidentiality agreement. Recordings will be transferred via Western's corporate online secure file sharing platform, Microsoft Office OneDrive. If you prefer not to have the interview audio-recorded, written notes will be recorded instead.

If required, you have the option to request a translator be present during the interview. We use the free services of Across Languages. Their translators are qualified and certified.

## Potential Risks and Benefits

By participating in this study, you may learn some new information about harassment as a workplace and societal issue. It may help you understand your experiences and the possible actions that workplaces can take to provide appropriate responses and supports to workers affected by harassment. It is possible that there are no direct benefits to you from participating in this research, but information gathered may provide benefits to society as a whole which include, an increased understanding of workplace and government practices to address harassment, ways to improve these practices, and how they shape the experiences of workers affected by harassment.

If you are currently or have in the past been impacted by harassment, you may find it distressing to respond to some questions. Attached to this letter is a list of resources by province so that if you feel distressed you can speak to someone for support or obtain information about local supportive services. You may also have a support person present during the interview (e.g., friend, relative, advocate).

## Voluntary Participation

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate, refuse to answer any questions, or withdraw from the study at any time, even once the interview is complete, with no negative consequences. Please note: once the study has been published, we will not be able to withdraw your information.

## Questions

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant or the conduct of this study, you may contact The Office of Human Research Ethics (519) 661-3036, 1-844-720-9816, email: ethics@uwo.ca. This office oversees the ethical conduct of research studies and is not part of the study team. Everything that you discuss will be kept confidential. If you have any questions about this study, please contact Barb MacQuarrie.

*Study Title:* Harassment and Violence at Work in Canada
*Principal Investigator:* Barb MacQuarrie, Centre for Research & Education on Violence Against Women & Children, Western University

## Consent

You do not waive any legal right by consenting to this study.

This study has been explained to me and any questions I had have been answered. I know that I may leave the study at any time. I agree to take part in this study.

_____     _____     _____
Print Study Participant's Name            Signature                              Date

(You will be given a signed copy of this consent form.)

Do you agree to the audio-recording of this interview?  ☐ Yes   ☐ No

Direct quotes from this interview may be used in research reports. However, only pseudonyms will be used to accompany quotes.  No information that identifies you will be used. Do you agree to the use of the quotes?   ☐ Yes   ☐ No

The person below acted as a translator for the participant during the consent process and attests that the study as set out in this form was accurately translated and has had any questions answered.

_____    _____    _____    _____
Print Name of Translator        Signature                    Language                    Date


My signature means that I have explained the study to the participant named above.  I have answered all questions.

_____     _____     _____
Print Name of Person Obtaining        Signature                              Date
Consent

This letter is yours to keep for future reference.

**Appendix D**

## Western

### Workplace Harassment and Violence Resources /
### Ressources de soutien relativement au harcèlement et à la violence au travail

If you, or anyone you know, need support or information on sexual harassment and violence, below is a list of Canadian resources organized by province/territory.

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Si vous, ou quelqu'un que vous connaissez, avez besoins d'aide ou d'informations en rapport avec la violence et le harcèlement sexuel, n'hésitez pas à vous servir de la liste d'organismes canadiens et de ressources de soutien ci-dessous. Notez que les ressources bilingues ou francophones sont marquées d'un astérisque.

**\*Alberta : Association des juristes d'expression française de l'Alberta – ajefa.ca**
La mission de l'AJEFA est de faciliter l'accès au public aux services juridiques en français et de promouvoir l'utilisation de la langue française dans l'administration de la justice en Alberta.

**Alberta: One Line for Sexual Violence – 1-866-403-8000**
Offers talk, text and chat to people in all areas of Alberta who have been impacted by sexual violence.
*(Seulement disponible en anglais)*

**Alberta: Workers Resource Centre:  1 (844) 435-7972 / 1 (403) 264-8100 / www.helpwrc.org**
The Case Work program provides individual assistance to workers who live or work in the Alberta area and need help with Employment Standards complaints, Employment Insurance claims and appeals, Workers' Compensation claims (we do not do WCB appeals), employment-related complaints under the Alberta Human Rights Act, and claims for employer short/long term disability and Canada Pension Plan disability benefits.
*(Seulement disponible en anglais)*

**Alberta: Sexual Assault Services in Alberta - https://aasas.ca/get-help/**
*(Seulement disponible en anglais)*

**\*Colombie-Britannique : Inform'Elles –  http://www.informelles.ca/**
Depuis 1998, l'équipe d'Inform'Elles travaille auprès des femmes francophones en situation de violence en Colombie-Britannique. Notre mission est de favoriser l'accès à des services d'information, de sensibilisation et de soutien aux femmes et aux jeunes filles francophones en Colombie-Britannique en situation de violence.

**\*British Columbia/Colombie-Britannique: WorksafeBC – https://www.worksafebc.com/**
We are committed to creating a province free from workplace injury or illness, and to providing service driven by our core values of integrity, accountability, and innovation. By partnering with workers and employers, we help British Columbians come home from work safe every day.
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Si vous avez été accidenté.e au travail et si vous voulez faire une demande d'indemnités à WorkSafeBC, communiquez avec son Centre de télé-réclamations (en anglais) où des représentants

de WorkSafeBC qui parlent français pourront vous aider à remplir un rapport de blessures et à comprendre le processus de réclamation.

