

Victorians' experiences of sexism and sexual harassment while working remotely due to the coronavirus

Report findings, January 2021

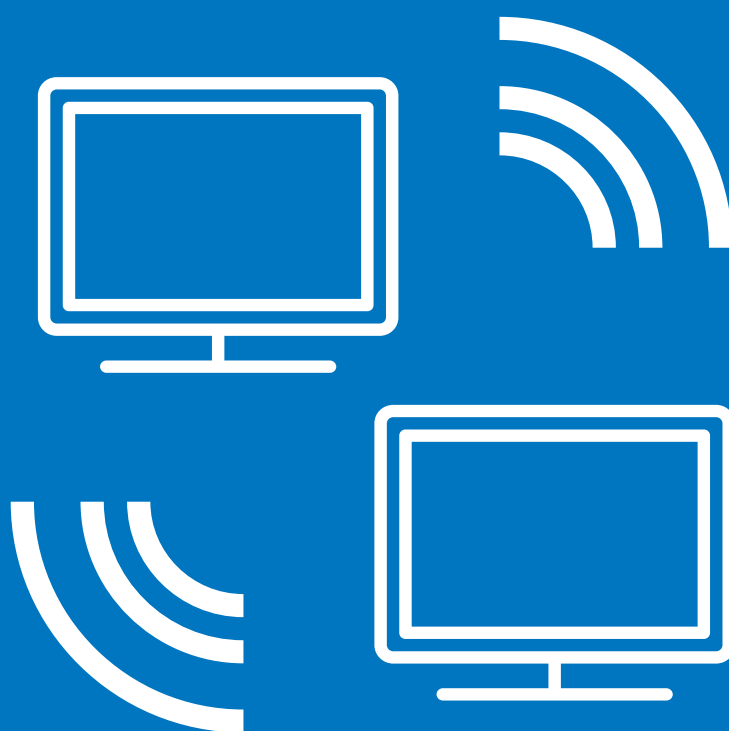


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00 / Executive summary

What did we do and why?

Reducing workplace sexism and sexual harassment has the capacity to provide safer, more productive environments for Victorians, produce better mental wellbeing outcomes, and creates more diverse opportunities and equal treatment of women in the workplace.

The coronavirus has changed the working environment for Victorians for the foreseeable future. The ensuing recession resulted in mass job losses, with women, minorities and young people disproportionately impacted.¹ Offices were also periodically shut down, with many working remotely due to lockdowns and restrictions on movement. The impacts of this were felt particularly strongly in Victoria, which suffered the longest lockdown of any state or territory.

With workplaces moving increasingly online, experiences of sexism and sexual harassment in the workplace, and taking action in response, are also changing. However, there has been a lack of research into sexism and sexual harassment in remote working, despite the importance of this work in the current context.

In partnership with the Victorian Office for Women and the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth), The Behavioural Insights Team (BIT) has undertaken research to fill this gap.² We surveyed a representative sample of 1,109 workers from across Victoria who were working remotely between March - September 2020. In the survey we asked about:³

- the types of sexism and sexual harassment experienced during remote working;
- the types of sexism and sexual harassment witnessed during remote working;
- whether these behaviours increased or decreased while working remotely;
- whether Victorians felt that they knew how to or were able to respond to these behaviours;
- any barriers to responding; and
- mental wellbeing.

The findings of the survey represent a particular and unprecedented moment in time, when coronavirus lockdowns were forcing the majority of Victorians who were able to work, to do so from home. Nonetheless, understanding what sexism and sexual harassment looked like in this context is a critical first step in enabling policy makers and workplaces to effectively develop strategies to tackle these behaviours, and prepare for the increase in flexible work practices we are likely to see across Victoria in 2021.

¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2020). *Labour Force Statistics April 2020*. Retrieved from <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/labour-force-australia/apr-2020>.

² This research was undertaken within Phase 3 of the project: Increasing bystander action in Australian workplaces.

³ Further details about the survey can be found in Appendices 1 and 2.

It will also assist relevant entities to comply with their obligations under the Victorian Gender Equality Act 2020 which commences in March 2021.



What did we find?

This report details findings in relation to the rate at which Victorians⁴ experience and witness sexism and sexual harassment when working remotely, and the instances of and barriers to taking action in response. The report's findings relate to specific demographic groups, including gender and age, as well as commenting on how the composition of a workplace can impact these behaviours. A table of our headline findings is provided below.

Table 1: Research key findings

	1. Almost 1 in 5 Victorians experienced sexism and sexual harassment while working remotely, and 1 in 3 Victorians saw or heard about sexism and sexual harassment happening to others.
	2. Workers thought that instances of sexism and sexual harassment had occurred less frequently while working remotely, compared to in the office.
	3. Half of Victorians who experienced or witnessed sexism and sexual harassment while working remotely took action. Workers were more likely to take action after the incident than in the moment.
	4. Women working remotely were at greater risk of sexism and sexual harassment compared to men. However, women thought that the frequency of these behaviours had decreased when working remotely, compared to men.



⁴ When we refer to 'Victorians' we mean the representative sample of individuals who responded to the survey, who were working remotely between March - September 2020.


	<p>5. Victorians aged 18-34 experienced and witnessed sexism and sexual harassment at greater rates than older colleagues. 1 in 4 younger workers experienced sexism and sexual harassment, and half saw or heard about this happening to someone else.</p>
	<p>6. Entry-level workers reported experiencing sexism and sexual harassment at greater rates than more senior workers. Senior workers took action in response to these behaviours at a greater rate.</p>

What do we recommend going forward?

Synthesising the results of our survey, we distilled 3 important actions policy makers and workplaces should take, so that Victorians can prevent and respond effectively to sexism and sexual harassment in remote working environments in 2021 and beyond. For additional detail on the recommendations see section 6 of this report.

Table 2: Summary of recommendations

	<p>Recommendation 1: Encourage bystander action in response to sexism and sexual harassment during remote working</p> <p>The results of our survey show that 91% of Victorians agreed that some form of action is needed after witnessing sexism and sexual harassment. However, half of participants surveyed did not take any action in response.</p> <p>Harnessing the power of bystanders is a powerful way to address sexism and sexual harassment in the workplace. Workplaces should communicate social norms to encourage more workers to become active bystanders. Encouraging workers to make specific plans about how they will respond if they witness sexism and sexual harassment when working remotely, is another potential method to encourage them to take bystander action.</p>
	<p>Recommendation 2: Maintain support for flexible working even after coronavirus related lockdowns end</p> <p>Victorian workers thought that instances of sexism and sexual harassment had occurred less frequently while working remotely, compared to in the office. This perceived reduction in frequency is a</p>

	<p>hopeful sign and indicates likely benefits of remote working for all workers, particularly women.</p> <p>Workplaces should continue to offer flexible working arrangements to all workers beyond 2020. Workplaces should move to formalise their flexible working arrangements, and take steps to encourage flexible working.</p> <p>This recommendation does not aim to remove targets of sexism and sexual harassment from physical workplaces as a means to prevent these behaviours, but rather aims to ensure that workers have agency over how they engage with their colleagues. This recommendation needs to be implemented in conjunction with other efforts to prevent sexism and sexual harassment in the workplace as it will not solve the underlying issues which cause these behaviours. It is also noted that while some workers may prefer to work remotely, others prefer to work in the office, so working practices need to consider individual needs and preferences.</p>
	<p>Recommendation 3: Ensure that workplace policies and reporting procedures are suited to remote working environments and adhered to by workers</p> <p>The shift to remote working has changed the way that people communicate and interact with their colleagues. Policies and procedures about acceptable workplace conduct, preventing sexism and sexual harassment, reporting and taking action in response are written with primarily in-person working in mind.</p> <p>These policies and procedures should be reviewed and updated where needed, in light of increased remote and hybrid working. Steps should also be taken to ensure workers' compliance with these policies. This should include using behaviourally-informed language to increase worker engagement with policies, and requiring workers to account for how they have contributed to preventing sexism and sexual harassment in the workplace.</p>

01 / The research: What we did and why

Addressing sexism and sexual harassment in the workplace

Workplace sexism and sexual harassment is a persistent problem in Australian workplaces. The Australian Human Rights Commission reported in 2018 that 20% of Australians had been sexually harassed in the workplace in the past 12 months.⁵ Australia performs poorly by international standards of gender equality, with a 2020 international report measuring gender equality in 153 different countries ranking Australia 44th overall. Australia ranked even lower for gender equality of economic opportunity (49) and labour force participation (53).⁶ This is corroborated by the experience of Australian women, almost half of which report that gender inequality exists in most Australian workplaces.⁷

The negative consequences of sexism and sexual harassment for Australian workplaces are substantial. In 2018 Deloitte estimated that sexual harassment cost the Australian economy \$3.5 billion, mainly due to reduced workplace productivity.⁸ Sexual harassment has been linked to negative impacts on employee health and wellbeing, productivity, staff turnover, career progression and workplace culture.⁹ Frequent and unchallenged sexist behaviour can also have negative impacts on women's mental wellbeing and employment opportunities in the long-term.¹⁰

Work needs to be done to prevent sexism and sexual harassment, by providing workplaces with the tools to respond to these behaviours. These new approaches should be victim-centred, practical, and designed to minimise harm to workers.¹¹ Another strategy to prevent these behaviours is to encourage individuals who witness, or are informed of sexism and sexual harassment, to take action. While bystander action is known to be an effective way to stop sexual harassment,¹² in 69% of cases, witnesses take no action in response to an incident of sexual harassment in the workplace.¹³ While less is known about online bystanding, some research suggests that bystanders witnessing negative online behaviour are just as unlikely to take action.

⁵ Australian Human Rights Commission (2018). *Everybody's business: Fourth national survey on sexual harassment in Australian workplaces*.

⁶ World Economic Forum. (2020). *Global Gender Gap Report*.

⁷ Lumby, C., & Aftab, A. (2018). *'Is Australia Sexist?' Survey Report*.

⁸ Deloitte. (2019). *The economic costs of sexual harassment in the workplace*.

⁹ Australian Human Rights Commission. (2020). *National Inquiry into Sexual Harassment in Australian Workplaces*.

¹⁰ Sojo, V. E., Wood, R. E., & Genat, A. E. (2016). Harmful workplace experiences and women's occupational well-being: A meta-analysis. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 40(1), 10-40.

¹¹ Australian Human Rights Commission. (2020). *National Inquiry into Sexual Harassment in Australian Workplaces*.

¹² Australian Human Rights Commission (2018). *Everybody's business: Fourth national survey on sexual harassment in Australian workplaces*.

¹³ Australian Human Rights Commission (2018). *Everybody's business: Fourth national survey on sexual harassment in Australian workplaces*.

A survey by the Australian eSafety Commissioner found that 70% of Australian adults had taken no action in response to the negative online experience of a friend or colleague.¹⁴ Harnessing the ‘bystander’ is therefore a key component of preventing sexism and sexual harassment in the workplace. Some Victorian organisations working to address online harms have created resources to promote active bystanding on social media, recognising the potential benefit of this strategy.¹⁵ More work is needed to address this issue in the workplace.

Coronavirus has changed the working lives of Victorians

The Coronavirus had an unprecedented impact on workplace environments across Australia in 2020. The ensuing recession resulted in mass job losses, with women, minorities and young people disproportionately impacted.¹⁶ Offices were also periodically shut down, with many working remotely due to lockdowns and restrictions on movement. The impacts of this were felt particularly strongly in Victoria¹⁷ which suffered the longest lockdown of any state or territory.¹⁸

As workplaces moved increasingly online, experiences of sexism and sexual harassment also changed. However, to date there has been a lack of research on how these behaviours are manifesting in remote workplaces. Without sufficient evidence and information, organisations remain ill-equipped to prevent and respond to sexism and sexual harassment in remote working environments.

As restrictions on workplaces are gradually lifted in 2021, the ‘new normal’ is likely to involve a hybrid home/office working model with continued remote working. It is therefore critical to better understand sexism and sexual harassment in remote working environments to ensure these behaviours can be effectively addressed in the coming months and years.

Sexism and sexual harassment during remote working — a survey

BIT, in partnership with the Victorian Office for Women and VicHealth, have undertaken this project to address the knowledge gap in how sexism and sexual harassment are manifesting in remote workplace environments. This survey was conducted online between 16th October 2020 and 4th November 2020 and is part of Phase 3 of the project *Increasing bystander action in Australian workplaces*.

¹⁴ Australian eSafety Commissioner. (2020). *Adults’ negative online experiences*.

¹⁵ Gender Equity Victoria. (n.d). Online Active Bystander Project. Retrieved from: <https://www.genvic.org.au/focus-areas/projects/online-active-bystander-project/>

¹⁶ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2020). *Labour Force Statistics April 2020*. Retrieved from <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/labour-force-australia/apr-2020>

¹⁷ The Mckell Institute. (2020). *The Impact of COVID-19 on Women and Work in Victoria*.

¹⁸ The Mckell Institute. (2020). *The Impact of COVID-19 on Women and Work in Victoria*.

We surveyed a representative sample of 1,019 workers who were working remotely across Victoria between March and September 2020. We asked about:¹⁹

- the types of sexism and sexual harassment experienced during remote working;
- the types of sexism and sexual harassment witnessed during remote working;
- whether these behaviours increased or decreased while working remotely;
- whether Victorians felt that they knew how to/were able to respond to these behaviours;
- any barriers to responding; and
- mental wellbeing via the United Kingdom's Office of National Statistics wellbeing measures.

The results of this survey are presented in the following sections of this report.

It is important to note that these findings are representative of an unprecedented moment in time, when coronavirus lockdowns were forcing the majority of Victorians who were able to work, to do so from home. Nonetheless, understanding what online sexism and sexual harassment looked like in this context will help policymakers and workplaces better address these behaviours, in preparation for future increases in flexible work practices across Victoria in 2021.

The objectives of the Victorian Gender Equality Act 2021 include promoting, encouraging and facilitating the achievement of gender equality, and supporting the identification and elimination of systemic causes of gender inequality in policy, programs and delivery of services in workplaces and communities. Certain organisations have positive obligations to work towards these objectives under the Act. We hope that the findings of this research will help these organisations fulfil their obligations, due to commence in March 2021.²⁰

The scope and limitations of this report

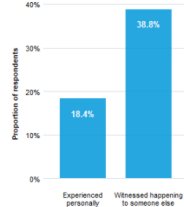



The scope of the report

This report provides information about how sexism and sexual harassment manifest in remote working environments. It presents overarching findings in relation to prevalence of these behaviours, relative frequency, and how many Victorians take action in response. It also breaks down findings by demographics and provides discrete findings in relation to gender, younger workers, and the different composition of Victorian workplaces.

¹⁹ Further details about the survey can be found in the appendices to this report.

²⁰ The Commission for Gender Equality in the Public Sector. (2020). *About the Gender Equality Act 2020*.

