

# Sexual harassment as perceived and experienced by male and female restaurant employees

Andreea-Stefania Baltag\* , Melanie Bosman, Andrea Bravo Wilson, Joanne Huismans & Wichard Zwaal 

Hotel Management School, NHL Stenden, Leeuwarden, the Netherlands

\*Correspondence: andreea.baltag@student.nhlstenden.com

**ABSTRACT:** The purpose of this study was to gain knowledge about sexual harassment as perceived and experienced by male and female restaurant employees. The research was carried out by using an online survey and five interviews. The 137 participants of the survey and the five interviewees are all students at a university of applied sciences in the Netherlands who work or have worked in the restaurant industry. The results indicate that females label more incidents as sexual harassment than males; that females experienced more incidents of sexual harassment from guests than males did; and that sexual harassment negatively affects both females' and males' motivation and well-being. Based on the incidence and impact of sexual harassment, we recommend raising awareness and educating people from an early age regarding sexual harassment and to insist that every restaurant has a proper policy and training programme to prevent and penalise sexual harassment.

**KEYWORDS:** gender differences, health and safety, restaurant employees, sexual harassment

## Introduction: The rationale for the study

The European Commission Code of Practice defines sexual harassment as "[u]nwanted conduct of a sexual nature, or other conduct based on sex, affecting the dignity of women and men at work. This can include unwelcome physical, verbal or non-verbal conduct" (Gilbert et al., 1998, p. 48). Nowadays, there is an uncomfortable truth that more sexual harassment claims are filed in the restaurant industry than in any other industry (Reedy, 2019). Reedy (2019) found that 90% of the women that worked in a restaurant experienced a form of sexual harassment. Not only women experience forms of sexual harassment, but 70% of men experience this as well. Sexual harassment is a problem because it is happening in the hospitality industry and there is not always appropriate action being taken (Fitzgerald & Ormerod, 1991). Even though servers felt uncomfortable and threatened, they sometimes saw it as simply part of the job (McDonald, 2020). It is not only that the guests need to be more respectful, but the entire attitude of the hospitality industry is contributing to the problem (Morgan & Pritchard, 2018). To further investigate the issue, we decided to study sexual harassment as perceived and experienced by restaurant employees with an additional focus on the differences between genders.

## Literature review

Working in a restaurant can be a hard and demanding job and it becomes even harder when employees need to deal with sexual harassment from guests. In this literature review, four topics will

be discussed: Labelling sexual harassment, gender differences in perceptions of sexual harassment, reasons for sexual harassment and the normalisation of sexual harassment.

### Labelling sexual harassment

Labelling an incident, situation or behaviour as sexual harassment can be done from three perspectives: the actor, the victim, and third-party observers (Giuffre & Williams, 1994). Whether the behaviour is labelled as sexual harassment will depend on the type of behaviour, the (alleged) intention of the harasser, situational factors, and the social context. Because of different perspectives, it could well be that one person identifies a situation as sexual harassment and another person identifies the exact same situation as sympathetic interaction. Particularly in the hospitality industry, where the guest is considered to be king and service staff are expected to make customers happy, it can be challenging to identify and deal with inappropriate guest behaviour (McDonald, 2020). Restaurant employees use different criteria when "drawing the line" and qualifying an incident as sexual harassment. Interpreting communication, including body language, is notoriously difficult and riddled with potential mistakes. Much less ambiguity occurs in situations where sexual harassment is combined with violence (Schneider, 1982).

### Gender differences in perceptions of sexual harassment

Although there is progress being made in defining sexual harassment, it is still debated as to whose perspective should be taken when the circumstances surrounding a case of harassment are evaluated (Rotundo et al., 2001). In a legal context, it was

suggested to replace the "reasonable person standard" with the "reasonable woman standard" (Westman, 1992). The reasonable woman standard is an attempt to reflect the feminine viewpoint: whether sexual harassment exists should depend on whether a reasonable woman would interpret the actions as sexual harassment. The purpose in adopting the reasonable woman standard is to change and eliminate prevailing stereotypes, push employers to implement preventive programmes to deal with sexual harassment and make the workplace a safer place for both men and women.