**British Columbia: VictimLinkBC – 1-800-563-0808**
a toll-free, confidential, multilingual telephone service available across B.C. and the Yukon 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. It provides information and referral services to all victims of crime and immediate crisis support to victims of family and sexual violence, including victims of human trafficking exploited for labour or sexual services.
*(Seulement disponible en anglais)*

**British Columbia: Access Pro Bono's (APB) Employment Standards Program – 1.877.762.6664 / http://accessprobono.ca/**
Provides free legal representation by volunteer lawyers and law students to low income employees or former employees appearing before the Employment Standards Branch and the Employment Standards Tribunal (e.g. vacation pay, termination pay, overtime, statutory holiday pay, etc.) Standards Program accepts clients from across the province. Legal representation is contingent on eligibility for Access Pro Bono's services, a merit assessment of the case, and volunteers' availability.
*(Seulement disponible en anglais)*

**British Columbia: TAPS Employment Standards Legal Advocacy Project - 250.361.3521 / www.tapsbc.ca/**
Provides free face-to-face advocacy representation services for non-unionised employees. TAPS Advocates are available to assist employees in resolving disputes with their employers under the BC Employment Standards Act.
*(Seulement disponible en anglais)*

**British Columbia: Society for Male Survivors of Sexual Abuse – (604) 682-6482 / http:// bc-malesurvivors.com/home/**
A non-profit society, established to provide therapeutic services for males who have been sexually abused at some time in their lives.
*(Seulement disponible en anglais)*

**Manitoba: The Workers' Organizing Resource Centre – (204) 947-2220 / www.worc.ca/intro.asp**
The mandate is to help establish, maintain and facilitate community organizations that represent and enforce people's rights within our community and to advocate on behalf of workers who do not have access to a union for protection of their rights in the workplace and beyond.
*(Seulement disponible en anglais)*

**Manitoba: Sexual Assault Crisis Line – 1-888-292-7565**
A 24-hour phone line that provides information and crisis intervention to sexual assault victims and those close to them.
*(Seulement disponible en anglais)*

**\*Manitoba: Justice Victim Services – 1-866-484-2846 / www.gov.mb.ca/justice/crown/victims/index.html**
In general, Victim Services helps people access their rights, understand their responsibilities and

connects them to other services or agencies. Services are provided free of charge and are available in person, by phone, fax or Internet.

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En général, le personnel des Services aux victimes aide celles-ci à faire valoir leurs droits et à comprendre leurs responsabilités et les met en contact avec d'autres organismes et services. Les services sont offerts gratuitement en personne, par téléphone, par télécopieur et sur Internet.

**\*Manitoba : La ligne provinciale d'information et d'aide confidentielle en cas de crise de violence familiale – 1-877-977-0007**
Appelez sans frais, 24 heures par jour, la ligne provinciale d'information et d'aide confidentielle en cas de crise de violence familiale

**\*Manitoba : Chez Rachel – 204-925-2550 / chezrachel.ca**
Chez Rachel fournit des services accessibles et sécuritaires, du counselling et du soutien pratique. Nous aidons les femmes à retrouver une vie normale et un avenir meilleur. Nous avons des programmes variés pour les femmes et leurs enfants qui leur permettront de développer de meilleures aptitudes, d'avoir confiance en elles-mêmes et de vivre de façon indépendante.

**\*New Brunswick/Nouveau Brunswick: Chimo Helpline / Ligne d'écoute Chimo – 1-800-667-5005**
A provincial crisis phone line, accessible 24 hours a day, 365 days a year to all residents of New Brunswick. Provides a listening ear, helpful information, crisis intervention and referrals to resources in the province of N.B.

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Chimo est une ligne d'écoute provinciale ouverte à tous les résidents du Nouveau-Brunswick et accessible 24 heures par jour. Nous offrons une écoute active et des renseignements pertinents.

**\*New Brunswick/Nouveau Brunswick: Sexual Assault Support Line / Ligne d'écoute en matière d'agression sexuelle – 506-454-0437**
A 24-hour confidential sexual assault support line for anyone affected by sexual violence, or anyone supporting someone affected by sexual violence. The support line is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and 365 days a year. Our mission is to serve our community by providing a competent level of crisis intervention, referrals and vital information in a caring, confidential manner.

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Si vous avez été victime de violence sexuelle, vous pouvez recevoir de l'aide. Lorsque vous serez prête, VSNB vous propose des services et des programmes offrant un soutien, de l'information et des options.