Table 3: How to read this report:

How to read this report							
<p>Graphs are used to represent our findings.</p>	 <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Category</th> <th>Proportion of respondents</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Experienced personally</td> <td>16.4%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Witnessed happening to someone else</td> <td>38.8%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Category	Proportion of respondents	Experienced personally	16.4%	Witnessed happening to someone else	38.8%
Category	Proportion of respondents						
Experienced personally	16.4%						
Witnessed happening to someone else	38.8%						
	<p>Direct quotes from survey participants are marked with a speech bubble.</p>						
<p>Key findings which we believe present an opportunity and should be incorporated into the thinking of policymakers and workplaces in 2021 are marked with a light bulb.</p>							
	<p>Key findings which we believe present challenges to be addressed in 2021 are marked with a forward arrow.</p>						

Terminology used in this report

What we mean by 'sexism and sexual harassment'

Where we refer to 'sexism and sexual harassment,' or inappropriate behaviours in this report, we are referring to an inventory of specific behaviours included in our survey. These are:

Table 4: Behaviours included in the survey

Behaviours included in the survey
Sending comments, jokes or put-downs when working remotely (for example on email, instant messengers, or social media) based on someone's sex or gender that makes them feel uncomfortable.
Making comments, jokes or put-downs in a work meeting based on sex or gender that makes others feel uncomfortable.
Asking intrusive or offensive questions about someone's private life or physical appearance that makes them feel uncomfortable.
Treating someone differently because of their sex or gender, for example interrupting them while on a work call, or excluding them from workplace meetings.
Taking credit for someone's work or ideas disproportionately because of their sex or gender.
Excluding someone from important tasks or decision-making because of their sex or gender.
Suggesting or implying that someone is not capable of performing part of their role because of their sex or gender.
Making assumptions about someone's career/role/interest in career opportunities on the basis of their sex or gender (e.g. that women have to take care of children's learning from home and don't want responsibilities, or that men do not want flexible working arrangements because they only care about their career).
Assuming, commenting or indicating that someone is not committed to their job or can't perform their job adequately because they have family or personal commitments.
Criticising someone for not behaving 'like a man/woman should.'

The behaviours included in our survey were limited to those which could occur in remote working environments. Some of the behaviours in this list could be categorised as sexism, sexual harassment or both. We therefore refer to 'sexism and sexual harassment' together throughout this report, and we do not present results which distinguish between sexist behaviours and sexual harassment.

What we mean by 'witnessing'

In this research, we have defined 'witnessing' to mean both 'seeing' instances of sexism and sexual harassment when working remotely, and 'hearing about' these behaviours from colleagues. In remote work environments, workers may have the opportunity to 'see' instances of these behaviours firsthand at a reduced rate due to colleagues being in separate physical locations, and increased communications taking place through private meetings and online messaging systems. It is therefore important to also capture information about people who hear about these behaviours taking place in remote work environments.

What we mean by ‘taking action’

Our survey asked who ‘took action’ in response to sexism and sexual harassment. This includes Victorians who took any action in response to a behaviour which was targeted at them personally, and those who took any action after seeing or hearing about sexism and sexual harassment happening to their colleagues.

Taking action, as defined here, includes but is not limited to active bystanding.²¹ When we refer to ‘bystanding’ in this report, we refer to incidents of sexism and sexual harassment that someone either saw or heard about (but did not personally experience), in which they intervened.

What we mean by ‘remote working’

We surveyed Victorians who were working from home for a portion of their working week between March and September 2020, during coronavirus related shutdowns. Due to restrictions on movement much of this work was done online. Throughout this report we refer to this as remote working.

What we mean by ‘target’

In this report we use the term ‘target’ to mean someone who has experienced sexism and sexual harassment personally.

The limitations of this report

Our findings are only part of a much larger picture. While we specifically focused on sexism and sexual harassment in our survey, it’s important to recognise the larger impact of coronavirus. 2020 was an unprecedented year, with significant changes in lifestyle, employment and working arrangements, and notable decreases in wellbeing.

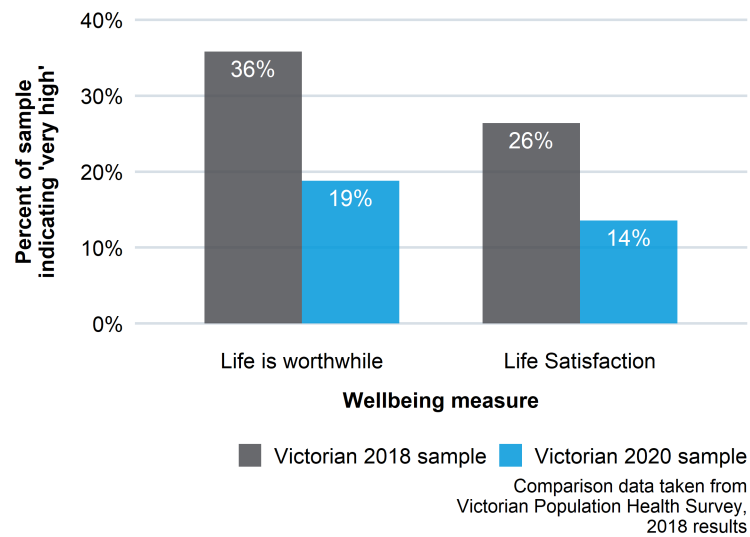
As an example, we asked our survey participants to rate their perceived levels of wellbeing on a scale of 0-10. The survey items used to measure wellbeing were taken from the United Kingdom’s Office for National Statistics wellbeing measures, known as the ONS-4. These measures of wellbeing were chosen due to their robustness and ease of administration within a survey, and their interpretability for a non-professional audience.

We found that in our sample, there were lower numbers of individuals rating their ‘life satisfaction’ and feelings that ‘life is worthwhile’ as “very high” (a rating of 9 or 10), compared to a Victorian sample from the Victorian Population Health Survey (2018 results).²²

²¹ The taking of action by individuals who witness sexism and sexual harassment but are neither the perpetrator nor the target.

²² We note that there are several potential differences between a Victorian 2020 and a Victorian 2018 sample, including the sample of individuals and the time of the year of the survey. Therefore, although these results suggest decreased wellbeing in Victorians in October/November 2020, they do not provide a complete picture of the change in wellbeing for Victorians as a result of COVID-19.

We also see reductions in wellbeing in Victoria during October/November 2020, when comparing this to a UK sample from 2019. While this decrease in wellbeing is not unexpected, it is important to keep in mind this broader context in addition to the findings reported here.



02 / Key findings: The experience of sexism and sexual harassment while working remotely

This section of the report details our overall findings in relation to the prevalence of sexism and sexual harassment in Victoria during remote working due to coronavirus, as well as reported instances of taking action in response to these behaviours.

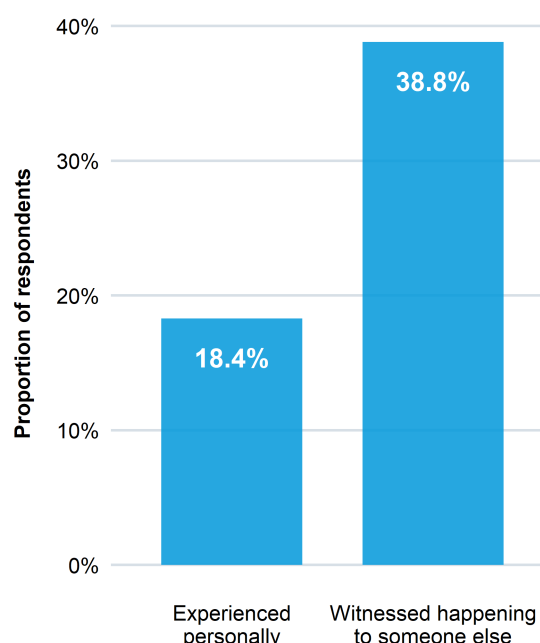
Almost 1 in 5 Victorians experienced sexism and sexual harassment, and over 1 in 3 witnessed sexism and sexual harassment while working remotely, with the most common behaviour experienced being 'asked intrusive or offensive questions about their private life or physical appearance' (5.6%). However, there is a perception that instances of sexism and sexual harassment have reduced during remote working.

We also saw that Victorians took action at relatively high rates in response to sexism and sexual harassment during remote working compared to other contexts, with 50% of participants having taken some action in or after the moment in response to these behaviours. However, significant barriers to taking action in remote work environments remain.

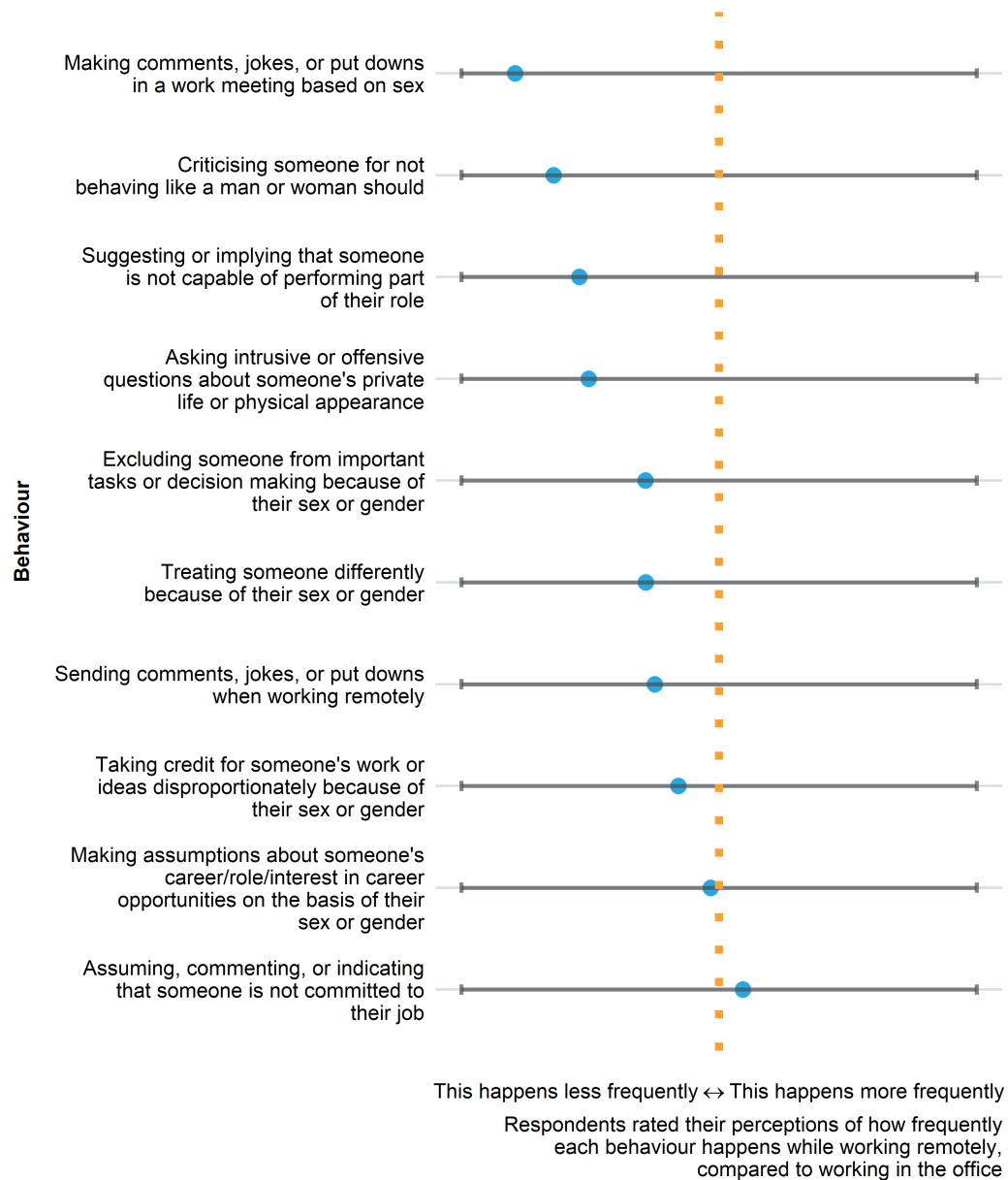
Experiences of sexism and sexual harassment while working remotely

Almost 1 in 5 Victorians experienced sexism and sexual harassment, and over 1 in 3 witnessed sexism and sexual harassment while working remotely

We asked participants whether they experienced each of the 10 sexist and sexually harassing behaviours while working remotely (see Appendix 2 for the full list of behaviours). 18% of participants indicated that they had personally experienced at least 1 of the 10 behaviours. 39% of participants indicated that they had seen or heard of at least 1 of the behaviours happening to someone else while working remotely.



Victorians thought instances of sexism and sexual harassment were less frequent while working remotely



Despite reporting relatively high rates of experiences with sexism and sexual harassment, participants thought that almost all of these behaviours were occurring less frequently while working remotely compared to working in the office. These attitudes may reflect the idea that communication and interactions were generally less frequent during remote working.



“[The] opportunity to be sexist is more limited when working remotely” - 45-54 year old female

“I think it is more difficult to directly discriminate based on someone's gender while working remotely because you are less likely to associate the person's gender with their work.” - 35-44 year old male

While individuals said that instances of sexism and sexual harassment were happening less frequently on average, a notable exception was the response to the question of whether they had witnessed “someone assuming, commenting, or indicating that someone is not committed to their job.” The perception that this had increased slightly may be driven by coronavirus related changes in work and schooling patterns, and restrictions in movement. For example, those with child-caring responsibilities might have experienced these types of comments due to the need for home-schooling, and the perception that this interrupted their work.