In his meta-analytic review of gender differences in perceptions of sexual harassment, Blumenthal (1998) found that women were more likely to label certain behaviour as sexual harassment than men. Nevertheless, the difference was rather small, particularly for behaviour that involves sexual propositions and sexual coercion. Although these quantitative studies show that a gender difference does exist, these findings and effect sizes are not strong enough to support the "reasonable women standard" to use in court to assess the claims of sexual harassment. The "reasonable victim standard" is suggested as an alternative legal standard that would treat men and women equally when deciding to qualify an incident as sexual harassment or not (Meads, 1993).

**Reasons for sexual harassment**

The hospitality industry, including the restaurant sector, faces a huge number of cases of sexual harassment and exploitation (Morgen & Pritchard, 2018). The reason for this high number is the toleration of sexual harassment within the hospitality industry. The central rule in the industry is "the guest is always right" and the restaurant employees are often dependent on the tips paid by the guests. This attitude makes it more difficult for the restaurant employees to distinguish an inappropriate conversation from a friendly conversation with the customer or guest. Restaurant employees are expected to use their appearance, friendliness and smile as part of the service they deliver to the customer or guest. Appearance is an important aspect of the hospitality industry because it influences the customers' experience. Therefore, employees are more likely to accept forms of sexual harassment since it is assumed to be part of the job (Morgan & Pritchard, 2018).

**The normalisation of sexual harassment**

When customers are sexually harassing their servers and use "the power of the tip" or "the customer is always right" attitude to get away with inappropriate behaviour, sexual harassment

is being normalised in restaurants. Therefore, the restaurant employee usually does not know how to react and if they reach out to their manager, the manager does not know how to act, does not believe the employee, or considers the customer's behaviour as normal. As a result of this normalisation, the guest continues to touch or to flirt with the employee because nobody stops them from acting in that way. The customer believes that it is reasonable to sexually harass the employee because the restaurant industry is about making the customer happy. According to McDonald (2020), the employees expect this treatment from customers because it is "part of the job" and they prepare mentally for it to happen. Overall, even if some of the managers act against sexual harassment, the normalisation and the managers' ignorance of this issue still exist in the restaurant industry. Additionally, according to Mathisen et al. (2008), sexual harassment can lead to negative effects on the health and well-being of the employees, which affect motivation and job satisfaction and as a result the staff turnover rate will increase.

In conclusion to this literature review, even if sexual harassment is hard to define because of the different perspectives, women are more likely to label certain incidents as sexual harassment. Sexual exploitation is embedded in the restaurant industry, because of the "customer is always right" attitude and the "power of the tip". A major problem with the restaurant industry is that sexual harassment is normalised and even employees think that it is "part of the job", which leads to negative effects on their health, well-being, motivation and job satisfaction, which may contribute to an increased turnover rate.

**Conceptual model**

The guest behaviours that are considered sexual harassment include compliments about the server's appearance, sexual remarks, looks or gestures, touching parts of the body, and inappropriate requests. Male and female employees might perceive and label these guest behaviours differently. Their personal experience with incidents of sexual harassment could also be different. Finally, their perception of and experience with incidents of sexual harassment are expected to influence their performance and well-being. The relations between the different concepts are visualised in Figure 1.

**Problem statement and research questions**

The problem statement for this study is:

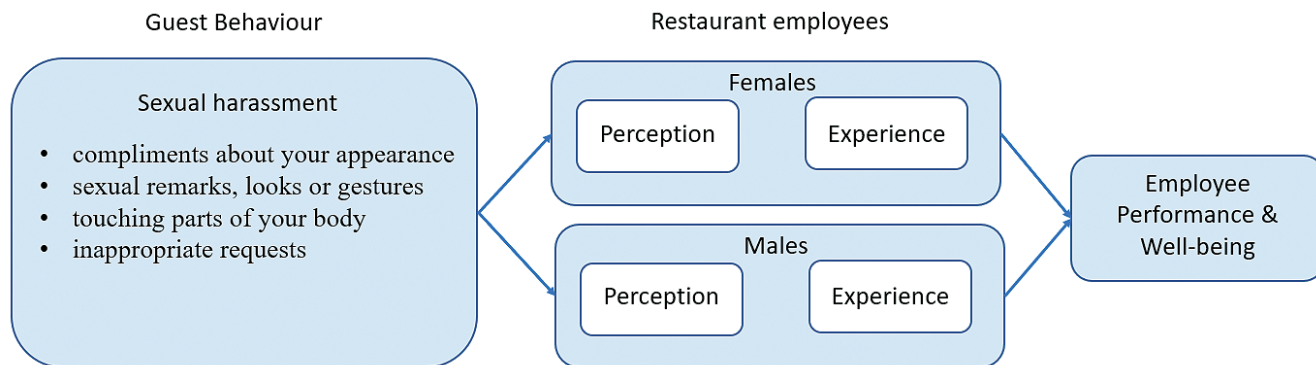


FIGURE 1: Conceptual model

- What are the differences in the perception of and experience with incidents of sexual harassment by male and female restaurant employees?
- Research questions resulting from the problem statement are:
- What are the differences between men and women when it comes to the perception of sexual harassment?
- How often do male and female restaurant employees experience incidents of sexual harassment?
- What are the implications of incidents of sexual harassment?
- How can management prevent or deal with incidents of sexual harassment?

## Method

### *Type of research and instrumentation*

The type of research applied is descriptive research (Brotherton, 2015), which is used in this study to measure or observe the perceptions and experiences of a group of people who have worked in a restaurant or are still working in a restaurant. The instrument used to conduct the research was a survey consisting of five different sections. The first section was accepting the GDPR (general data protection regulations), the participation was voluntary and respondents who did not agree with the GDPR rules and regulations could choose to not continue and close the survey. The participants who accepted the GDPR (general data protection regulations) were asked to fill in some general questions about gender, current study programme of the participants and if the participants currently work or have worked in a restaurant. The second section was composed of Likert scale questions. In this section, the participants were asked to assess on a 10-point Likert scale to what extent they considered 25 incidents as representing cases of sexual harassment. These incidents were selected from the literature review and discussions with fellow students who have worked in restaurants. A zero would indicate that the incident was not perceived to demonstrate sexual harassment at all and a ten meant that the participant saw it as a clear form of sexual harassment. The third section of the survey was used to identify if any of the participants ever experienced one of the listed incidents. The fourth section included statements that were answered using a 4-point Likert scale (strongly disagree; disagree; agree; strongly agree). The statements were focused on the restaurant's regulations regarding sexual harassment and on what the participant would do in case of a sexual harassment incident. The fifth and last section was informative and suggested that if the participants had ever faced difficulties regarding sexual harassment, they could contact the GGD (The municipal health organisation for preventive healthcare in the Netherlands). The section also provided the participants with a link to the GGD's website and their phone number.

The survey was pilot tested, and some useful feedback was obtained. The incident about the suggestive signals was explained more clearly. Pictures were added about the question with sexually suggestive visuals, and a full explanation about the GDPR was added.

In addition to the surveys, five interviews were conducted for more in-depth information. The interview consisted of 16 open questions: 4 general questions and 12 questions about the interviewees' perceptions and experiences with sexual harassment. Moreover, the interviews were focused on the interviewees' feelings regarding sexual harassment.

### *Sampling and data collection*

The survey was sent to participants using different methods. One method that was used was contacting people via email. The researchers sent the survey to their contacts and groups from the university. Another method was to use social media channels such as WhatsApp to contact groups of student associations, other university groups or friends who study at the university. At the end of the survey, the researchers asked the participants to forward the survey to other students within the university who work or have worked in the restaurant industry.

The population used for this research was "all the students who are studying at the university and who work or have worked in a restaurant". The population needed to include both female and male students since the research is about the difference in gender. The target sample size was 100 respondents or more. In the end, the survey generated 137 useable responses.