**Newfoundland: Newfoundland & Labrador 24 Hour Support and Information Line - 1-800-726-2743**
A 24-Hour Support and Information Line where callers can reach an empathetic, non-judgmental volunteer.
*(Seulement disponible en anglais)*

**Newfoundland: NL Sexual Assault Crisis & Prevention Centre -  www.endsexualviolence.com**
A non-profit, community-based, charitable organization that exists to support individuals of all genders who have been impacted by sexual violence.
*(Seulement disponible en anglais)*

**Nova Scotia: The Sexual Assault and Harassment Phone Line – 1-902-425-1066**Non-judgmental, active listening and support to anyone who has experienced or has been affected by sexualized violence. Calls are taken from 12pm - 12am, 7 days a week. There are only 2 phone line operators taking calls and they may be helping another person when you call. If you are unable to get through, please try again later. The phone line is operated by Dalhousie Student Union.
*(Seulement disponible en anglais)*

**Nova Scotia: NS Mi'kmaq Crisis and Referral Line – 1-855- 379-2099**
The Nova Scotia Mi'kmaq Crisis and Referral phone line is available 24/7 toll free to Mi'kmaq people across the province. The Centre also provides online support through the Eskasoni Crisis Worker Facebook account. Both are a service of Eskasoni Mental Health.
*(Seulement disponible en anglais)*

**Nova Scotia: Halifax Workers Action Centre – (902) 221-0755 / www.halifaxworkersaction.ca**
Provides help to workers with labour standards issues, unpaid wages, terminations, workplace discrimination, and more. We provide free, one-on-one assistance at our employment law information clinics.
*(Seulement disponible en anglais)*

**Nova Scotia: Sexual Assault Centres – www.novascotia.ca/coms/svs/sexual-assault-centres**
*(Seulement disponible en anglais)*

**\*Nova Scotia/ Nouvelle-Écosse: Legal Advice for Sexual Assault Survivors Program / Consultation juridique pour les personnes qui ont subi une agression sexuelle**
Call 211 to register. You do not need to provide details about what happened. You only have to say that you were sexually assaulted in Nova Scotia, and that you would like to speak with a lawyer.
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Composez le 211 au téléphone pour vous inscrire. Il n'est pas nécessaire de donner des détails sur ce qui s'est passé. Il suffit de dire que vous avez subi une agression sexuelle en Nouvelle-Écosse et que vous voulez parler à un avocat.

**\*Nova Scotia/Nouvelle-Écosse: Nova Scotia Sexual Violence – breakthesilencens.ca**

**\*Northwest Territories/Territoires du Nord-Ouest: NWT Help Line / La Ligne d'aide des TNO – 1-800-661-0844**
Offers free support to residents of the Northwest Territories, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. It is 100% free and confidential. The NWT Help Line also has an option for follow-up calls.
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La Ligne d'aide des T.N.-O. offre du soutien aux résidents des Territoires du Nord-Ouest en tout temps. Il s'agit d'un service entièrement gratuit et confidentiel. Nous pouvons également offrir du suivi par téléphone.

**\*Nunavut: Nunavut Kamatsiagtut Helpline – Toll Free (867) 979-3333**
For all people who need someone to talk to about their troubles, concerns, and anything that bothers you. trained volunteers are on the phone 24 hours every day of the week. Volunteers come from

many walks of life and are always available with an open mind and listening ear for those who need someone to talk to about issues that matter to you. All of our volunteers speak English and many speak Inuktitut and French.

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Bien que le site Web de cet organisme ne soit disponible qu'en anglais, il indique que plusieurs de leurs bénévoles parlent français et Inuktitut.


**Ontario: Workers' Action Centre – 1-855-531-0778 / www.workersactioncentre.org/resources/**
Our organization and members are committed to improving the lives and working conditions of people in low-wage and unstable jobs. We want to make sure that all of us have a voice at work and are treated with dignity and fairness. On this page you will find materials on your rights at work. You can phone us if you need advice about a workplace problem you are facing, and request to speak to someone in your language.
*(Seulement disponible en anglais)*


**Ontario: Assaulted Women's Helpline – 1-866-863-0511 / Toll-Free TTY 1.866.863.7868 / #SAFE (#7233) on your Bell, Rogers, Fido or Telus mobile phone**
Offers a 24-hour telephone and TTY crisis line to all woman who have experienced abuse. We provide counselling, emotional support, information and referrals.
*(Seulement disponible en anglais)*


**Ontario: Ontario Coalition of Rape Crisis Centres – www.sexualassaultsupport.ca/support**
Sexual assault centres provide free counselling and information about sexual violence. Get contact information for a centre near you.
*(Seulement disponible en anglais)*


**\*Ontario: Ontario Network of Sexual Assault Domestic Violence Care and Treatment Centres / Réseau ontarien des centres de traitement ou de soins en cas d'agression sexuelle ou de violence familiale – www.sacc.to/gylb/satc/SATCcentres.htm**
Specialized teams of doctors, nurses and counsellors provide emergency medical treatment and emotional support to youth (over the age of 12), women, and men who have experienced a recent sexual assault (within two years).  Services are confidential and free of charge.  Able to take care of victims who have physical disabilities.  Will arrange for interpreters to help understand individuals who have difficulty with the English language. On call 24 hours a day.

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Le ministère de la Santé de l'Ontario finance 34 centres de traitement et de soins en cas d'agression sexuelle et de violence familiale basés dans des hôpitaux.  Une équipe d'infirmières et de médecins est disponible sur demande 24 heures par jour, 7 jours par semaine par le biais du service des urgences, de telle sorte que les victimes d'agressions sexuelles peuvent recevoir des soins médicaux et psychologiques spécialisés.


**\*Ontario : FEM'AIDE – 1.877.336.2433 / 1.866.860.7082 (ATS)**
Fem'aide offre aux femmes d'expression française aux prises avec la violence sexiste, du soutien, des renseignements et de l'aiguillage vers les services appropriés dans leur collectivité 24 heures par jour.