“People are more suspicious and questioning of colleagues work commitment and productivity” - 18-24 year old female

“Saying that people are not committed to their work position when having to do things like school pick up/drop off instead of working” - 45-54 year old male

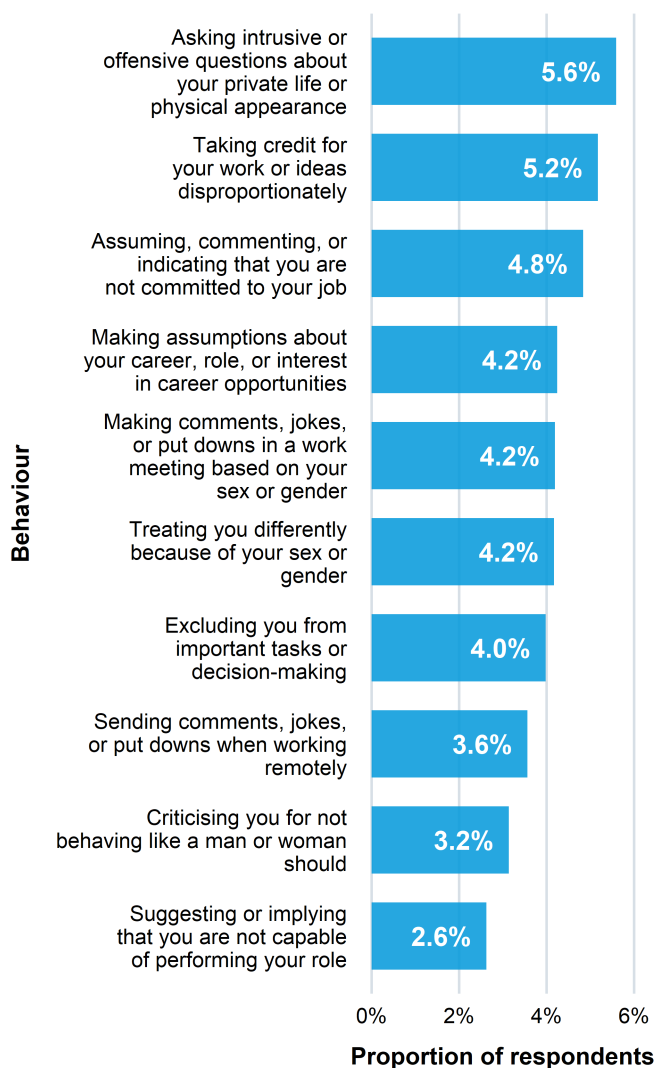


Understanding the drivers of change

The perceived decrease in sexism and sexual harassment is a hopeful sign. However, this research is just a first step to understanding what factors are driving this change. The shift to remote work from physical workplaces is complex, and it's not clear which changes are the ones responsible for the perceived decrease in inappropriate behaviours.

Further work should be undertaken in workplaces to understand the drivers of this change, and to design workplace interventions and programs to prevent sexism and sexual harassment as work returns to office environments full time or in hybrid models in 2021.

The rate at which workers experienced sexism and sexual harassment differs by behaviour



The most frequently reported behaviour experienced by participants was being asked intrusive or offensive questions about their private life or physical appearance (5.6%). Following this, the second most frequently experienced behaviour was someone taking credit for someone else's work, which 5.2% of our participants reported experiencing.

The least frequently experienced behaviours were someone suggesting or implying that one was not capable of performing their role (2.6%) and being criticised for not behaving in stereotypically gender conforming ways (3.2%).

Box 1: Comparison to the Australian Human Rights Commission's findings: Everyone's Business²³

The Australian Human Rights Commission found that 20% of Australians had been sexually harassed in the workplace in the past 12 months in a 2018 national survey of Australian workplaces.²⁴ Workplace sexual harassment was more likely to have happened to women (23%) rather than men (16%). While our findings show a comparable rate of Australians reporting sexism and sexual harassment, relative to this 2018 survey, there are notable methodological differences between the 2 surveys that make direct comparison problematic. For instance, the list of behaviours in our survey differed from those in the AHRC survey. The behaviours included in this survey were adapted to reflect behaviours that could occur in a remote setting (i.e. no in-person behaviours), but also included sexist behaviours — and therefore were broader than behaviours that are strictly classified as sexual harassment. The increase in remote working in 2020 may have impacted behaviours experienced and the rates at which they were witnessed by others. The timespan that participants were asked about also differs: the 2018 national survey asked about behaviours over the past 12 months, whereas our survey asked participants about behaviours over the last 8 months. It's also worthwhile mentioning that cultural trends could also have an impact beyond that of remote work, and that general shifts in behaviour, call out culture, and the Me Too movement may have impacted reports of sexism and sexual harassment since 2018.

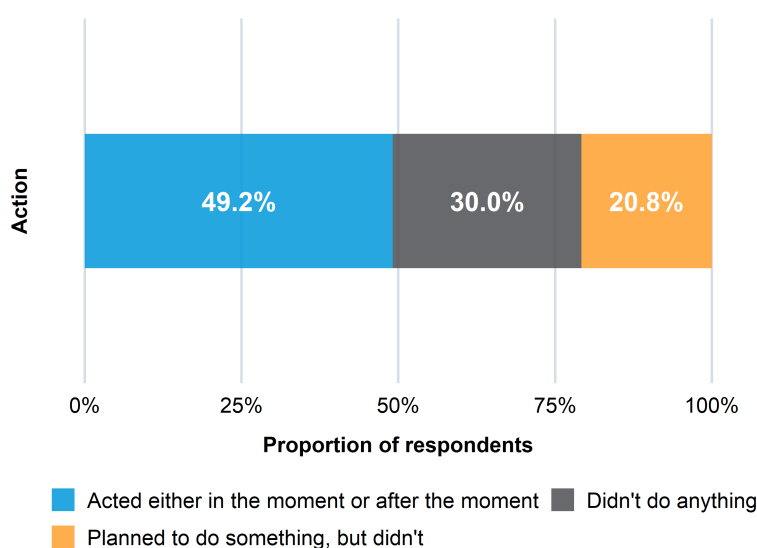
Victorians reported taking action at relatively high rates while working remotely

Our findings on taking action constitute some of the earliest available evidence of whether and how people take action against inappropriate behaviours in a remote workplace setting. Despite the novelty of the context for many workers and constraints on interpersonal communication, we found relatively high rates of taking action, and strong support for bystander intervention. This shows that there are opportunities in remote working contexts to experience or witness inappropriate behaviour and do something about it. Importantly, we found there might be differences in *when* individuals are likely to take action when working remotely, whereby remote workers were more likely to take action after the moment had passed. This suggests that a deliberative approach to taking action is more likely to occur in the remote workplace setting, and interventions and reporting channels should be designed to facilitate taking action at these times.

²³ Australian Human Rights Commission (2018). *Everybody's business: Fourth national survey on sexual harassment in Australian workplaces*.

²⁴ Australian Human Rights Commission (2018). *Everybody's business: Fourth national survey on sexual harassment in Australian workplaces*.

Half of those who experienced or witnessed sexism and sexual harassment took action



Of those who experienced or witnessed sexism and sexual harassment while working remotely between March - September 2020, approximately half took some form of action in response to the incident.

This includes acting in the moment (e.g. calling out someone for their behaviour immediately), or at any time after the moment (e.g. reporting the behaviour to a colleague days later).



"I spoke out against this, to call out the person alerting them to the fact that you can't speak like that. It's not on, it's disrespectful." - 35-44 year old male

This is a higher rate of individuals taking action compared to findings from a similar survey we conducted with university students on campus.²⁵ In 2019, BIT, VicHealth and the University of Melbourne conducted a randomised controlled trial using emails highlighting social norms regarding bystander intervention to increase bystander action against sexism and sexual harassment. In this trial, 32% of all staff and students who completed the survey reported actively bystander in the control group (those who did not receive any communications regarding bystander action; 42% reported bystander in the best-performing trial arm) after experiencing or witnessing sexism and sexual harassment.²⁶

While the university context is a different environment, there are some other reasons we might see differences, including general cultural shifts over time. Remote working contexts may lessen the perception of immediate repercussions for bystander action, given decreased physical proximity between the perpetrator, bystander, and target.

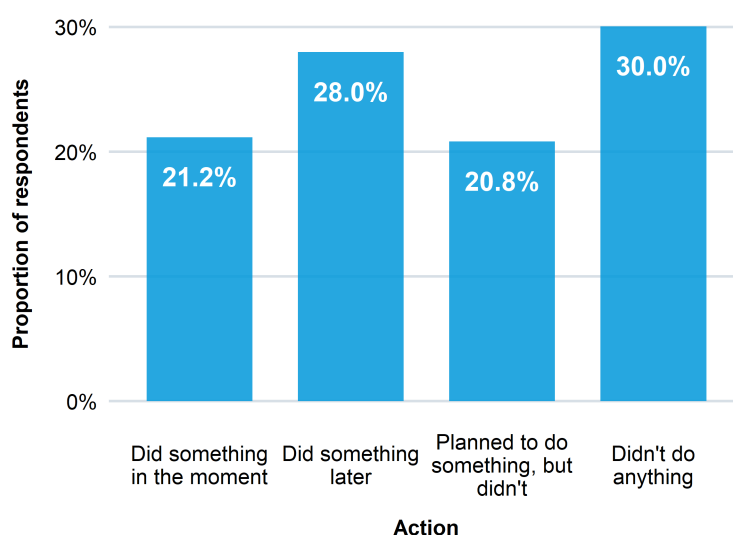
²⁵ The Victorian Health Promotion Foundation and The Behavioural Insights Team. (2019). *Take action: Empowering bystanders to act on sexist and sexually harassing behaviours in universities*.

²⁶ It is possible that we are seeing higher rates of taking action in this survey compared to bystander in the University of Melbourne trial (see footnote 24) based on how these concepts are defined; here we have defined taking action as intervening when you personally experience, or see or hear about sexism and sexual harassment. In contrast, in the University of Melbourne trial we defined bystander as taking action only if the participant saw or heard of sexism and sexual harassment happening to someone else. It is possible that rates of taking action are higher when the inappropriate behaviour is personally experienced (rather than only seen or heard about), thereby increasing our rates of taking action here relative to the University of Melbourne trial.

The familiar environment of one's own home may increase confidence to speak out.²⁷ Similarly, the nature of remote work platforms may provide a sense of security in that digital records can justify actions and reduce the ambiguity of a bystanding requirement. For example, a comment made using an instant messaging service is on record and can be more easily followed up on.

Those who experienced or witnessed sexism and sexual harassment were more likely to take action after the incident rather than in the moment

For those who experienced or witnessed online sexism and sexual harassment, 21% took action in the moment they witnessed the behaviour, and 28% took action after the moment had passed.



***"It was not an active decision to respond, it was reflex."
- 35-44 year old female***

***"I was a bit shocked and it took me time to process it
and decide what to do." - 55-64 year old female***

***"I thought about it for a few hours and then called my
manager about it to tell them that I was upset about
particular comments that were made to me even though
they were meant to be 'harmless'." - 25-34 year old
female***

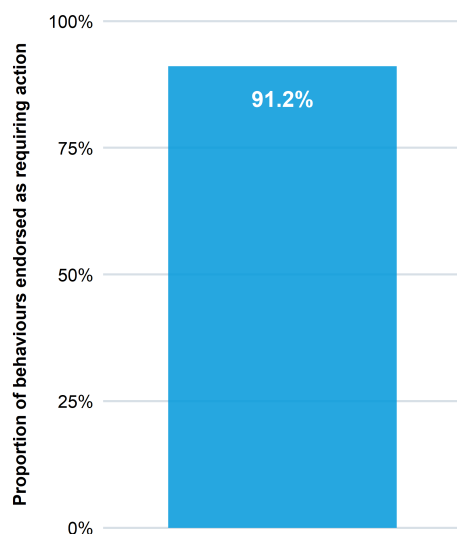
²⁷ Darley, J. M., & Latane, B. (1970). *The unresponsive bystander: why doesn't he help?* New York: Appleton Century Crofts.

Box 2: A two system model to explain bystander behaviour

Recent research has suggested that individuals have 2 internal approaches or 'systems' that govern how they react to inappropriate behaviours²⁸. One is a fast reaction of personal distress, which prevents bystander as it leads to people not wanting to involve themselves in an incident. The other is a slower process that builds sympathy toward others, which can initiate bystander action by overcoming the personal distress which people initially feel about taking action.

By putting more physical and psychological distance between individuals, remote working is likely to encourage more deliberation in taking action and may lead to greater instances of bystander.

Most participants agreed some form of action is needed after witnessing sexism and sexual harassment while working remotely



We found that 91% of participants agreed action is needed in the situations we asked about.

However, as outlined above, in reality individuals took action at much lower rates. This is likely due to the intention-action gap.

²⁸ Hortensius, R., & de Gelder, B. (2018). From Empathy to Apathy: The Bystander Effect Revisited. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 27(4), 249–256.

Box 3: The intention-action gap in intervening against sexism and sexual harassment

People's intentions often differ from their actual behaviour; this is called the intention-action gap. For example, people often say that they want to get more fit, but do not change their unhealthy habits or exercise routine. Closing the gap between intentions and actions would mean getting people to start changing their habits, thereby matching their behaviours to their intentions. There can be lots of reasons an intention-action gap exists in response to sexism and sexual harassment — for example, workers might feel uncomfortable speaking out in front of senior colleagues, or they might assume that another bystander has already taken action in response to an incident. Such circumstances can act as barriers to individuals fulfilling their intentions.

As shown in our findings above, Victorians agreed that some form of action is needed as a response to sexism and sexual harassment. However, when it comes to taking action, less than half of Victorians who were presented with an opportunity to take action actually did so. Behavioural insights offer a range of tools to help close this gap. For example, we know that if individuals rehearse an action plan to put into place if they witness sexism and sexual harassment, anticipating barriers to action and setting precise goals to overcome these, can help to bridge the intention-action gap and raise the chances of taking action in the future. This is a strategy known as implementation intentions.²⁹

Many people who considered acting did not follow through

Half of participants who experienced or witnessed sexism and sexual harassment did not take any action, although just under half of these participants (21%) said they planned or thought about doing something but did not follow through.



Capitalise on Victorians' plans to take action

In our survey, we found that a substantial proportion of Victorians (21%) planned or thought about acting but failed to do so.

This crucially shows that in the remote workplace setting, there are a number of individuals who gravitate toward action by planning to act, but who ultimately end up failing to do so.

If remote or hybrid work becomes more common, the intention-action gap will be an important target for intervention, as it is easier to motivate individuals who already consider acting, compared to those without this intention.

²⁹ van Hooft, E. A. J., Born, M. Ph., Taris, T. W., van der Flier, H., & Blonk, R. W. B. (2005). Bridging the gap between intentions and behavior: Implementation intentions, action control, and procrastination. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 66(2), 238–256.

Worryingly, 30% of all participants who reported experiencing or witnessing sexism and sexual harassment reported taking no action, which suggests there are still barriers to workers taking action in Victorian workplaces. We elaborate on some of the barriers to taking action in the next section of this report.



“I didn’t wish to be seen as petty or causing trouble.” - 35-44 year old female

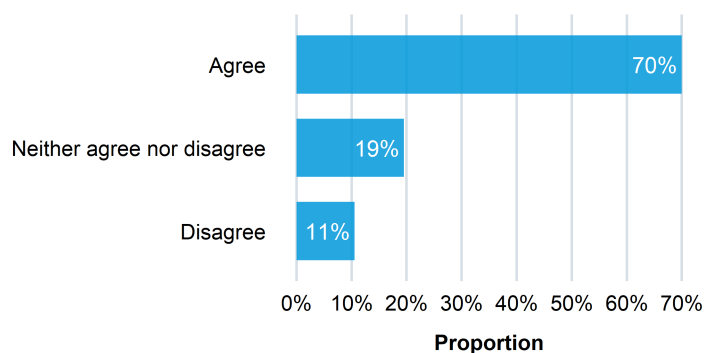
“I don’t want to seem overly sensitive.” - 18-24 year old female

“I am planning to leave the organisation [as] I can no longer be bothered with trying to improve my manager's behaviour.” - 55-64 year old male

Barriers to taking action

In order to close the intention-action gap and mobilise more Victorians into taking action against inappropriate behaviours, we need to understand the reasons that individuals decide not to take action. The barriers for intervening may be varied, but by identifying these we can understand whether they are common to many Victorians, and what types of strategies can be used to overcome them and encourage taking action.