For the interviews, the researchers contacted people they knew would be interested in participating. The identity of the participants was protected and not revealed thereby guaranteeing confidentiality. The qualitative data from the interviews was used to provide an in-depth understanding of the subject and to support the findings of the quantitative survey results.

### *Ethical considerations*

Since sexual harassment is a sensitive topic, ethical considerations are fundamental when collecting data. To prevent possible repercussions, it was key that all respondents gave informed consent when conducting the survey and interview. To achieve this, all respondents were asked for permission to use their data.

In the survey, respondents were informed that the data derived from the survey would be used for research purposes only and that the survey is conducted according to the guidelines of the GDPR laws. The survey is completely anonymous which indicates that the answers that were given could not be traced back to the respondent who answered them.

The same procedure of asking the respondents permission for processing data was completed before the interviews. During the interview, a trigger warning was mentioned before the two more sensitive questions were asked to prevent the respondent from being startled when talking about experiences of sexual harassment. After this trigger warning, the respondent had the opportunity to not answer these questions. At the end of the more sensitive questions, a link to the GGD (The municipal health organisation for preventive healthcare in the Netherlands) was mentioned for support. This link was also provided at the end of the survey.

By handling the subject with care and obtaining informed consent from all respondents, chances of harming participants, individuals or organisations are reduced to a great extent and the ethical implications are properly managed.

### *Limitations of the research*

All research has limitations, which are factors that could influence the results and the outcome of the research. The first limitation is time. Since this research was completed by students, there were other deadlines regarding other subjects which also had to be met. Therefore, there was less time to go into depth with the research. The research is still valuable and useful, although the

constraint in time means it goes less into detail. However, this does not make the research invalid.

The second limitation concerns the data collection process. The interviews were conducted through video calls, because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The topic is sensitive and can be intimate for some interviewees, which is why doing an interview online can make it harder for participants to tell everything and open up about their experiences. On the other hand, the participants had the opportunity to choose their own space where they feel comfortable.

The third limitation is the experience in research. The researchers are students and have less experience with doing research and creating academic papers than experienced researchers.

## Results

### Sample characteristics

In Table 1, the characteristics of the sample are shown. The researchers obtained a total of 137 respondents, a majority of which is female (76.6%) and 92% enrolled at the hotel management school of the university.

### Perception of sexual harassment

Respondents were asked to indicate to what extent they considered 25 incidents to be examples of sexual harassment. The incidents were selected from the literature and discussions with fellow students that have worked in restaurants. Considering that particular incidents could be perceived by respondents as demonstrating more or less serious forms of sexual harassment they could score each incident from 0 to 10. The results are shown in Table 2.

TABLE 1: Sample characteristics

Characteristic	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Female	105	76.6%
Male	32	23.4%
Programme		
Hotel Management	126	92%
Other	11	8%
Worked in restaurant?		
Yes	137	100%
No	-	

As shown in Table 2, the incidents most perceived as sexual harassment are: "The guest gives you a pat on the butt" with a score of 8.86; and "The guest asks you about sexual experiences, preferences or fantasies" which scores 8.65. The lowest scoring incidents are: "You have beautiful eyes" (3.92); and "You have a nice smile" (1.93). When looking at the difference in perception between males and females, we notice that females score all incidents higher as indicators of sexual harassment than males do. For 15 of the 25 incidents, females consider the incidents as significantly more serious forms of sexual harassment than males do.

### Incidence of sexual harassment

For all 25 incidents, respondents indicated whether they had experienced this behaviour when working as restaurant employees. Results are shown in Table 3.