**\*Ontario : Action ontarienne contre la violence faite aux femmes (AOcVF) – https://aocvf.ca/**
AOcVF a pour mandat de travailler à la prévention de la violence, à la formation continue des intervenantes et des directions, au démarchage en vue de mettre en place de services en français, à l'analyse des enjeux et à la réalisation de matériel éducatif et de sensibilisation en français, selon une analyse féministe de la situation sociale et communautaire.

**Ontario: Sexual Harassment and Assault Resource Exchange (SHARE) – 1-866-625-5179 or 416-597-4900 / TTY: 416-597-4903 or 1-866-612-8627 / https://www.hrlsc.on.ca/share/welcome**
The Sexual Harassment and Assault Resource Exchange (SHARE) is a service that supports all workers who have experienced sexual harassment or assault at work. We provide free, confidential legal information to workers about all their available options to address their experience.  Sexual Harassment and Assault Resource Exchange's (SHARE) goal is to support diverse groups of workers who are exposed to sexual harassment and assault by providing them with legal information to make informed decision about which steps, if any, they would like to take. SHARE is a project of the Human Rights Legal Support Centre and is funded by the Department of Justice Canada.
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Le programme Échange de ressources pour le Harcèlement et l'Agression Sexuelle (ÉRHAS) offre des services de soutien à tous les travailleurs qui ont subi du harcèlement sexuel ou des agressions sexuelles en milieu de travail.  Nous offrons des renseignements juridiques gratuits et confidentiels aux travailleurs sur les options qui s'offrent à eux pour faire face à leurs expériences. L'objectif du programme ÉRHAS est de soutenir les groupes diversifiés de travailleurs exposés au harcèlement ou aux agressions sexuelles en leur fournissant des renseignements juridiques leur permettant de prendre des décisions éclairées sur les démarches qu'ils pourraient vouloir entreprendre, le cas échéant. ÉRHAS est un projet du Centre d'assistance juridique en matière de droits de la personne. Il est financé par le ministère de la Justice du Canada.

**\*Prince Edward Island/L'Île-du-Prince-Édouard: The Island Helpline / Ligne d'écoute de l'Î.-P.-É. – 1-800-218-2885**
When you call the Island Helpline, you can expect a kind and caring staff person to answer who is trained in crisis intervention. Staff provide emotional support, problem solving and crisis intervention services 24/7. Staff can also help by offering information about community resources and supports near you.
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La Ligne d'écoute de l'Î.-P.-É. est un service gratuit et confidentiel qui offre un soutien affectif et des interventions en cas de crise aux Insulaires de tout âge. Bien formés et bienveillants, nos bénévoles et nos employés peuvent recevoir vos appels 24 heures par jour.

**Prince Edward Island: The PEI Rape and Sexual Assault Centre – 1-866-566-1864 / http://peirsac.org/index.php**
The mission of the PEI Rape and Sexual Assault Centre is to support survivors of sexual assault and abuse in their healing and to ensure that all people living in PEI are safe from sexual violence.
Does not provide support or crisis intervention outside of regular work hours.
*(Seulement disponible en anglais)*

**Prince Edward Island/L'Île-du-Prince-Édouard: Victim Services - Queens and Kings County / Services aux victimes des comptés Queens et Kings – (902) 368-4582**

**Prince Edward Island/L'Île-du-Prince-Édouard: Victim Services - Prince County / Services aux victimes du compté Prince – (902) 888-8218**
Victim Services assists victims of crime throughout their involvement in the criminal justice system. Assistance is available to victims of crime anywhere on Prince Edward Island. If you live off-Island and are victimized by a crime that occurred on PEI, you are also eligible for services.
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Aucune description des services aux victimes n'est disponible en français sur le site Web de cet organisme. Cependant, certaines pages du site sont traduites en français et des services en français sont peut-être disponibles.

**\*Québec : Le Groupe d'aide et d'information sur le harcèlement sexuel au travail de la province de Québec inc. / The Help and Information Center on Sexual Harassment in the Workplace – (514) 526-0789 / https://www.gaihst.qc.ca/**
Le Groupe d'aide et d'information sur le harcèlement sexuel au travail de la province de Québec inc. (G.A.I.H.S.T.) est un organisme communautaire établi en 1980 et qui vient en aide aux personnes ayant subi du harcèlement sexuel et/ou psychologique dans leur milieu de travail.
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A non-profit community center established in 1980 that has been helping individuals who have been subjected to sexual and/or psychological harassment at work.

**\*Québec : Tel-Aide – (514) 935-1101 / www.telaide.org**
Offers a free listening service, in English and in French, which is anonymous, confidential and 24/7. Our service is accessible to everyone who suffers from loneliness or stress, who are emotionally distressed or angry, or who simply need to confide in someone who will listen without judgement.
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Centre d'écoute téléphonique fondé en 1971 et le plus important au Québec, Tel-Aide a pour mission d'offrir un service d'écoute en français et en anglais, gratuit, anonyme et confidentiel 24 heures par jour. Ce service est accessible à toute personne qui souffre de solitude, de stress, qui est en détresse psychologique ou en colère, ou qui a simplement besoin de se confier à quelqu'un qui les écoutera sans les juger.