Confidence to take action is not a substantial barrier to doing so



One prerequisite for taking action is having the knowledge and confidence to act. The majority of survey participants indicated that they were confident to do so. This suggests that confidence is not generally a substantial barrier to intervening when witnessing sexism and sexual harassment.

We asked participants specifically why they didn’t take action after experiencing, seeing or hearing about inappropriate behaviours. Three themes emerged from the responses provided:

- Participants were concerned about repercussions of their actions (an external barrier to action).
- There was a lack of organisational support to bring complaints against more senior staff (an external barrier to action).
- Participants lacked the motivation to act (an internal barrier to action).

Potential repercussions of taking action are a major barrier

By and large, most participants who reported not acting indicated that they were fearful of the repercussions of doing so. Specific repercussions that participants cited were diverse, but they often focused on the possibility of losing their job, or possible impacts on their career prospects. Some participants were less specific and thought that acting might cause general issues or stir up trouble. Other participants said that they didn't want to become targets of sexism and sexual harassment themselves.



"I worried that [reporting] will impact my job security and it's too troublesome going through the stress...it is not worth risking my job so I have stopped doing anything about it." - 35-44 year old female

These reports also fit in with the fast/slow system for taking action against sexism and sexual harassment outlined above (see Box 2) and show clearly how potential personal distress can be a powerful driver of avoidance behaviours for some individuals.

A lack of organisational support for taking action may also play a role

Participants also reported not acting when the perpetrator was in a higher or more senior role than the target or witness. While this might be related to fear of repercussions, it also shows that more effort is required to take action against a more senior perpetrator. This perhaps points toward a lack of organisational support for junior workers, and that the existing power dynamics in an organisation provide protection for those more senior. This is a theme which we elaborate on below (see section 5 of this report).



"I just couldn't be bothered trying to defend myself against the other person as they were in a higher role." - 18-24 year old female

A lack of motivation and diffusion of responsibility are major barriers to taking action

For other participants, it seemed that not acting after planning to do something was not an "active" decision, but occurred due to time passing, other priorities, distraction, or it being perceived as someone else's responsibility. These more apathetic reasons do not seem related to personal distress, and instead may reflect a lack of cultural norms that support taking action.



“I just got busy and someone else reported it first.” - 25-34 year old female

Box 4: Does a decrease in face-to-face communication during remote working facilitate or hamper reporting channels?

Our survey results show that Victorians working remotely still experienced and witnessed sexism and sexual harassment, and that 49% of these people took action in response. What we don't know is whether changes in the way teams and colleagues interact have reduced access to channels to report inappropriate behaviours or facilitated reporting by providing less confrontational environments. For example, targets of sexism and sexual harassment in remote work environments may experience less backlash when reporting the behaviour of a colleague with whom they no longer share a physical working environment. On the other hand, scheduling a meeting to explicitly report an inappropriate behaviour may be more of a barrier than being able to casually and informally begin the reporting process with a colleague.

If remote working is to become more common and sustained, it's vital that reporting channels appropriate for the right context are put in place. These could include soft approaches, like making sure colleagues have dedicated non-work catch-up time where they can choose to discuss and report inappropriate behaviours, or dedicated reporting channels on communications platforms. Workplaces could also provide workers with anonymous reporting channels for inappropriate workplace behaviours, such as the anonymous registrar for inappropriate behaviour at the University of Melbourne,³⁰ or the Ethos³¹ program at St Vincent's Hospital in New South Wales.

Workplace culture is a strong determinant of social norms and taking action

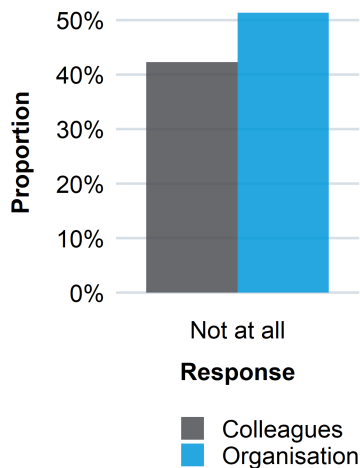
We spend the majority of our day at work, and therefore workplace cultures have a powerful opportunity to shape perceptions of appropriateness, and what is tolerated regarding sexism and sexual harassment. Workplace culture is affected bottom-up by the individuals that participate in an organisation, but also from the top-down, by policies and structures mandated by the organisation. Both are important to motivate changes in how workplaces address sexism and sexual harassment.

³⁰ The University of Melbourne. (n.d). *Anonymous Register for Inappropriate Behaviour*. Retrieved from https://unimelb.service-now.com/public?id=anonymous_register.

³¹ This program is currently being evaluated in a four year study to determine its effectiveness at reducing rates of unprofessional behaviour. Retrieved from <https://www.svhs.org.au/newsroom/svhns-news/st-vincent-launches-ethos>.

Victorians thought that their colleagues have a greater tolerance for inappropriate behaviour than their workplace

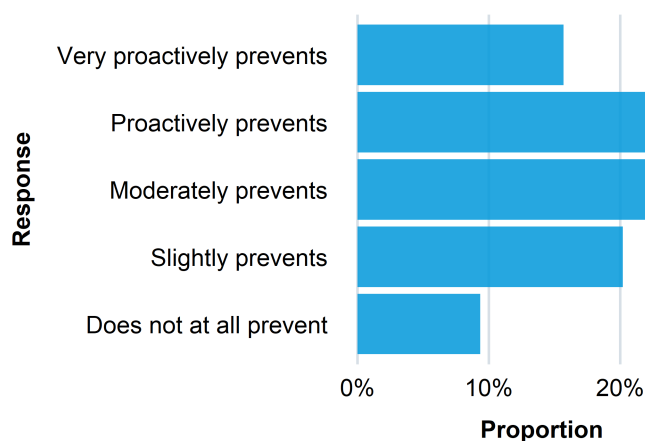
Participants indicated that workplaces are more likely to take a strong stance on inappropriate behaviour (i.e. they “don’t at all tolerate” inappropriate behaviour), compared to their colleagues.



This may reflect the fact that workplaces can hold a strong stance on particular issues, however individuals can differ in how much they tolerate any given behaviour. This may also be a by-product of the fact that individuals within a workplace may not be adhering to the policies in place, despite the workplace having a strong stance on inappropriate behaviour. This suggests that there is the potential for increasing uptake and adherence to policies related to inappropriate behaviour.

40% of workers thought that their workplace proactively prevents sexism and sexual harassment

While 40% of participants thought their workplaces proactively or very proactively prevent sexism and sexual harassment, a significant proportion of participants thought that their workplace does not proactively prevent inappropriate behaviour at all. This shows there is a need for workplaces to improve their efforts to prevent sexism and sexual harassment in remote working environments.





Individuals' attitudes are harder to change than workplace policies

Workplace culture can act as a significant barrier to tackling sexism and sexual harassment. Individuals will often behave in line with social norms, and even those that believe in taking action may be suppressed by their workplace's priorities and capacity to support targets and bystanders.

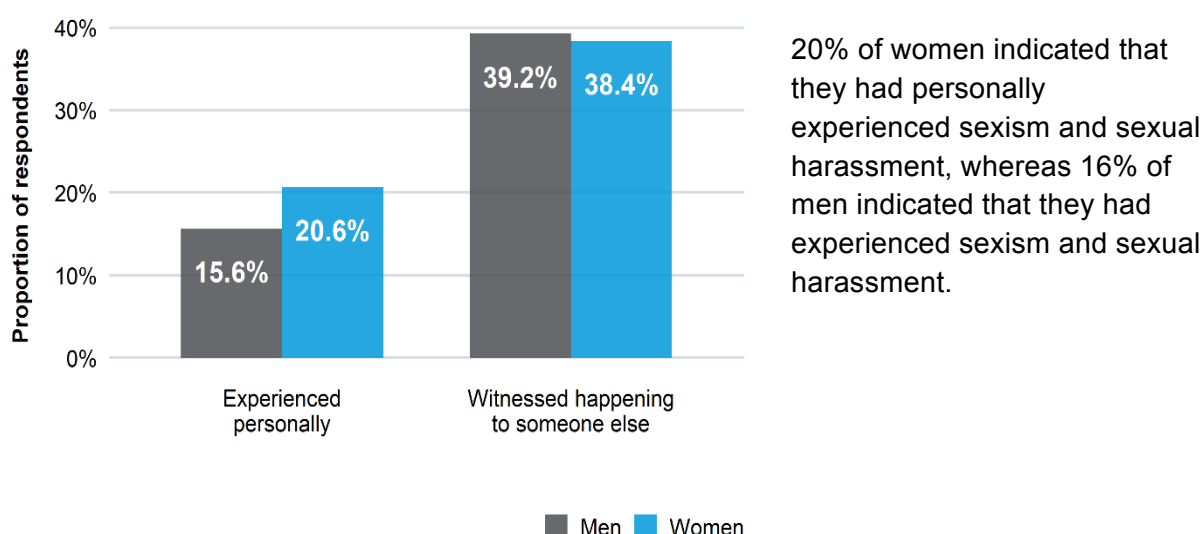
While cultural change can be both a bottom-up and top-down process, often the easiest way to make changes is at the top — i.e. leading by example. Our findings show there is still a way to go in terms of workplaces proactively preventing inappropriate behaviours, which provides a simple target for change.

03 / Key findings: Women and men's experiences of sexism and sexual harassment while working remotely

We found that women experienced sexism and sexual harassment at a greater rate than men. Specifically, 20% of women experienced sexism and sexual harassment during remote working compared to 16% of men. Interestingly, however, women thought that the frequency of inappropriate behaviours had decreased when working remotely, compared to men.³² This was the case across almost all the behaviours we asked about in the survey. This suggests that remote working may have benefits for women, although it's unclear what the exact cause of this might be.

Note that in our discussion of gender here we focus on women and men, as we did not have sufficient representation of gender-diverse individuals in our survey sample to speak to the experiences of gender-diverse individuals while working remotely.

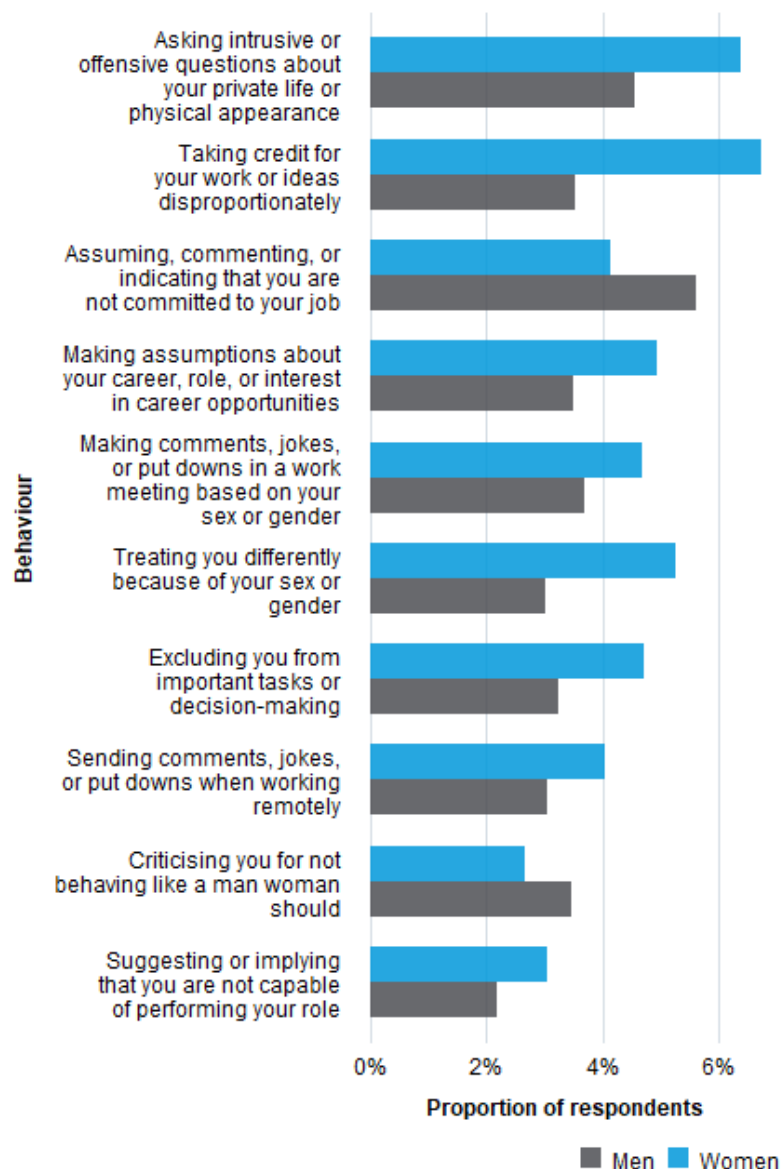
Women experienced sexism and sexual harassment at a greater rate than men



While women were more likely than men to indicate personally experiencing at least one sexist or sexually harassing behaviour, they were just as likely as men to report witnessing at least one of those behaviours over the same period.

³² However, our previous research in a university setting found that men were less likely than women to witness sexism and sexual harassment, and to recognise these behaviours as requiring a response. The Victorian Health Promotion Foundation and The Behavioural Insights Team. (2019). *Take action: Empowering bystanders to act on sexist and sexually harassing behaviours in universities*.