As shown in Table 3, the most frequently occurring incidents are: The guest says, "You have a nice smile" (97); the guest asks, "Do you have a boyfriend/girlfriend?" (74); and "The guest is

TABLE 2: Perception of incidents of sexual harassment (N = 137)

Incident of sexual harassment	Overall	Females (n = 105)	Males (n = 32)
The guest gives you a pat on the butt.	8.86	9.03	8.31
The guest asks you about sexual experiences preferences or fantasies.	8.65	8.81	8.13
The guest is sending sexually suggestive signals.	8.45	<b>8.74</b>	7.47
The guest gives you a massage around the neck or shoulders.	8.23	<b>8.60</b>	7.00
The guest says, "You have a nice butt".	8.13	<b>8.40</b>	7.25
The guest tells you a sexual story.	7.99	8.19	7.37
The guest is displaying sexually suggestive visuals.	7.79	<b>8.13</b>	6.66
The guest says, "You look sexy".	7.63	<b>7.93</b>	6.63
The guest grabs your hand.	7.63	7.74	7.25
The guest suggests to come and pick you up at the end of your shift.	7.47	7.59	7.06
The guest is throwing 'kisses' at you.	6.84	<b>7.12</b>	5.91
The guest is telling you dirty jokes.	6.69	<b>6.99</b>	5.72
The guest is looking at you up and down.	6.73	<b>7.10</b>	5.50
The guest is winking at you.	6.03	6.25	5.31
The guest is giving you a hug when leaving.	6.06	<b>6.40</b>	4.94
The guest invites you to go on a date.	6.04	<b>6.41</b>	4.84
The guest wants to dance with you.	6.07	<b>6.40</b>	4.97
The guest asks for your personal phone number.	5.88	<b>6.15</b>	5.00
The guest is standing very close to you.	5.91	<b>6.43</b>	4.22
The guest wants to contact you via social media.	5.61	5.83	4.88
The guest pats you on the back or shoulder.	5.45	<b>5.81</b>	4.28
The guest asks, "Do you have a boyfriend / girlfriend?"	4.31	4.46	3.84
The guest says, "You look nice today".	4.04	<b>4.38</b>	2.91
The guest says, "You have beautiful eyes".	3.92	4.05	3.50
The guest says, "You have a nice smile".	1.93	2.07	1.50

Note: Perception (0 = no sexual harassment; 10 = sexual harassment); 10 = sexual harassment); Bold = significant difference between genders

looking you up and down" (68). Of these three, the first two were not rated very high on perceived sexual harassment (see Table 2), but the third one (looking you up and down) was rated 7.10 by female employees. The five incidents that were rated 8 or above on perceived sexual harassment have been experienced by 3–16% of the respondents.

All incidents are experienced more frequently by female employees. Since there are more females than males among the respondents, we also looked at the incidence percentage within each gender category. Only three of the 25 incidents are experienced relatively more often among male employees: "The guest is telling you dirty jokes" (37.5%); "The guest asks you about sexual experiences, preferences or fantasies" (15.63%); and "The guest gives you a massage around the neck or shoulders" (3.13%).

Many incidents are experienced exclusively ("You look sexy") or predominantly by female employees, e.g. "The guest suggests to come and pick you up at the end of your shift" (31 females, 1 male), "The guest is throwing 'kisses' at you" (20 females, 1 male) and "The guest invites you to go on a date" (37 females, 1 male). Also, the incident qualified with the highest score for perceived sexual harassment ("The guest gives you a pat on the butt") is almost exclusively experienced by women (17 females, 1 male).

Moreover, the results indicate that 93% of the 137 respondents have experienced one or more incidents of sexual harassment. No incidents of sexual harassment were experienced by 7% of female and 9% of male employees.

### Implications of sexual harassment

Respondents were asked to indicate on a 4-point Likert scale to what extent they agreed or disagreed with 14 statements about the response to and consequences of sexual harassment.

As shown in Table 4, respondents most strongly agree with the statement: "In case of sexual harassment, I would always inform my manager" ( $M = 3.26$ ) followed by the statements "Incidents of sexual harassment at work affect my well-being" ( $M = 2.72$ ) and "motivation" ( $M = 2.70$ ). Looking at the last two statements in Table 4, the respondents are not "willing to accept more from a guest when receiving a large tip" ( $M = 1.72$ ) or that "restaurants create the problem of sexual harassment by hiring attractive young female servers" ( $M = 1.64$ ).