**\*Québec : Le Centre de Travailleurs et Travailleuse Immigrant-e-s / The Immigrant Workers Centre – (514) 342-2111 / https://iwc-cti.ca/**
Le Centre de Travailleurs et Travailleuse Immigrant-e-s défend les droits des immigrant-e-s dans leurs lieux de travail et se bat pour la dignité, le respect et la justice
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Defends the rights of immigrants in their places of work and fights for dignity, respect, and justice.

**\*Québec : Centres locaux des services communautaires (CLSC) / Local Community Service Centres (CLSCs) – https://santemontreal.qc.ca/population/ressources/clsc/**
Les CLSC offrent des services de santé et des services sociaux dans leurs installations, mais aussi à l'école, au travail et à domicile.
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Offer basic front-line health and social services. They also have the mandate to provide the population within the territory they serve with preventive or curative health and social services and rehabilitation and reintegration services.

**Saskatchewan: Sexual Assault Services of Saskatchewan – 306.757.1941 / www.sassk.ca**
A provincial non-profit organization that works collectively with front-line agencies, community partners, and governments that provide support and advocacy for those affected by sexual violence in Saskatchewan.
*(Seulement disponible en anglais)*

**Saskatchewan: Victim Services  –  www.saskatchewan.ca/residents/justice-crime-and-the-law/victims-of-crime-and-abuse/help-from-victim-service-units-and-agencies**
The Victim Services programs work closely with police and assist victims in the immediate aftermath of a crime or tragedy and throughout the criminal justice process. Services offered, provided by staff and volunteers, include crisis intervention, information, support, referrals to other specialized programs and services.
*(Seulement disponible en anglais)*

**Saskatchewan: Emergency/Crisis Hotlines –**
**www.sk.211.ca/saskatchewan_247_hour_crisis_hotlines#**
*(Seulement disponible en anglais)*

**Yukon: VictimLinkBC – 1-800-563-0808**
A toll-free, confidential, multilingual telephone service available across B.C. and the Yukon 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. It provides information and referral services to all victims of crime and immediate crisis support to victims of family and sexual violence, including victims of human trafficking exploited for labour or sexual services.
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Bien que le site Web ne soit disponible qu'en anglais et qu'il ne précise pas si des services en français existent, le service téléphonique serait offert en plusieurs langues.

**\* Yukon: Women's Directoriate / Direction de la condition féminine –**
**https://yukon.ca/en/womens-directorate**
We're responsible for ensuring that gender considerations are integrated into government policy-making, legislation and program development. We offer a range of public education materials on gender equality, health and violence prevention. We also provide funding support to groups and initiatives that enhance gender equality and security. We work closely with a network of gender equality seeking groups and non-government organizations and agencies throughout Yukon for ensuring that equality concerns are brought forward.
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Notre mandat : veiller à ce que la problématique hommes-femmes fasse partie intégrante du processus d'élaboration des politiques, lois et programmes du gouvernement. Pour ce faire, nous proposons un éventail de ressources éducatives sur l'égalité et la santé des femmes et sur la prévention de la violence envers les femmes; offrons du soutien financier aux groupes et aux initiatives qui favorisent l'égalité et la sécurité des femmes et collaborons étroitement avec un réseau de groupes de femmes et d'organismes non gouvernementaux de partout au Yukon pour faire avancer la cause des femmes.

**Appendix E**

**Subject line: Scheduling interview**

Hello [**Name**],

Thank you for your continued interest in participating in an interview for this study.

Your interview has been scheduled for [**Date/Time – e.g. Wednesday, December 2, at 2:00 pm EST**]. Please confirm (by replying to this email) your availability to attend the interview or if you would like an alternative date/time. *A zoom link and telephone numbers (if you prefer to call in) will be sent prior to our interview.*

Please find attached a Letter of Information and Consent containing information about the study. Please complete the last page of the letter and return a copy to us. Alternatively, please answer the following questions (by reply to this email):

This study has been explained to me and any questions I had have been answered. I know that I may leave the study at any time. I agree to take part in this study. (Yes/No):

Do you agree to the audio recording of this interview? (Yes/No):

Direct quotes from this interview may be used in research reports. However, only pseudonyms will be used to accompany quotes.  No information that identifies you will be used. Do you agree to the use of the quotes? (Yes/No):

We will review the letter together and you will have the opportunity to ask questions before the interview begins. You have the option to have a support person present during the interview (e.g., a friend, relative, advocate). Anyone present **must be 18 years of age** or over and will be required to sign a confidentiality agreement.

Thank you for your participation and I look forward to our conversation.

Sincerely,

Chelsea Reid
Centre for Research & Education on Violence Against Women & Children
Western University

**Appendix F**

# Interview Guide: Workers

This interview guide is intended to prompt discussions with workers regarding their experiences of harassment, their knowledge, and impressions of resources available, and supports that are available to those who experience harassment in the workplace, as well as the barriers workers may face when reporting. To gather detailed, contextually specific information from a diverse array of workers across Canada, interviews will be semi-structured using qualitative questions that are broad and open-ended.  Follow-up questions will be adapted as needed.

Note for Interviewer:  Watch for any signs of distress. Stop occasionally to check in with participants – are they ok, would they like to continue, etc. Remind them that "we can stop anytime".

Confirm that the participant is over 18 years of age and has experienced harassment at work.