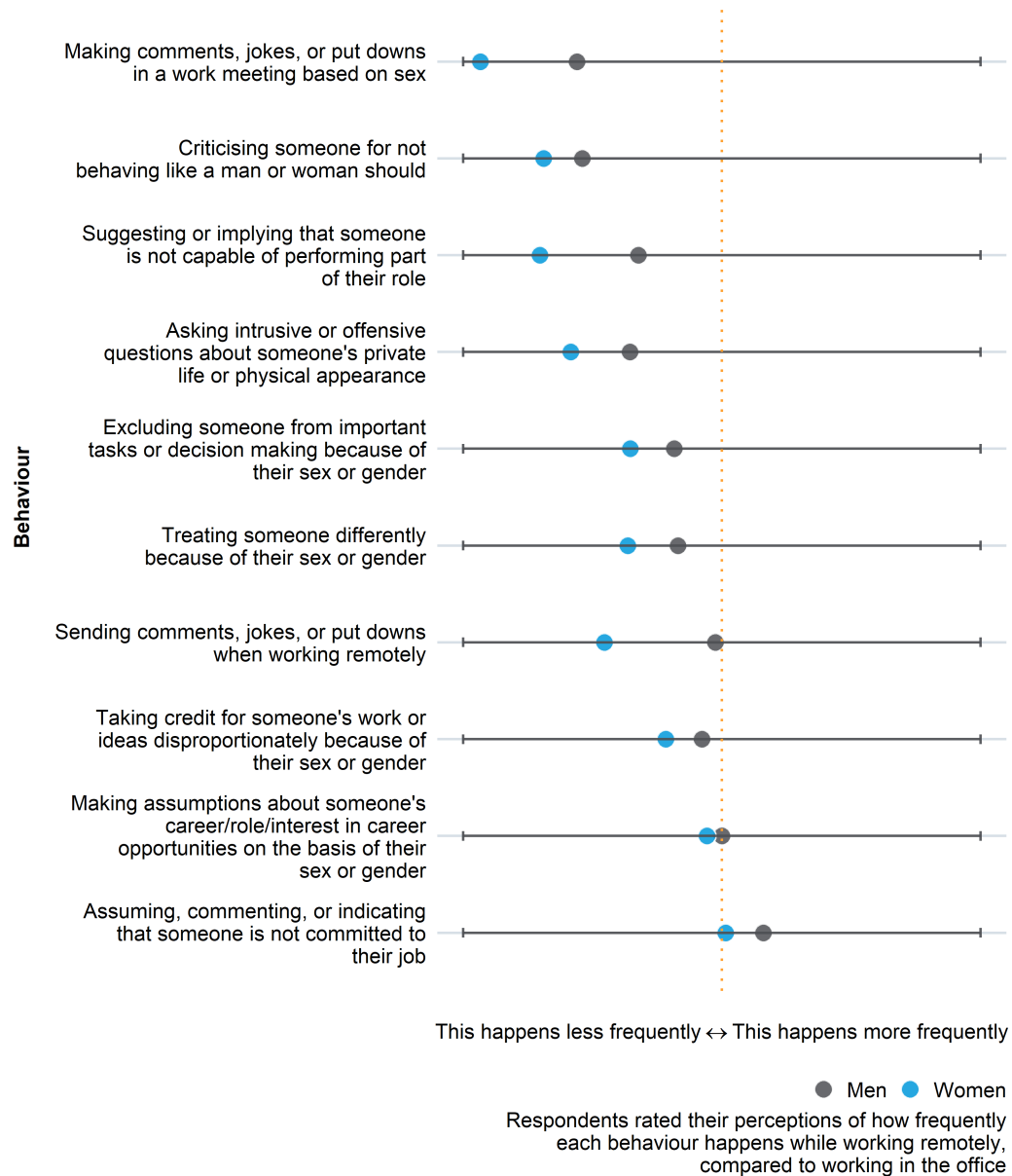
Women experienced almost all behaviours in the survey more than men



Women experienced almost all specific behaviours at higher rates than men. The 2 exceptions were “assuming, commenting, or indicating that you are not committed to your job”, and “Criticising you for not behaving like a man or woman should”, which men experienced more than women.

One possible explanation for this is that during remote working, men are more likely to be involved in domestic and childcare roles. This could conflict with the expectations for men’s job commitments and increase the incidence of these behaviours being targeted at men.

Women believed sexism and sexual harassment had decreased while working remotely



Across all the inappropriate behaviours surveyed, women were more likely to think that sexism and sexual harassment were occurring less frequently while working remotely, compared to men. This decrease in perceived frequency was the case for almost all behaviours surveyed. While men also thought sexism and sexual harassment had decreased while working remotely, they believed that this had decreased less than women did. This suggests that remote working may have benefits for women, although it's unclear what the exact cause of this might be.



Women experience more inappropriate behaviours

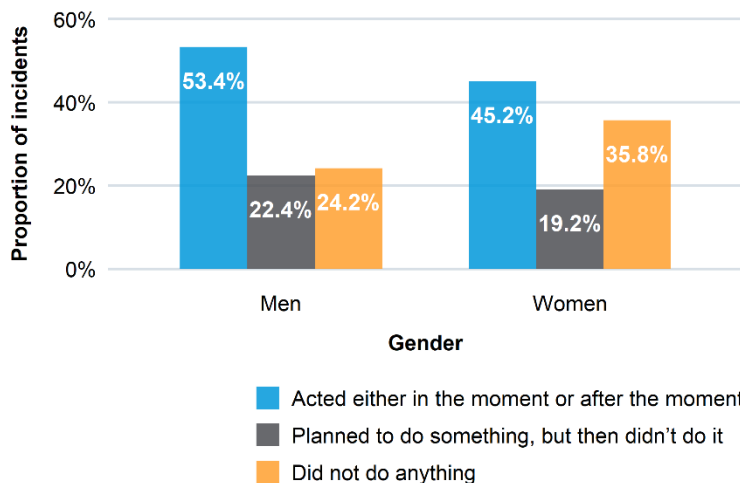
While the decrease in perceived frequency of sexism and sexual harassment for women is encouraging, it's vital to note that women still experienced sexism and sexual harassment at higher rates than men.

This continues to point to the long-standing gender disparity in these behaviours and should be taken into account as workplaces start to implement their obligations under the Gender Equality Act.

Men reported an increase in someone assuming that they were not committed to their jobs during remote working

The only behaviour that participants thought was happening more frequently under remote working conditions was someone assuming, commenting or indicating that they were not committed to their job. This increase was entirely driven by men — women indicated this happened equally as often while working remotely and working in the office. This supports men's reported experience of this behaviour (discussed above).

Men and women took action at comparable rates after experiencing or witnessing sexism and sexual harassment



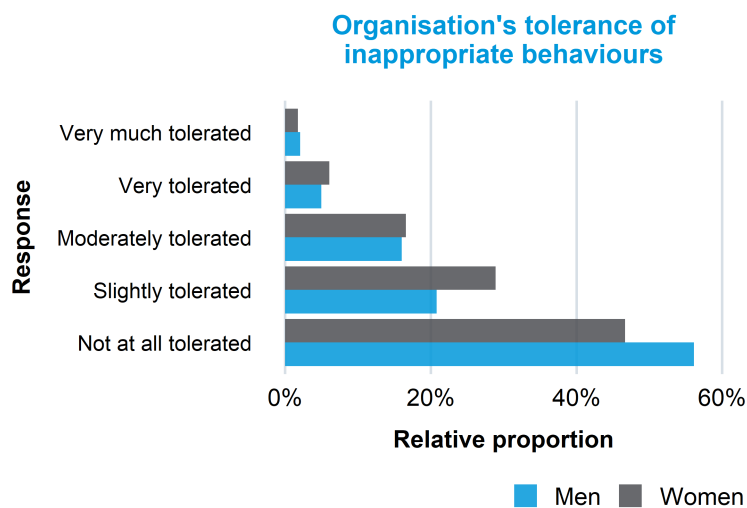
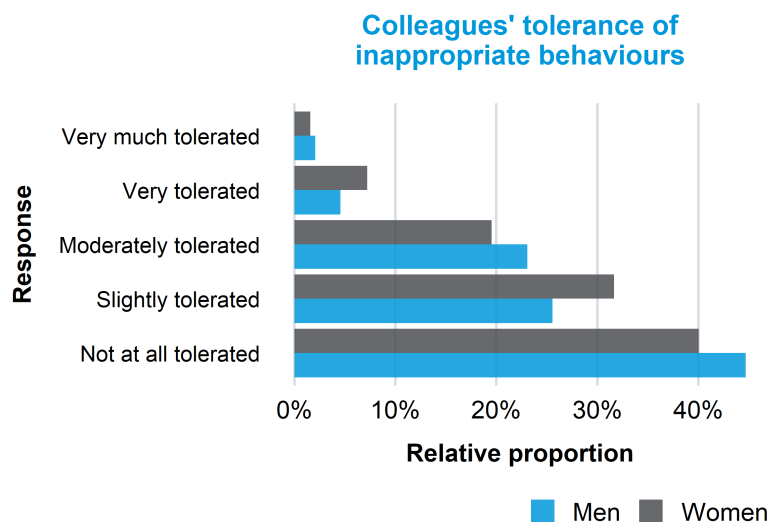
Both women and men reported acting, either in the moment or after an incident, at similar rates. Men responded to an incident at slightly greater rates than women, with 53% of men and 45% of women reporting taking action.

However, this slight increase in the number of men taking action relative to women is likely because women reported personally experiencing sexism and sexual harassment at much greater rates than men. Thus, the increased proportion of incidents where women did not take action (35%) could be due to them being the target of inappropriate behaviour more frequently, potentially making it more difficult to take action.

and sexual harassment at much greater rates than men. Thus, the increased proportion of incidents where women did not take action (35%) could be due to them being the target of inappropriate behaviour more frequently, potentially making it more difficult to take action.

Women were more likely to report that their workplace culture tolerates inappropriate behaviours

Women were more likely to report that both their colleagues and their organisation were more tolerant of inappropriate behaviour than men. This suggests that women don't think workplace culture is doing enough against sexism and sexual harassment under remote working conditions.



04 / Key findings: Younger workers' experiences of sexism and sexual harassment while working remotely

We know that the coronavirus has posed many unique challenges for young people. A 2020 survey investigating the impacts of the coronavirus on 25,800 young Australians found that 27% had been treated unfairly in the past year.³³ Young people have also reported increased feelings of loneliness, isolation, and negative mental health since the onset of the pandemic³⁴.

This chapter highlights our findings related to younger workers' experiences of sexism and sexual harassment while working remotely in Victoria. Here we define younger workers as those aged between 18-34.

Overall, we found that younger workers experienced and witnessed sexism and sexual harassment at greater rates than older workers while working remotely. Specifically, 1 in 4 younger workers reported personally experiencing sexism and sexual harassment, and half of all younger workers reported seeing or hearing about sexism and sexual harassment at work.

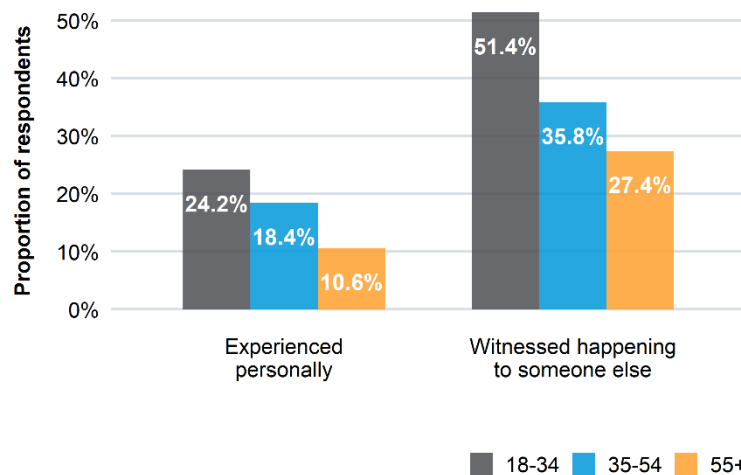
We also found that younger workers were more likely to report planning to take action, but not doing so, compared to older workers. This was potentially due to younger workers' perceived ability to intervene — only 60% of younger workers reported feeling that they have the skills and knowledge to support a colleague, and 15% of young workers disagreed that they would feel confident knowing what to do if they saw a colleague being treated inappropriately.

These findings suggest that younger workers are particularly vulnerable to experiencing or witnessing sexism and sexual harassment while working remotely. However, there are clear pathways to helping younger workers take action in response to these behaviours, such as closing the intention-action gap (see Box 3) and providing them with the skills and knowledge to support their colleagues.

³³ Mission Australia. (2020). *Annual Youth Survey Report 2020*.

³⁴ The Victorian Health Promotion Foundation. (2020). *Young people coping with coronavirus: interim report*.

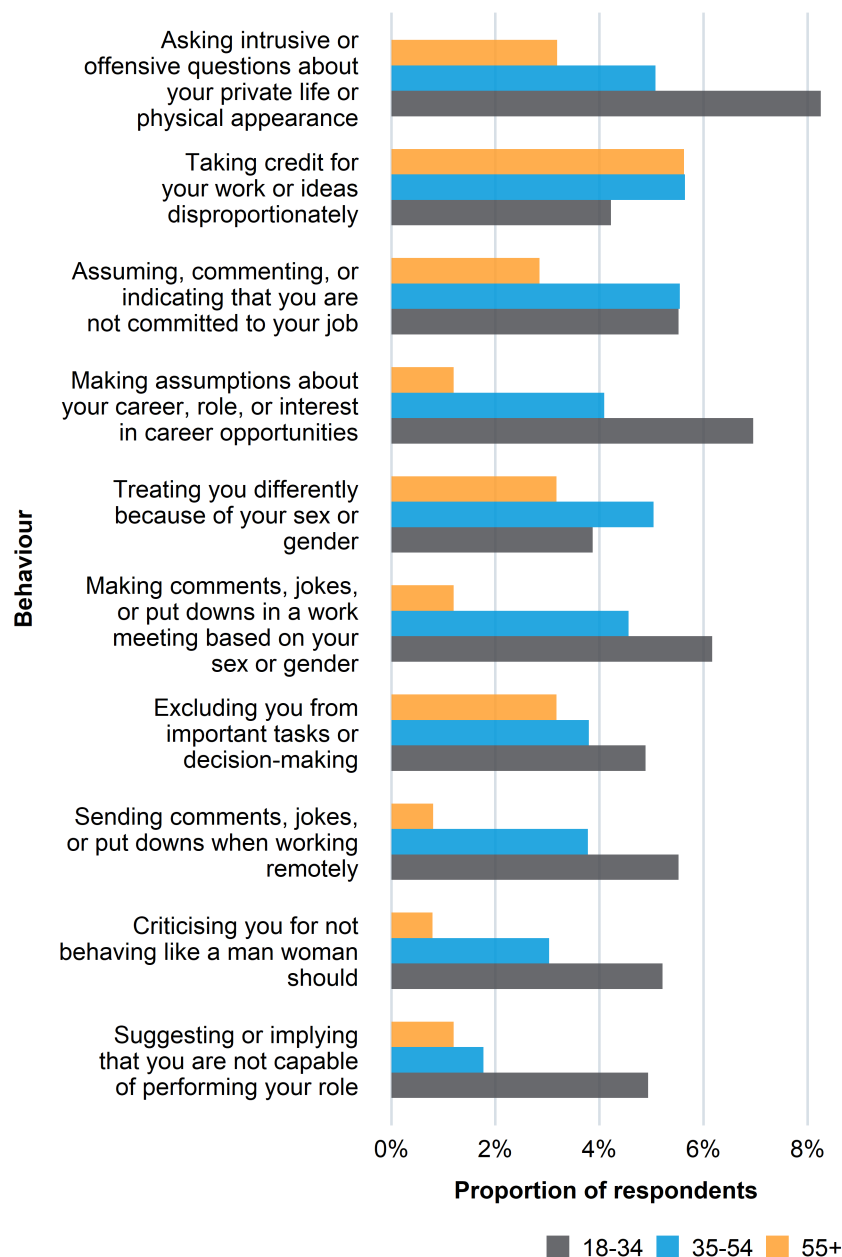
1 in 4 younger workers experienced sexism and sexual harassment, and half of younger workers witnessed sexism and sexual harassment while working remotely



Younger workers (aged 18-34) were particularly exposed to instances of online sexism and sexual harassment relative to older workers (aged over 35) during remote working.