In the interviews, the interviewees indicated that the restaurant they work or worked at made enough effort to tackle the problem of sexual harassment. All four interviewees who had experienced sexual harassment noted that when they experienced sexual harassment, they reported it to their managers. The ones that experienced sexual harassment said that this made them feel used and that it negatively influenced their motivation and well-being.

As shown in Table 4, for five out of 14 statements there is a significant difference between females and males. Males more strongly agree with the statements "I am willing to accept more from a guest when receiving a large tip", "Restaurants create the problem of sexual harassment by hiring attractive young female servers", and "I am willing to accept more from an attractive guest than from an unattractive one". Females more strongly agree with the statements "Incidents of sexual harassment at work affect my motivation" and "I feel uncomfortable to speak up to the guest when sexual harassment is happening to me".

TABLE 3: Experienced incidents of sexual harassment (N = 137)

Incident of sexual harassment	Females (n = 105)	Males (n = 32)	Overall
The guest gives you a pat on the butt.	17 (16.19%)	1 (3.13%)	18
The guest asks you about sexual experiences preferences or fantasies.	13 (12.38%)	5 (15.63%)	18
The guest is sending sexually suggestive signals.	18 (17.14%)	4 (12.50%)	22
The guest gives you a massage around the neck or shoulders.	3 (2.86%)	1 (3.13%)	4
The guest says, "You have a nice butt".	18 (17.14%)	3 (9.38%)	21
The guest tells you a sexual story.	14 (13.33%)	3 (9.38%)	17
The guest is displaying sexually suggestive visuals.	14 (13.33%)	2 (6.25%)	16
The guest says, "You look sexy".	14 (13.33%)	0 (0%)	14
The guest grabs your hand.	26 (24.76%)	6 (18.75%)	32
The guest suggests to come and pick you up at the end of your shift.	32 (30.48%)	1 (3.13%)	33
The guest is throwing 'kisses' at you.	20 (19.05%)	1 (3.13%)	21
The guest is telling you dirty jokes.	34 (32.38%)	12 (37.50%)	46
The guest is looking you up and down.	61 (58.10%)	7 (21.88%)	68
The guest is winking at you.	56 (53.33%)	9 (28.13%)	65
The guest is giving you a hug when leaving.	20 (19.05%)	4 (12.50%)	24
The guest invites you to go on a date.	37 (35.24%)	1 (3.13%)	38
The guest wants to dance with you.	24 (22.86%)	5 (15.63%)	29
The guest asks for your personal phone number.	49 (46.67%)	2 (6.25%)	51
The guest is standing very close to you.	55 (52.38%)	7 (21.88%)	62
The guest wants to contact you via social media.	49 (46.67%)	10 (31.25%)	59
The guest pats you on the back or shoulder.	50 (47.62%)	10 (31.25%)	60
The guest asks, "Do you have a boyfriend / girlfriend?"	62 (59.05%)	12 (37.50%)	74
The guest says, "You look nice today".	55 (52.38%)	9 (28.13%)	64
The guest says, "You have beautiful eyes".	59 (56.19%)	4 (12.50%)	63
The guest says, "You have a nice smile".	80 (76.19%)	17 (53.13%)	97

Note: Experience = number of respondents indicating to have experienced the listed incident



TABLE 4: Opinion about statements (N = 137)

Statement	Overall	Females (n = 105)	Males (n = 32)
In case of sexual harassment, I would always inform my manager.	3.26	3.07	3.05
Incidents of sexual harassment at work affect my well-being.	2.72	2.76	2.59
Incidents of sexual harassment at work affect my motivation.	2.70	<b>2.79</b>	2.41
I feel uncomfortable to speak up to the guest when sexual harassment is happening to me.	2.53	<b>2.65</b>	2.16
The restaurant I work/have worked in has a clear policy and protocol for dealing with incidents of sexual harassment.	2.32	2.28	2.47
I am willing to accept more from an attractive guest than from an unattractive one.	2.28	2.20	<b>2.56</b>
The hospitality industry is not a female friendly sector.	2.14	2.16	2.06
I feel uncomfortable to speak up to my superior when sexual harassment is happening to me.	2.09	2.12	1.97
Incidents of sexual harassment at work have made me reconsider my career-choice.	1.80	1.79	1.81
The combination of hospitality alcohol and female servers is asking for problems.	1.88	1.87	1.91
Managers always take the side of the guest.	1.72	1.69	1.84
In the hospitality industry accepting sexual comments by guests is part of the job.	1.74	1.79	1.56
I am willing to accept more from a guest when receiving a large tip.	1.72	1.61	<b>2.06</b>
Restaurants create the problem of sexual harassment by hiring attractive young female servers.	1.64	1.51	<b>2.06</b>