Introductory Questions:
- Please tell me about your workplace, industry/sector, and the work that you do.
    - What is your current job title? In what industry do you hold this position?
  - Follow-up: How long have you been in your current position? In your profession?
  - Employment status?
  - Follow-up: How is your workplace organized? For example, small, large, separate departments, work in groups/independently, is there an HR department, the organizational hierarchy (team lead, supervisor, etc.).
- How would you describe your work environment?
  - Follow-up: What is the gender balance of your workplace? Mostly men, and women, evenly distributed?
  - Follow-up: What is the gender of your immediate supervisor?
  - Follow-up: Do you consider your workplace to be diverse?

Experiences of Harassment:
Ask participants to describe their experience of harassment. Pay particular attention to the context within the workplace of the experience– e.g. how participants describe their experiences, whether they use specific words/terms repeatedly, how they label their experience(s), where the harassment took place (at the office, at a workplace event, online), duration of harassment, who was involved (position within the workplace of the harasser, where coworkers present, etc.).  Be attentive to not label a participant's experience for them.
- For you, what is harassment (sexual, psychological, discriminatory)?

COVID-19:
- Has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted your experiences of harassment in any way??  If so, how? (Listen for ways in which the harassment has escalated/intensified, whether behaviours are manifesting themselves more overtly online, examples of online harassing behaviours, whether there has been pressure to meet in person notwithstanding COVID restrictions, etc.)

Impact of Workplace Harassment:
- What were the consequences for you of experiencing harassment (health, isolation, job loss, etc.)?
- Have these experiences had an impact on your confidence, sense of self, feelings of self-worth, or other aspects of how you view yourself? If so, how?
- Have these experiences impacted how you view yourself as a worker? Your relationship with your employer or workplace? If so, how?
- How have these experiences impacted your relationships with those around you? How would you describe these changes?
    - Personal relationships, e.g., with family, friends, or children? For example, has your experience of trust with those relationships changed?
    - Work relationships, e.g., with co-workers or management?

Reporting & Retaliation
- Did you report your experience of harassment at your current or previous workplace? If so, how would characterize that experience? Who did you tell/report to? Was it a formal or informal report?
    - Follow-up: What made you decide to report (or not)?
    - Follow-up: Were the outcomes positive or negative for you? Why/why not?
    - Follow-up: What happened to the person who harassed you?
    - Was an investigation conducted? If so, were you informed of the outcomes? How long did the investigation take?
    - Follow-up: Do you think this process for reporting is effective? Please describe why/why not.
    - Follow-up: Are there changes you would like to see to the reporting procedures? If so, please describe.
- Have you or a coworker experienced retaliation for reporting or otherwise objecting to being harassed at work? If so, please describe.
    - Follow-up: Does retaliation differ based on whether it occurs before reporting or after?
    - Follow-up: What about retaliation more broadly, for example, forms of retaliation (such as increased harassment) that might occur as a result of a worker rejecting someone's initial sexual advances?

Effective Supports and Areas for Improvement
- Was there anyone you shared your experiences with and, if so, how would you describe their response and the support you received, if any?
    - Did their response(s) meet your expectations? Why or why not?
    - Did their response change over time?
    - Based on these responses, how did you cope with your experiences? (For example, going to private therapy, exercising, withdrawal, etc.)
- Thinking about the current supports at your workplace available to workers who experience harassment, what do you think is effective?
- What are the changes and/or improvements that you would like to see? This could include ways to improve existing supports and resources or thinking of new ones.
- Thinking about your work environment, what kinds of things might prevent or encourage harassment?

- o Follow-up: Are there changes you would like to see in your workplace? If so, please describe.

Workplace Practices Related to Preventing and Responding to Harassment and Supporting Workers:

Resources and Supports
- What kind of measures helped (or would have helped you) to get through your situation?
- What resources or supports are available in your workplace for those who experience harassment at work?
  - o Follow-up: Are these internal or external to your workplace? Both?
  - o Follow-up: What are your thoughts on these resources/supports? Are they effective?
  - o Follow-up: What would you change about them?
- Are there resources or supports outside of your workplace that you have found helpful? If so, please describe them.
  - o Follow-up: What prompted you to connect with them?
  - o Follow-up: Do you feel these external resources would be able to provide support for workers that have experienced harassment at work?
- Does your workplace have a policy on harassment?
  - o Follow-up: Was it readily available or you?/Easy to access?
  - o Follow-up: Did it contain information that was useful/helpful (e.g., reporting procedures, investigations procedures, deadlines for filing, etc.)?
- Did you take legal steps or speak to a lawyer about your experience(s)? Why? What were your expectations?

Barriers/Challenges
- What kinds of challenges or barriers might people at your workplace that are experiencing harassment face?
  - o Follow-up: Thinking about sexual harassment, do the barriers/challenges change? Are there additional ones?
  - o Follow-up: Are there issues specific to workers' social and/or employment status? For example, issues related to gender, race, length and type of employment, language, sexual orientation, etc.
- What do you think could be done to change this/protect workers?

Training
- What kinds of training or information (if any) have you received related to harassment at work?
  - o Follow-up: What did you think about them?

Closing:
- What areas do you think we should pay more attention to regarding harassment at work?
- What kinds of outcomes do you hope to see from our research?
- Do you have any additional comments or things that are important for us to know that we have not touched on already?