Our findings suggested that 1 in 4 younger workers personally experienced sexism and sexual harassment while working remotely. In addition, 51% of all workers aged between 18-34 reported witnessing sexism and sexual harassment while working remotely. The number of young workers experiencing and witnessing sexism and sexual harassment while working remotely is notably higher than the average rates of experiencing and witnessing sexism and sexual harassment (reported in Section 3).

Younger people were most likely to be asked intrusive questions about their private life, or have assumptions made about their career or interests



Workers aged between 18-34 reported experiencing most behaviours more often than older workers. Specifically, younger workers reported experiencing being asked intrusive questions about their private life, having assumptions made about their career or interests, being criticised for not behaving in stereotypical ways based on their gender, and it being suggested or implied that they are not capable of performing their role.

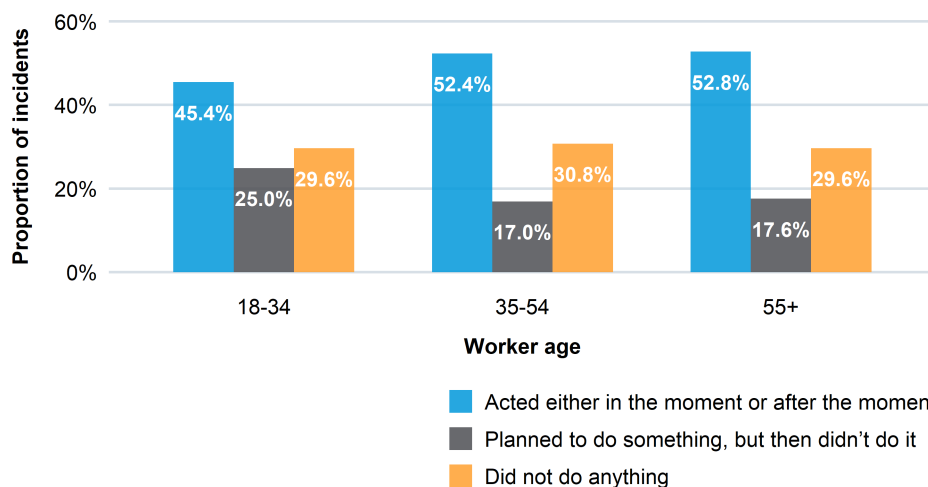


Younger workers are more vulnerable to sexism and sexual harassment

Younger workers were exposed to greater numbers of sexist and sexually harassing behaviours compared to older workers. This is particularly problematic as younger workers are often more vulnerable in the workplace, often being lower in seniority and experience.

Young people are also less likely to have the skills, knowledge and confidence to take action in response to witnessing an incident of sexism and sexual harassment. By targeting interventions for young people, workplaces will reduce harms experienced by those most vulnerable, and empower those most likely to witness or hear about an incident. Future workplaces should therefore seek to equip younger workers with strategies to take action against sexism and sexual harassment.

Younger workers were more likely to report planning to take action in response to sexism and sexual harassment, but not following through



Younger workers were slightly less likely to take action in response to an incident (45%), compared to older workers (52%).

This reduced rate of taking action is despite younger workers having both experienced and witnessed sexism and sexual harassment, more often than older workers.

The reduction in rates of taking action for younger workers was driven by younger workers indicating more often that they planned to take action, but did not do so, compared to older workers. The reason for this change of mind for younger workers may be varied, but could be due to perceived repercussions, lack of experience in taking action, or a lack of skills or confidence to do so.

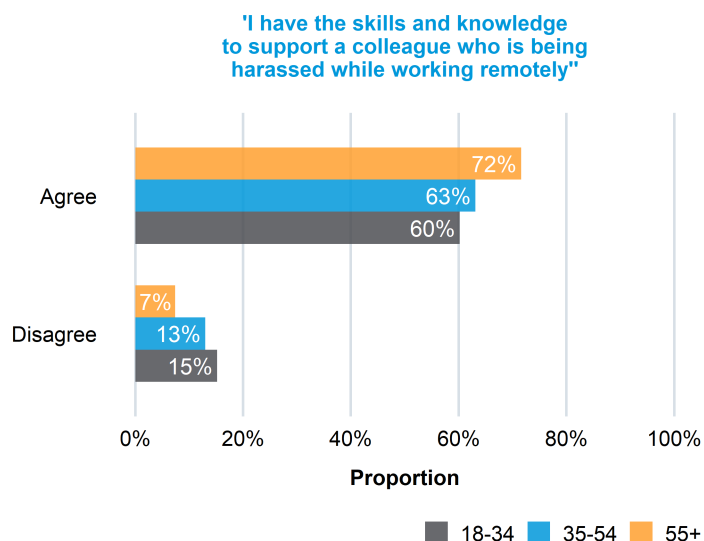


“It was too hard to prove and too intimidating.” - 25-34 year old female

“Leadership should be doing stuff first — I wanted to observe and see if management would act before I do.” - 25-34 year old female

“It is hard to get hold of my manager and I am very new and reluctant to cause any drama.” - 18-24 year old female

40% of younger workers felt they do not have the skills and knowledge to take action in response to sexism and sexual harassment



Younger workers were slightly less likely to take action compared to older workers if they experienced or witnessed sexism and sexual harassment while working remotely, and this is also reflected in younger workers' reports of lower skills, knowledge and confidence to do so.

Only 60% of younger workers agreed that they personally had the skills and knowledge to support their colleagues who were being harassed. This number rose to 72% for workers aged 55 years and over.

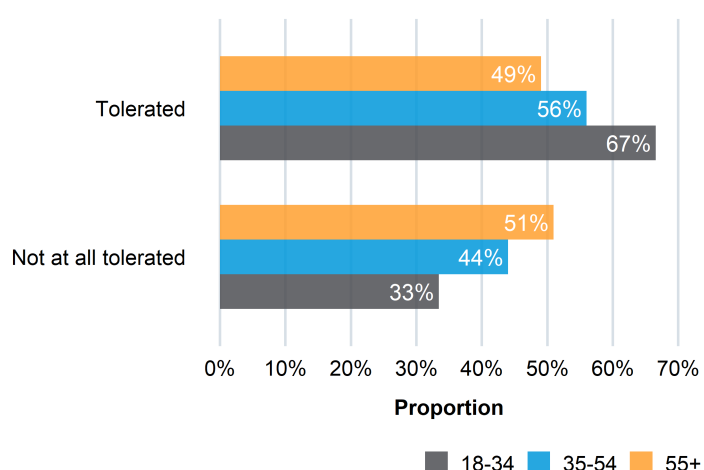


Motivate and equip younger workers to take action

Younger workers were more likely to plan to take action but not follow through with their plans compared to older workers. Employing behavioural strategies known to help close this intention-action gap may be a useful tool to promote action in younger workers.

Implementation intentions (as discussed in Box 3) could be used to encourage younger workers to make specific plans about how they will act, if they witness sexism and sexual harassment while working remotely.

Younger workers were more likely to believe that colleagues tolerate inappropriate behaviours in their workplace, compared to older workers



67% of younger workers indicated that their colleagues tolerate inappropriate behaviours in the workplace. This number is lower for older workers: 49% of all workers aged 55 and over believed that their colleagues tolerate inappropriate behaviours in the workplace.

This difference is potentially based on actual experiences — young workers were more likely to have experienced and witnessed sexism and sexual harassment, and this likely had an impact on their perceptions of their colleagues' acceptance of such behaviours.

05 / Key findings: The impact of workplace composition and structure on experiences of sexism and sexual harassment

In this section we focus on characteristics of the workplace and how this may influence reported experiences of sexism and sexual harassment while working remotely. Specifically, we examine the impact of seniority (i.e. seniority of a worker's role), levels of education, and the sector of the economy that the worker is employed in.

A major finding in this section is that entry-level workers reported experiencing sexism and sexual harassment at greater rates than more senior workers. We also found that senior workers felt more secure taking action in response to these behaviours.



Junior workers need support, but senior workers have the power

Our analysis revealed some interesting disparities in both experiences of sexism and sexual harassment, and rates of taking action in response to incidents. These disparities suggest a responsibility gradient, whereby those in junior positions experienced sexism and sexual harassment at particularly high levels, but that those in the workplace with power were only taking action at slightly above average levels, despite their unique opportunity to do so.

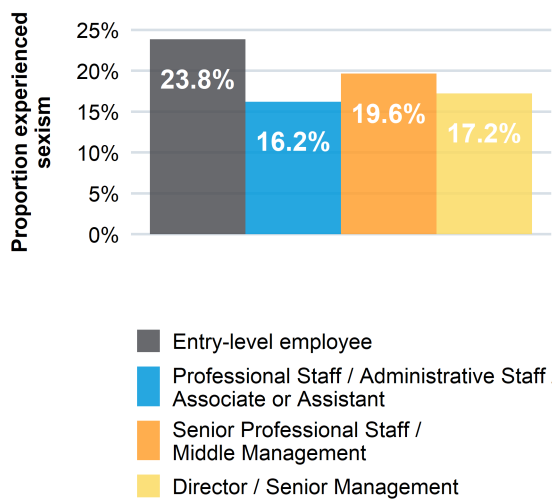
Workplaces should explore opportunities to both encourage more senior workers to take further action and remove barriers to entry-level workers doing so.

Seniority within the workplace

In this survey we asked participants to indicate their level of seniority in the employment that serves as their primary source of income. Our sample comprised of:

- Entry-level workers: 15%
- Professional staff / administrative staff / associate or assistant: 50%
- Senior professional staff / middle management: 23%
- Director / senior management: 12%

Entry-level workers faced sexism and sexual harassment at greater rates than their colleagues while working remotely

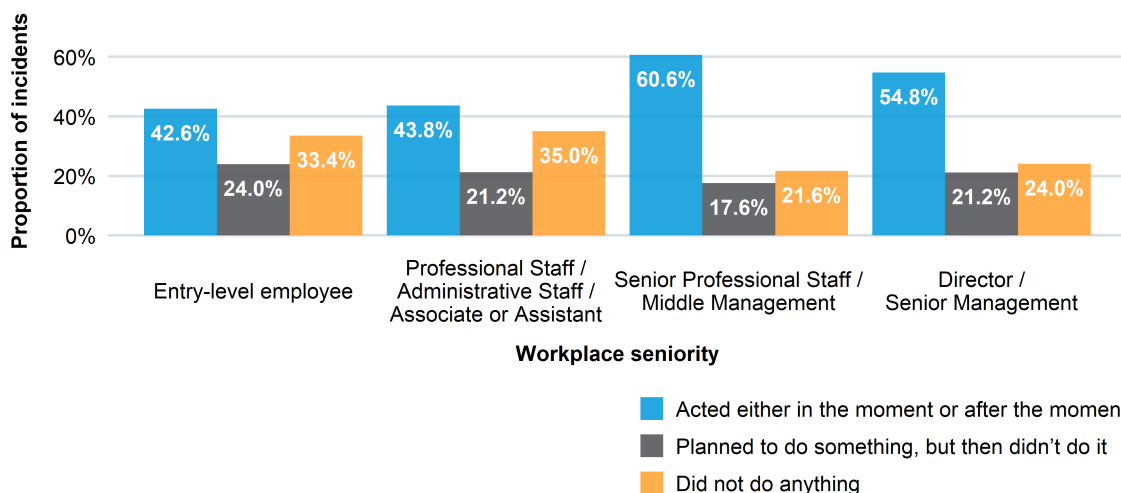


24% of entry-level workers reported experiencing sexism and sexual harassment while working remotely, which was above the average rate of 18% across all Victorians. In contrast, 16% of professional staff and 17% of senior management reported experiencing sexism and sexual harassment while working remotely.

It is possible that the disparity in experiencing sexism and sexual harassment for entry-level workers was due to the types of roles that these workers usually fill, including customer- and public-facing roles. This suggests that

entry-level workers are uniquely exposed to sexism and sexual harassment, and that this may be due to their working arrangements.

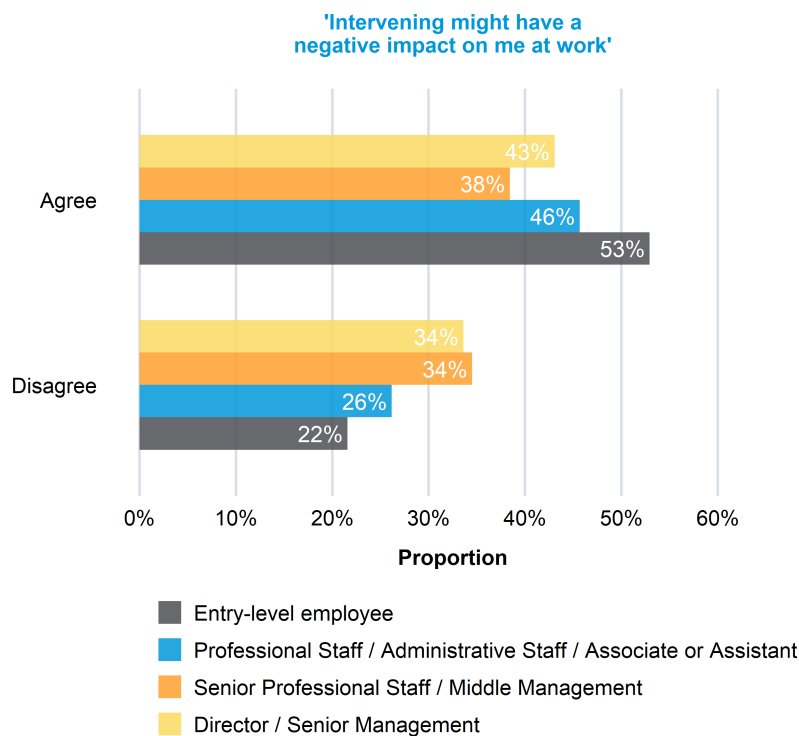
Rates of taking action were lower in entry-level and professional staff roles, compared to in middle and senior management



Rates of taking action for entry-level workers and professional / administrative staff / associates or assistants were lower than rates of taking action for more senior workers in Victorian workplaces. 60% of senior professional staff / middle management reported acting either in or after the moment in response to an incident. In contrast, only 42% of entry-level workers reported taking action — despite entry-level workers experiencing sexism and sexual harassment while working remotely at the highest rates, they took action at the lowest rates.