Note: 1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = agree; 4 = strongly agree; Bold = significant difference between genders

When looking at the interviews, four of the five interviewees answered that they would not cross the line regarding sexual harassment incidents to receive a higher tip. The male interviewee stated that

*If guests are touching you in inappropriate ways or asking for your phone number, this is not nice; however, if you know that you are going to get a good tip out of it, like 50 or 100 euros, you are going to suck it up. But you know in the back of your head that you do not like it and you feel disgusted, but you suck it up for the money.*

In summary the findings show a substantial difference in perception of sexual harassment between male and female employees, with females considering more guest behaviours as sexual harassment and as more serious forms of harassment. Females also more frequently experience incidents of sexual harassment than their male counterparts. While incidents of sexual harassment negatively affect the well-being and motivation of female staff members, they simultaneously feel uncomfortable to speak up to the guest when those incidents occur. Managerial support in counteracting sexual harassment is indispensable.

## Discussion

### Perception of sexual harassment

Regarding the perceptions of sexual harassment, the results of the research showed that the incidents "The guest gives you a pat on the butt" and "The guest asks you about your sexual experiences, preferences or fantasies" were perceived as the most explicit incidents of sexual harassment. The incidents "The guest says you have a nice smile" and "The guest says you have beautiful eyes" were perceived least as exemplifying sexual harassment. It seems that incidents are interpreted in different ways by different people. From the interviews, it was concluded

that perceiving sexual harassment depends on how guests say certain things. All these findings align with what was stated in the literature review about the fact that certain situations could lead to someone labelling it as sexual harassment depending on the interpretation of the person affected (McDonald, 2020). When evaluating gender differences in perceptions of sexual harassment, both males and females had the same perception about the previously named incidents being the incidents demonstrating the most or least sexual harassment. However, when the difference between males and females regarding the perception of incidents of sexual harassment is analysed, it becomes clear that females perceive all incidents to be more expressive of sexual harassment than males. In fifteen of the 25 incidents, this difference is statistically significant. The males and females particularly differ in their perception regarding the incidents "The guest is standing very close to you", "The guest is looking you up and down" and "The guest gives you a massage around the neck or shoulders." These findings line up with Blumenthal's (1998) research which found that females are more likely to label certain behaviour as sexual harassment than males.

### Experience of sexual harassment

Regarding the experience of sexual harassment, Morgan and Pritchard (2018) mention that more sexual harassment happens to female servers. This is confirmed by the results of the current study which also show that more female restaurant employees experienced incidents of sexual harassment than males. When taking into consideration that more females than males took part in the survey, percentages still show that except for three statements, females experienced more incidents of sexual harassment than males. Also, Reedy (2019) stated that 90% of women and 70% of men that work in restaurants did experience some form of sexual harassment. Looking back at the results, the current study confirms that 93% of women and 91% of men

restaurant employees have experienced one or more incidents of sexual harassment.

### Dealing with sexual harassment

Regarding dealing with sexual harassment in the hospitality industry, the literature review indicated a tendency to tolerate incidents of sexual harassment as part of the job (Morgan and Pritchard, 2018). The fact that most respondents of the survey disagreed with the statement "The restaurant I work/have worked at has a clear policy and protocol for dealing with incidents of sexual harassment" shows that there is still much work to be done.