Reminder to the researcher: Check in with the participant before concluding the interview. Remind them of the resource list provided to them before the interview/via email.

*Thank you very much for your time!*

**Appendix G**

**Starting interview**

Hi, I'm Chelsea and I'm a member of the research team at the center for research and education on violence against women and children. I just wanted to start by saying thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. A crucial part of this research is interviews because we need to hear your voices. You can have your camera on or off whatever you feel most comfortable with.

Did you have a chance to look at the letter of information and consent form?
- If they haven't read LOI and consent → read it with them or offer them a few minutes to read it now
- Do you have any questions about any of the information in there?

Are you okay with being recorded? We will only be keeping the audio version.
- **If they say no** to being recorded → say no problem, I will just take detailed notes to make sure I take an accurate account of your experience

I'm going to ask you the questions from the consent form again because I do have to have the answers recorded on file because we go through a rigorous process with ethics.

A *Letter of Information and Consent* for this study was sent to you via email and a list of resources, I just want to confirm that you received these documents? I will now ask you a series of yes or no questions to confirm your responses to gain your consent or assent. These questions are those included on the last page of the letter you received. I will document your response to each question. Please remember that you do not waive any legal right by consenting to this study and feel free to stop me anytime if you have any questions.

Are you over the age of 18 years old and have experienced harassment and/or violence at work?
☐ Yes   ☐ No

1. This study has been explained to me and any questions I had have been answered.  I know that I may leave the study at any time.  I agree to take part in this study.
☐ Yes   ☐ No

2. Do you agree to the audio recording of this interview?  ☐ Yes   ☐ No

3. Direct quotes from this interview may be used in research reports.  However, only pseudonyms will be used to accompany quotes.  No information that identifies you will be used. Do you agree to the use of the quotes?   ☐ Yes   ☐ No

4. If a translator is present, the following question will be asked of him/her:
The person present acted as a translator for the participant during the consent process and attests that the study as set out in this form was accurately translated and has had any questions answered.
☐ Yes   ☐ No

5. Do you have any further questions before we start?
***Before we start, I just want to remind you that we can stop at any time and if you see me looking down at all it's because I am taking notes

## Introductory Questions
*Please tell me about your workplace, industry/sector, and the work that you do*
- What is your current job title? In what industry do you hold this position?
    - **If unemployed**: "Can you think back to the organization that led to these experiences?" Ask questions in the past tense.
    - How long have you been in your current position? In your profession?
    - What is your current employment status?
- How is your workplace organized? **For example**, small, large, separate departments, work in groups/independently, is there an HR department, the organizational hierarchy (team lead, supervisor, etc.).
- How would you describe your work environment?
- What is the gender balance of your workplace? Mostly men, women, evenly distributed?
    - What is the gender of your immediate supervisor?
- Do you consider your workplace to be diverse?

## Experiences of Harassment
*Can you describe your experience of harassment?*
> **Note:** (Pay attention to the context, how they label their experiences, where the harassment took place, what words they use, duration, who was involved, position of harasser, were others present? Be attentive to not label a participant's experience for them.)

*For you, what is harassment (sexual, psychological, discriminatory)?*
> **Alternative:** How would you describe harassment/violence in your own words?
> **Alternative:** What do you consider harassment/harassing behaviours to be or include?

## COVID-19
- Has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted your experiences of harassment in any way?? If so, how? (Listen for ways in which the harassment has escalated/intensified, whether behaviours are manifesting themselves more overtly online, examples of online harassing behaviours, whether there has been pressure to meet in person notwithstanding COVID restrictions, etc.)
    - For example, did going to remote work impact your experiences of harassment/violence?
    - For example, did you become isolated with your harasser?

## Impact of Workplace Harassment
- What were the consequences for you from experiencing harassment (health, isolation, job loss, etc.)?
    - **For example**, did you lose your job, did you become isolated by your co-workers, have you experienced any health-related issues due to your experiences (sickness or injuries)?
- Have these experiences had an impact on your confidence, sense of self, feelings of self-worth, or other aspects of how you view yourself? If so, how?

- o **Self-worth definition:** How you judge and evaluate your sense of your own personal competencies, which influences how you feel you deserve to be treated by yourself and others, and the actions you take that reflect this, including actions aimed at instigating changes you wish to make in yourself and others.
  - o **Alternative:** Has your experience affected how you see yourself, how you think others see you, your confidence, or your feeling of worthiness?
- Have these experiences impacted how you view yourself as a worker? Your relationship with your employer or workplace? If so, how? (Looking for blaming them for their experiences, not being believed, not taken seriously. Notice if there is a bias that affects how they are responded to)
  - o **Example:** some participants have said they felt they were no longer able to do their job to the same ability, didn't feel as competent at work, felt that workers saw them as troublemakers, thought they caused the harassment, etc.
- How have these experiences impacted your relationships with those around you? How would you describe these changes?
  - o Personal relationships, e.g., with family, friends, or children? For example, has your experience of trust with those relationships changed?
  - o Work relationships, e.g., with co-workers, clients, or management?
  - o **Alternative:** Did your experiences of harassment/violence impact the relationships within your life? For example, your relationship with your intimate partner or family.