While it is encouraging that 60% of more senior workers took action, it appears that one reason there is a disparity in the rates of action between entry level and senior workers is that entry-level workers believed that taking action could have a negative impact on them.

Over half of entry-level workers believed that intervening after seeing or hearing about sexism and sexual harassment at work could have a negative impact on them



The proportion of entry-level workers that were concerned about consequences of intervening on their work was 53%. This proportion was below 50% for all other levels of seniority in the workplace. This suggests that a belief in the negative impacts of intervening is a barrier to doing so for many workers.

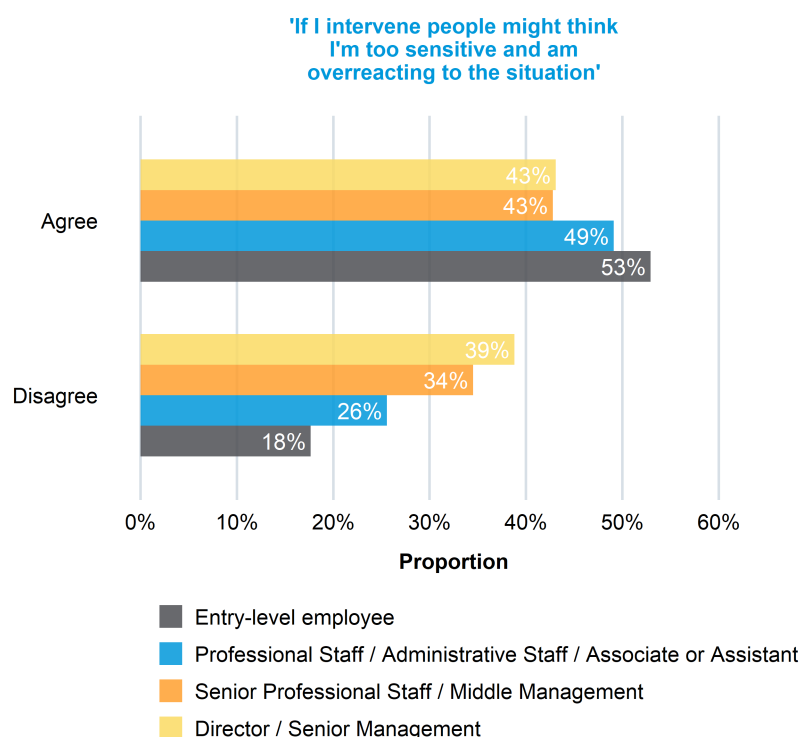
This finding is reinforced by participant responses indicating that many did not take action after experiencing, seeing or hearing about sexism and sexual harassment due to the perceived repercussions of them doing so. For entry-level workers, the threat of repercussions is particularly worrying, as they are more likely to be in less secure employment or in casual positions where they are reliant on rostering for shifts. These positions could lead them to be in a precarious position should they need to take action after experiencing or witnessing sexism and sexual harassment.



"I chose not to speak up for fear of being victimised." - 25-34 year old female

"I did not want to draw more attention to myself, and the risk of being sent back into the office, and no longer having the work from home option." - 35-44 year old female

Senior leadership didn't think they would be perceived negatively when intervening



40% of participants who occupy the most senior roles in the organisation thought that they wouldn't be perceived as sensitive or overreacting if they intervened. In contrast, 53% of entry-level workers thought that they themselves could be perceived as sensitive or overreacting to the situation if they intervened.

The fact that senior leadership are not perceived negatively for intervening, places them in a unique position to set the culture of an organisation and lead from the front by modelling positive behaviours. This could help to encourage a culture of acceptance of taking action.



Encouraging senior leaders to foster positive workplace cultures

The fact that senior leadership are not perceived negatively for intervening places them in a unique position. Senior leadership should set the culture of an organisation and lead from the front by modelling positive behaviours. This could help to encourage a culture of acceptance of taking action.

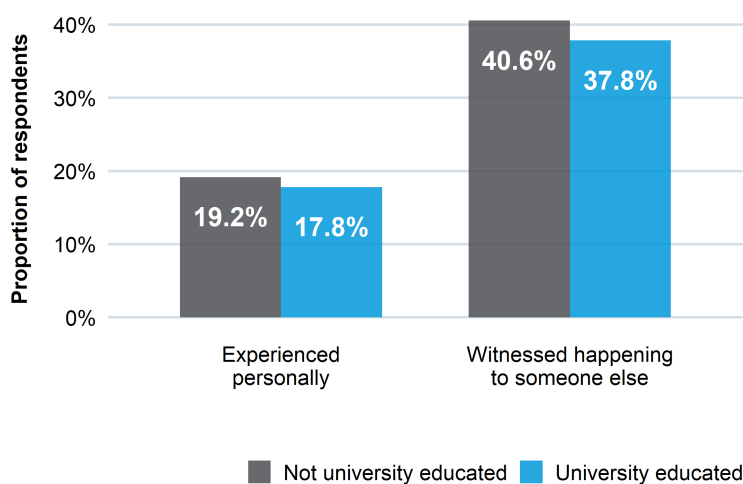
Worker education levels

To understand the impact of the education level of workers on their experiences of sexism and sexual harassment while working remotely, we looked at participants' highest level of education achieved, and categorised these based on whether the participant had obtained a degree or certificate at a university level or above or not.

Table 5: Participant categories by level of education

Not university educated	University educated
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have not completed high school Completed high school Certificate level (Certificate 1-4) Advanced Diploma or Diploma 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bachelor's degree Graduate diploma or certificate Post-graduate degree: Masters or PhD

Rates of experiencing and witnessing sexism and sexual harassment while working remotely were roughly equivalent for university-educated and non-university educated workers

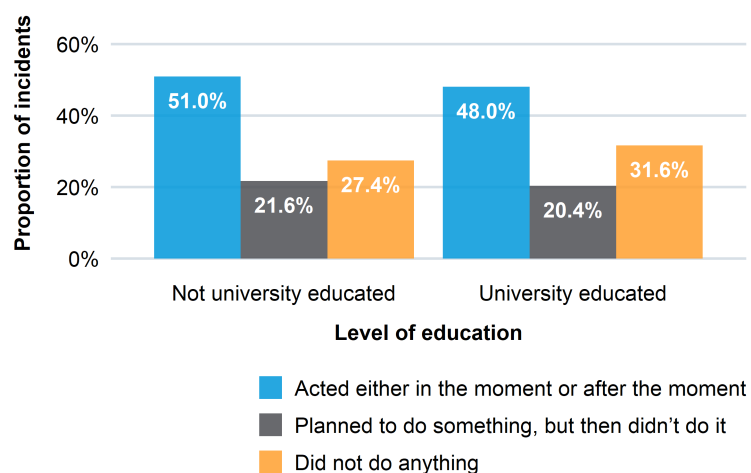


University-educated workers and those without a university education reported experiencing sexism and sexual harassment at similar rates.

Likewise, rates of witnessing sexism and sexual harassment were roughly equivalent for university-educated and non-university educated workers. 38% of participants with a university-level education and 41% of workers without a

university education saw or heard about sexism and sexual harassment happening to someone else while working remotely.

University-educated participants took action at equivalent rates to those without a university education



The rates of taking action for university educated and non-university educated workers were approximately equal. For incidents that university educated, and non-university educated workers experienced or witnessed, approximately half took some sort of action either in or after the moment.

Sector of the economy

For the purposes of understanding how specific types of workers experienced sexism and sexual harassment while working remotely, we combined participants across sectors of the economy.³⁵ This allowed us to investigate the experiences of workers while maintaining sufficient sample sizes within each broad category of work to ensure that the results are not influenced by small samples and outliers.³⁶

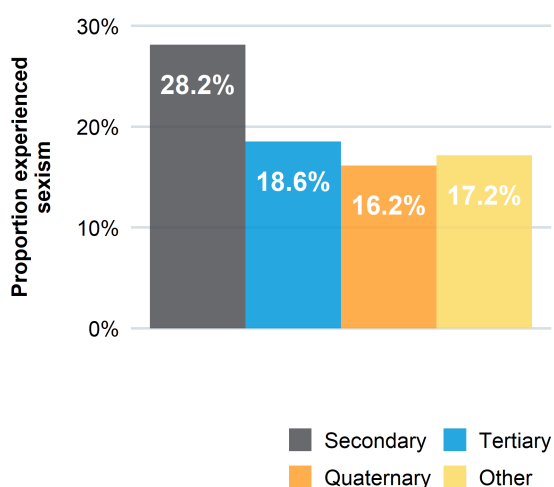
Table 6: participants categorized by the sector of the economy in which they work

Grouping and Definition	Industries
Primary: This involves the extraction and production of raw materials <i>(omitted from analyses due to small sample size)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agriculture, forestry and fishing • Mining
Secondary: This involves using raw materials to create finished goods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manufacturing • Electricity, gas, water and waste services • Construction
Tertiary: This involves the sale of the goods produced by the secondary sector, and the provision of commercial services to the general population and business across the economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wholesale trade • Retail trade • Accommodation and food services • Transport, postal and warehousing • Information media and telecommunications • Financial and insurance services • Rental, hiring and real estate services
Quaternary: This sector is often called the knowledge sector, and involves research and development, and intellectual activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professional, scientific and technical services • Administrative and support services • Public administration and safety • Education and training • Health care and social assistance • Arts and recreation services
Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Other services

³⁵ This aggregation was created using sectors of the economy, which divides economies into sectors of activity; this was done based on extensions to the three-sector model in economics. This aggregation was chosen to ensure that the sample sizes within each grouping were sufficient to understand the experiences and actions of those within each of these categories.

³⁶ Note that for the subsequent results, we have omitted participants who indicated that they work in Primary industries due to small sample size.

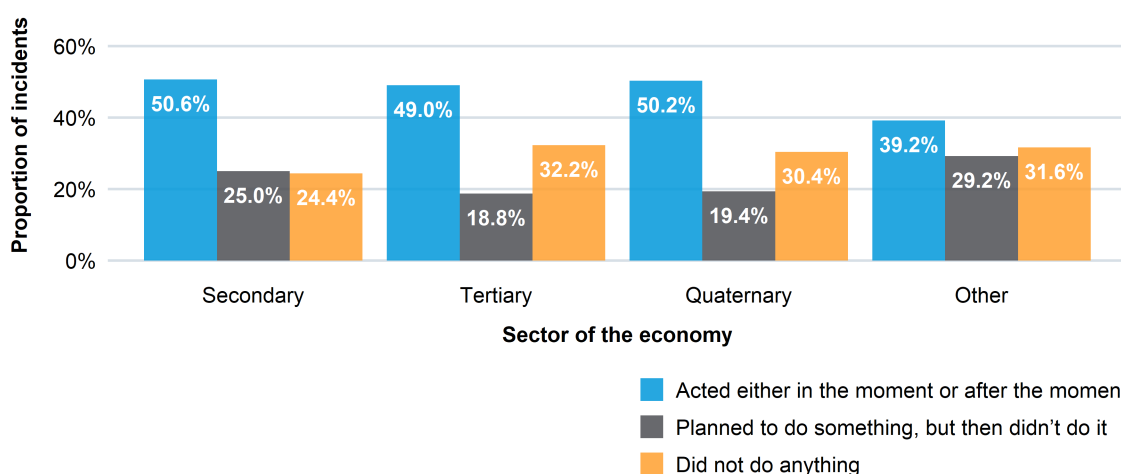
Workers in the secondary sector of the economy were exposed to sexism and sexual harassment at above average rates



Close to 1 in 3 workers in the manufacturing, electricity, gas, water and waste services, and constructions industries reported experiencing sexism and sexual harassment while working remotely. This rate of exposure was well above the average of 18%.

It is important to note that only one of these industries in the secondary sector of the economy (electricity, gas, water and waste services) has previously been identified as an industry where sexual harassment occurs at above average rates.³⁷

Rates of actions taken in response to incidents did not differ across sectors of the economy



The rates of taking action for incidents experienced by workers across different sectors of the economy did not differ meaningfully by sector, except where workers reported that they worked in “Other services”. Those working in “Other services” reported lower rates of taking action in response to sexism and sexual harassment both in and after the moment. However, it is not possible to indicate which industries or sectors participants in this category were employed in.

³⁷ Australian Human Rights Commission (2018). *Everybody's business: Fourth national survey on sexual harassment in Australian workplaces*.



More should be done to address sexism and sexual harassment in problematic sectors

Workers in the secondary sector — manufacturing, electricity, gas, water and waste services, and constructions industries — experienced sexism and sexual harassment at the greatest rate.

Workplaces across these sectors should ensure that interventions are introduced to prevent these behaviours and help workers respond to them effectively.

06 / Recommendations for policy makers and workplaces

Sexism and sexual harassment continue to take place at high rates in remote working environments, with 1 in 5 Victorians experiencing sexism and sexual harassment, and 1 in 3 Victorians seeing or hearing about sexism and sexual harassment happening to others.

Employees who experience sexism and sexual harassment may face negative consequences as a result, including negative impacts on their wellbeing and career advancement.³⁸ While sexism and sexual harassment can happen to anybody, some workers are more likely to be exposed to sexism and sexual harassment while working remotely, such as women, younger workers, and entry-level workers. It is important to support the targets of sexism and sexual harassment to mitigate the harms associated with these experiences. Workplaces should ensure that effective support is available for all workers, but in particular for those most likely to experience these behaviours. Support could include providing counselling, anonymous advice lines, increased paid time off, and giving staff control over the process should they wish to report an incident.

Synthesising the results of our survey, we distilled 3 further actions that policy makers and workplaces should take — so that Victorians can prevent and respond effectively to sexism and sexual harassment in remote working environments in 2021 and beyond.



Recommendation 1: Encourage bystander action in response to sexism and sexual harassment during remote working

Harnessing the power of bystanders is a powerful way to address sexism and sexual harassment in the workplace. The results of our survey show that 91% of Victorians agreed that some form of action is needed after witnessing sexism and sexual harassment. However, half of participants did not take any action in response to an incident that they experienced or witnessed. Just under half of these participants (21%) said they planned or thought about doing something, but did not follow through.³⁹ This suggests there is some work to be done to support workers who witness sexism and sexual harassment to close the intention action gap (see Box 3) and become active bystanders.

³⁸ Australian Human Rights Commission. (2020). *National Inquiry into Sexual Harassment in Australian Workplaces*; Sojo, V. E., Wood, R. E., & Genat, A. E. (2016). Harmful workplace experiences and women's occupational well-being: A meta-analysis. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 40(1), 10-40.