In the literature review, it was found that many managers do not take sexual harassment seriously, do not minimise the problem and tolerate certain kinds of sexual harassment (McDonald, 2020). It is stated that this is a result of guests using their power over a server because of the "power of the tip" or the "guest is always right" rule. This differs from the results of the present study which show that respondents disagree with the statement that "Managers always take the side of the guest". However, this does not take away the fact that sexual harassment, as perceived and experienced by male and female restaurant employees, has an impact on employee performance and well-being. Mathisen et al. (2008) stated that the normalisation and manager's ignorance of sexual harassment can lead to negative effects on the health and well-being of employees, which affects motivation and job satisfaction and as a result makes the staff turnover rate increase. The results indicate that the respondents of the survey mostly agree with the statements "Incidents of sexual harassment at work affect my well-being" and "Incidents of sexual harassment at work affect my motivation".

### Conclusion

Regarding the first research question "What are the differences between men and women when it comes to the perception of sexual harassment?", the results show that females score all incidents higher as indicators of sexual harassment than males do. Furthermore, in 15 of the 25 incidents, this difference is statistically significant. We conclude that female restaurant employees qualify more incidents as exemplifying sexual harassment than male employees, and as more serious expressions of sexual harassment.

The second research question about "How often do male and female restaurant employees experience incidents of sexual harassment?" showed that the most frequently occurring incidents of sexual harassment are: the guest saying, "You have a nice smile" (97 times), the guest asking, "Do you have a boyfriend/girlfriend?" (74 times), and "The guest looking you up and down" (68 times). All incidents are experienced more frequently by female employees and the vast majority of incidents are experienced exclusively or predominantly by female employees.

For the third research question "What are the implications of incidents of sexual harassment?", results show that the respondents strongly agree with the statements: "Incidents of sexual harassment at work affect my well-being" ( $M = 2.72$ ) and "Incidents of sexual harassment at work affect my motivation" ( $M = 2.70$ ). We conclude that incidents of sexual harassment do affect the performance and well-being of restaurant employees.

Regarding the last research question "How can management prevent or deal with incidents of sexual harassment?", respondents indicate that "In case of sexual harassment, I would always inform my manager" ( $M = 3.26$ ) and "The restaurant I work/have worked at has a clear policy and protocol for dealing with incidents of sexual harassment" ( $M = 2.32$ ). It can also be seen that the respondents have difficulty speaking up to the guests ( $M = 2.53$ ) and to their superiors ( $M = 2.09$ ) about incidents of sexual harassment. At the same time, they do not agree that "In the hospitality industry accepting sexual comments by guests is part of the job" ( $M = 1.74$ ), they are not "willing to accept more from a guest when receiving a large tip" ( $M = 1.72$ ) or that "restaurants create the problem of sexual harassment by hiring attractive young female servers" ( $M = 1.64$ ). We can conclude that respondents need more support in how to deal with sexual harassment.

Returning to the problem statement about the differences in the perception of and experience with incidents of sexual harassment by male and female restaurant employees, the results show that there is a different perception of sexual harassment between male and female restaurant employees. The females are more inclined to perceive the listed incidents as sexual harassment than males. Female restaurant employees also experienced more sexual harassment incidents than males.

### Recommendations

Awareness about sexual harassment should be raised and people should know that sexual harassment is happening almost on a daily basis. Since the media plays an influential role in shaping opinions in society nowadays, it can be used to raise awareness about this topic. There should also be more education about this topic, starting with children. Children should be taught about sexual harassment to protect them but also to teach them the difference between right and wrong. Teaching children about self-awareness, self-management and social awareness helps to prevent sexual harassment from happening. Finally, to minimise sexual harassment from happening, there should be a policy in restaurants (and all hospitality-related workplaces) about sexual harassment not being tolerated. Employees should be informed about this policy and know that sexual harassment is not accepted. Employees should also be provided with procedures to make a formal charge or complaint. Further research is highly recommended to raise more awareness about the frequency of sexual harassment, the reasons behind it and to find possible solutions for the re-occurring problems.

### ORCIDiS

Andreea-Stefania Baltag: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5240-9164>

Wichard Zwaal: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9303-6800>

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