## Reporting & Retaliation
- Did you report your experience of harassment at your current or previous workplace?
  - o **If yes...**
    - How would you characterize that experience?
    - Who did you tell/report to? How did they respond?
    - Was it a formal or informal report?
    - What made you decide to report?
    - Was the outcome positive or negative for you? Why/why not?
    - What happened to the person who harassed you?
    - Was an investigation conducted? If so, were you informed of the outcomes? How long did the investigation take?
  - o **If not...**
    - What made you decide not to report?
    - What happened to the person who harassed you?
- Do you think the process for reporting is effective? Please describe why/why not.
  - o Are there changes you would like to see to the reporting procedures? If so, please describe.
- Have you or a coworker experienced retaliation for reporting or otherwise objecting to being harassed at work? If so, please describe.
  - o Does retaliation differ based on whether it occurs before reporting or after?
  - o **Alternative:** Do you think that retaliation would differ based on whether it occurred before or after the reporting?
  - o What about retaliation more broadly, for example, an increase in harassment that might occur as a result of a worker rejecting someone's initial sexual advances?

**Effective Supports and Areas for Improvement**

**Support Definition**: support can come from a variety of individuals and avenues, but they are anything that help you cope with the possible negative outcomes of the harassment/violence, they can also include things/people you turn to during good times which help you to keep a high quality of life at all times, some examples of support can be friends, family, intimate partners, co-workers, employers/managers, policies at your workplace, procedures and laws within Canada, self-care, personal therapy, and more. Support can be as much or as little as possible and there is no one 'right' answer of what support should or can be. Everyone's experiences of support are different and are based on their unique situations and experiences.

- Was there anyone you shared your experiences with and, if so, how would you describe their response and the support you received, if any?
    - Did their response(s) meet your expectations? Why or why not? (Also red)
        - **For example**, individuals who experience harassment can report very little support from specific people who they once thought would provide them with a lot of support. (Too academically worded, concise), don't receive the kind of support they have anticipated, sometimes people say…
        - **For example**, other participants have mentioned that the support that they received from their intimate partner was not as much support as they expected their partner to give them.
    - Did their response change over time? (Also red)
        - **For example**, at the beginning when the harassment first started, their friends were very supportive, however, as time went on and the harassment continued, their friends became less supportive and began to blame them for the harassment continuing.
        - **For example**, when the harassment first began, their family was not supportive of them reporting, however after the harassment continued, their family became more supportive and understanding of their decisions to report the harassment
    - Based on these responses, how did you cope with your experiences? (For example, going to private therapy, exercising, withdrawal, etc.)
        - **Alternative**: Were there any other ways that you coped with your experiences of harassment? For example, going to therapy, exercising more, using substances.
- Thinking about the current **supports** at your workplace available to workers who experience harassment, what do you think is effective?
    - What are the changes and/or improvements that you would like to see? [This could include ways to improve existing supports and resources or thinking of new ones.]
    - **Alternative**: Based on your experiences and the supports in place at your workplace for those experiencing harassment, what types of workplace supports do you think are effective in helping these individual
- Thinking about your work **environment**, what kinds of things might **prevent or encourage** harassment?
    - Are there changes you would like to see in your workplace? If so, please describe.

      o **Alternative**: Although harassment can happen in any type of environment and at any workplace, are there any things that you can think of that might prevent or encourage harassment within a workplace?

### Resources and Supports
- What kind of measures helped (or would have helped you) to get through your situation?
    - **For example**, clear procedures of how to report or laws controlling harassment.
- What resources or supports are available in your workplace for those who experience harassment at work?
    - Are these internal or external to your workplace? Both?
        - **For example**, internal supports would be procedures put in place by your manager for what to do when harassment occurs whereas external supports would be laws in your province about harassment.
    - What are your thoughts on these resources/supports? Are they effective?
    - What would you change about them?
- Are there resources or supports outside of your workplace that you have found helpful? If so, please describe them.
    - What prompted you to connect with them?
    - Do you feel these external resources would be able to provide support for workers that have experienced harassment at work?
- Does your workplace have a policy on harassment?
    - Was it readily available or you/easy to access?
    - Did it contain information that was useful/helpful (e.g., reporting procedures, investigations procedures, deadlines for filing, etc.)?
- Did you take legal steps or speak to a lawyer about your experience(s)? Why or why not? What were your expectations?

### Barriers/Challenges
- What kinds of challenges or barriers might people at your workplace that are experiencing harassment face?
    - **For example**, do you think that people experiencing harassment at work would have a harder time connecting with others at work or would have a harder time getting promotions if their harasser was the boss?
    - Thinking about sexual harassment, do the barriers/challenges change? Are there additional ones?
    - Are there issues specific to workers' social and/or employment status? For example, issues related to gender, race, length and type of employment, language, sexual orientation, etc.
- What do you think could be done to change this/protect workers?

### Training
- What kinds of training or information (if any) have you received related to harassment at work?
    - What did you think about them?

**Closing**

- What areas do you think we should pay more attention to regarding harassment at work?
- What kinds of outcomes do you hope to see from our research?
- Do you have any additional comments or things that are important for us to know that we have not touched on already?

**Check-in with the participant** before concluding the interview. Remind them of the **resource list** provided to them before the interview/via email.

*Thank you very much for your time!*