³⁹ We note that these numbers relate to participants who both experienced or witnessed sexism and sexual harassment.

Our previous work at the University of Melbourne found that **highlighting social norms stating that the majority of individuals approve of taking action in response to inappropriate behaviours led to increased bystander behaviour**.⁴⁰ We found that the following norms were effective at increasing bystander action when sent by email to a sample comprising primarily of university students:

*“Most of us studying on campus think it’s right to call someone out for making sexist jokes or comments...
And 78% said they themselves would intervene if they saw sexism and sexual harassment on campus.
It’s important that you call it out next time you hear it.”*

Workplaces should create an organisation-wide social norms email campaign which communicates that the majority of Victorian workers approve of bystander action. To do this, workplaces can refer to the bystander email campaign toolkit previously developed by VicHealth and BIT, which details step by step instructions on how to implement such a campaign.⁴¹

Encouraging workers to make specific plans about how they will respond if they witness sexism and sexual harassment when working remotely, is another powerful way to bridge the intention-action gap. Plans to act are most effective when they are specific and realistic. Getting workers to think through what they are most likely to witness in their role, how that will make them feel, and any obstacles to taking action they may have, is more likely to bridge the intention-action gap. For example, this could take the form of an ‘If-Then plan’ such as: “If I see someone asking intrusive questions about someone’s private life, then I will enter the conversation and say, ‘I don’t think those questions are appropriate for this context’”.



Recommendation 2: Maintain support for flexible working even after coronavirus related lockdowns end

Victorian workers thought that instances of sexism and sexual harassment had occurred less frequently while working remotely, compared to in the office. This was the case for all but one of the behaviours asked about in our survey.⁴² Interestingly, women workers were more likely to think that sexism and sexual harassment were occurring less frequently while working remotely, compared to men.

⁴⁰ The Victorian Health Promotion Foundation and The Behavioural Insights Team. (2019). *Take action: Empowering bystanders to act on sexist and sexually harassing behaviours in universities*.

⁴¹ The Victorian Health Promotion Foundation. (2019). *Guide to implementing a university-wide bystander email campaign*. <https://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/-/media/ResourceCentre/PublicationsandResources/PVAW/Bystander/Bystander-Email-Campaign-Tool.pdf?la=en&hash=F3352E7C7B2DBD31A2A47E5D932064D182A19C24>

⁴² The one behaviour which participants reported as happening more frequently was ‘Assuming, commenting or indicating that someone is not committed to their job’.

A reduction in workplace sexism and sexual harassment indicates the likely benefits of remote working for all workers, and particularly for women (who experience workplace sexism and sexual harassment to a greater extent than men).

As a result, workplaces should continue to offer **flexible working arrangements to all workers after coronavirus related lockdowns end**. However, we note that remote working due to coronavirus has come with some challenges, such as potential decreases in wellbeing⁴³ and the exacerbation of existing gender inequality in domestic and parenting duties.⁴⁴ As a result, we recommend that **workers are allowed to adopt flexible work practices which suit their individual needs**.

This recommendation does not aim to remove targets of sexism and sexual harassment from physical workplaces as a means to prevent these behaviours, but rather aims to ensure that workers have agency over how they engage with their colleagues. This recommendation needs to be implemented in conjunction with other efforts to prevent sexism and sexual harassment in the workplace as it will not solve the underlying issues which cause these behaviours.

As a first step workplaces should move to formalise their flexible working arrangements, where they have not already done so. To help with this, **workplaces should undertake a survey of all workers about the aspects of remote working which worked best for them and what they would value most moving forward**. They should then incorporate these findings into their flexible workplace policies. Once in place, workplaces will need to take steps to continue encouraging flexible work. For example, research suggests that workers model the workplace behaviour of their senior leaders,⁴⁵ so **workplaces should support relevant senior leaders to practice flexible working and encourage them to discuss flexible work with their teams**.

Additional work should also be undertaken to track instances of sexism and sexual harassment during remote work to determine whether this perceived reduction continues, and to better understand the specific drivers of it. **Ongoing pulse surveys** will help workplaces monitor this as work returns to office environments full time or in hybrid models in 2021.

⁴³ The Victorian Health Promotion Foundation. (2020). Young people coping with coronavirus: interim report.

⁴⁴ Power, K. (2020). The COVID-19 pandemic has increased the care burden of women and families. *Sustainability: Science, Practice and Policy*, 16(1), 67-73.

⁴⁵ The New South Wales Department of Premier and Cabinet. (2018). *The Behavioural Insights Unit Report*.

Box 5: The perceived reduction in sexism and sexual harassment during remote working

We can't be certain of the degree to which the frequency of these behaviours has changed during remote working as we asked participants about their perception of the frequency of sexism and sexual harassment during remote work, compared to in office working. It may be difficult for workers to gain a clear picture of sexism and sexual harassment across a workplace during remote working. This is due to the different ways that workers interact and communicate in this context. It is also difficult to accurately compare our findings with previous data about workplace sexism and sexual harassment (see Box 1).

However, while we asked about a perceived reduction in the frequency of sexism and sexual harassment while working remotely, these perceptions are likely based on both personal experience and what was witnessed occurring to others as this was the focus of our survey. Further, when asking about 'witnessing' we ensured we captured data about what people both saw and heard about to account for an online context in which people may see these behaviours taking place less frequently but may hear about them from a colleague. We therefore think that our survey findings indicate that workplaces should offer flexible working for those who want to do so.



Recommendation 3: Ensure that workplace policies and reporting procedures are suited to remote working environments and adhered to by workers

20% of Victorians thought that their workplace only 'slightly prevents' sexism and sexual harassment during remote working, with 10% saying their workplace did not prevent it at all. One reason for this could be that the shift to remote working has changed the way that people communicate and interact with their colleagues.

Opportunities to perpetuate sexism and sexual harassment while working remotely are different. Instead of in-person interactions, people are almost exclusively communicating through online channels including email, messaging services, and online meeting platforms. Opportunities to take action in response to these behaviours are also different. For example, our data shows that individuals are more likely to take action after the moment in a remote workplace environment, where people take a reflective approach and consider their options prior to acting. This new context may not be effectively covered in policies about how to respond to and prevent sexism and sexual harassment.

To help address this gap, **policies and procedures about acceptable workplace conduct, preventing sexism and sexual harassment, reporting, and how to take action in response should be updated to incorporate both in-person and remote work environments, including ensuring that robust procedures exist for reporting inappropriate behaviour after the moment.**

It is also critical that steps are taken to ensure worker compliance with these updated policies and procedures. Survey participants indicated that workplaces were more likely to take a strong stance on inappropriate behaviour than their colleagues. This could suggest that individuals within an organisation are not adhering to the policies which are in place.

There are a number of ways workplaces could increase uptake of relevant policies.

Workplaces should use language informed by evidence on how to engage workers by:

- **Simplifying policies and using behaviourally informed language so that workers know exactly what behaviours constitute sexism and sexual harassment.** For example, research suggests that people find legal terms such as ‘sexual harassment’ and ‘discrimination’ vague and that most people define these terms differently.⁴⁶ People find it easier to recognise these behaviours when illustrated with specific examples.⁴⁷ For example, rather than simply prohibiting sexism and sexual harassment in the workplace, policies could elaborate by describing specific examples such as:

“Staff should not use different physical or verbal greetings based on gender. For instance, a senior male employee should not shake hands with male staff and then kiss female staff on the cheek.”
- **Using positive and solutions-focused language to explain measures to reduce sexism and sexual harassment.** Research finds that workplace sexual harassment programs which adopt punitive framing by treating workers as potential perpetrators can backfire.⁴⁸ Workplaces should therefore adopt positively focused messaging which treats workers as potential allies in policies about the prevention of sexism and sexual harassment. Workplaces should also explore the use of solutions-focused messaging.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Koss, M. P., Abbey, A., Campbell, R., Cook, S., Norris, J., Testa, M., ... & White, J. (2007). Revising the SES: A collaborative process to improve assessment of sexual aggression and victimization. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 31(4), 357-370.

⁴⁷ McMahon, S., Palmer, J. E., Banyard, V., Murphy, M., & Gidycz, C. A. (2017). Measuring bystander behavior in the context of sexual violence prevention: Lessons learned and new directions. *Journal of interpersonal violence*, 32(16), 2396-2418.

⁴⁸ Dobbin, F., & Kalev, A. (2019). The promise and peril of sexual harassment programs. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 116(25), 12255-12260.

⁴⁹ Common Cause Australia, The Victorian Health Promotion Foundation, Together for Equality and Respect and Outer East Primary Care Partnership. (2020). *Framing gender equality: Message guide*. Victorian Health Promotion Foundation, Melbourne.

For instance, workplaces could encourage staff to attend sexism and sexual harassment training by communicating that:

“Preventing sexism and sexual harassment creates a healthier, more collaborative workplace culture that benefits everyone”

Workplaces should promote accountability and transparency to increase compliance with sexism and sexual harassment policies by:

- **Asking staff to account for how they have contributed to preventing sexism and sexual harassment in the workplace.** When people believe their behaviour is likely to be evaluated, they spend more time making decisions, and make better and fairer choices overall.^{50 51} For example, one study found that managers who were told they would later be asked to justify a hiring decision to a supervisor, made less racially biased recruitment decisions.⁵² Workplaces should introduce accountability measures in relation to preventing sexism and sexual harassment, so that workers are aware that their behaviour matters, and will thus be monitored and evaluated. For example, actions taken by workers to combat these behaviours should be discussed at performance reviews.
- **Communicate transparently with workers about the problem and the actions being taken.** When organisations communicate transparently with their workers about a problem, the issue is brought into the open which allows it to be scrutinised and addressed. This leads to better outcomes for workers and increases trust that their employer is serious about addressing the problem. For instance, a review of 50 studies and over 10,000 participants found that greater transparency around gender salary differences was effective at reducing workplace gender pay gaps.⁵³ Workplaces should be transparent with workers about the prevalence of sexism and sexual harassment, and the actions that are being taken to address it. For example, workplaces could publish the number of incidents of sexual harassment that have been reported in their annual report.

⁵⁰ Castilla, E. J. (2015). Accounting for the gap: A firm study manipulating organizational accountability and transparency in pay decisions. *Organization Science*, 26(2), 311-333.

⁵¹ Self, W. T., Mitchell, G., Mellers, B. A., Tetlock, P. E., & Hildreth, J. A. D. (2015). Balancing fairness and efficiency: the impact of identity-blind and identity-conscious accountability on applicant screening. *PloS one*, 10(12).

⁵² Ford, T. E., Gambino, F., Lee, H., Mayo, E., & Ferguson, M. A. (2004). The role of accountability in suppressing managers' pre interview bias against African-American sales job applicants. *Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management*, 24(2), 113-124.

⁵³ Mazzei, J., Hüffmeier, J., Freund, P. A., Stuhlmacher, A. F., Bilke, L., & Hertel, G. (2015). A meta-analysis on gender differences in negotiation outcomes and their moderators. *Psychological bulletin*, 141(1), 85.

Do you want to find out what is happening in your workplace?



We hope that the findings and recommendations in this report will support workplaces as they look to implement the Victorian Gender Equality Act in 2021, and design programs and policies which help prevent sexism and sexual harassment and protect the safety of their workers.

For workplaces who wish to do research into what is happening in their specific context, we will release a workplace survey template to help them do this.⁵⁴ This template will be available on the VicHealth website.

Appendices

This section contains the following appendices:

1. Our approach
2. The survey questions
3. Survey sample demographics
4. Wellbeing during coronavirus

⁵⁴ The survey template provided in Appendix 2 of this report was used to survey a sample of workers across Victoria. The forthcoming template will be further targeted to individual workplace contexts. It is due to be released in April 2021.

Appendix 1 / Our approach

In October 2020, we surveyed 1,019 Victorians who indicated that they were working remotely due to government restrictions and the coronavirus pandemic.

We used the Survey Monkey platform to design our survey and distributed them to participants using the panel provider Pureprofile.

Our sample

We included in our survey any Victorians over the age of 18, who were working remotely at the time of the survey, and who had completed work remotely at any period between March and September 2020. All other potential participants were screened out of our survey or excluded.

Additionally, we excluded 24 participants whose free text responses were implausible, repetitive, or nonsensical. This left us with a total sample of 995 individuals.

Note that while we measured the proportion of individuals' work that was performed remotely, we did not measure the absolute number of hours that participants worked remotely. That is, some participants may have worked 100% remotely, but had very few hours, and therefore little experience of working remotely.

Behavioural inventory

When we refer to sexism and sexual harassment, or inappropriate behaviours in this report, we are referring to an inventory of specific behaviours. These were:

Sending comments, jokes or put-downs when working remotely (for example on email, instant messengers, or social media) based on someone's sex or gender that makes them feel uncomfortable?

Making comments, jokes or put-downs in a work meeting based on sex or gender that makes others feel uncomfortable?

Asking intrusive or offensive questions about someone's private life or physical appearance that makes them feel uncomfortable?

Treating someone differently because of their sex or gender, for example interrupting them while on a work call, or excluding them from workplace meetings?

Taking credit for someone's work or ideas disproportionately because of their sex or gender?

Excluding someone from important tasks or decision-making because of their sex or gender?

Suggesting or implying that someone is not capable of performing part of their role because of their sex or gender?

Making assumptions about someone's career/role/interest in career opportunities on the basis of their sex or gender (e.g. that women have to take care of children's learning from home and don't want responsibilities, or that men do not want flexible working arrangements because they only care about their career)?

Assuming, commenting, or indicating that someone is not committed to their job or can't perform their job adequately because they have family or personal commitments?

Criticising someone for not behaving 'like a man/woman should'?

For the full suite of questions that were asked to participants, see Appendix 2 below.

Appendix 2 / The survey questions

The questions below were asked to participants in the order they are presented.

Screening questions

Please select your age

- 18-24
- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45-54
- 55-64
- 65+
- Prefer not to say

Have you completed your work remotely at any period between March and September 2020?

(Note that in this survey we will use the term 'remote working' to mean working at a location that is not your usual workplace environment, such as from a private space like your home, public spaces that your employer does not own or lease, working predominantly online when your usual work is not online, and situations where the predominant method of communication between colleagues is online, rather than in-person).

- Yes
- No [screenout]
- Not sure [screenout]

How long have you been working remotely for at least some portion of your working week?

Single choice:

- I am not currently working remotely [screenout]
- 1-2 months
- 3-4 months
- 5-6 months
- 7-8 months
- 8 + months

What **approximate** percentage of your working week do you work remotely?

- Approximately **20%** of my working week is conducted remotely
- Approximately **40%** of my working week is conducted remotely
- Approximately **60%** of my working week is conducted remotely
- Approximately **80%** of my working week is conducted remotely
- Approximately **100%** of my working week is conducted remotely

Mental wellbeing

Wellbeing

We would like to ask you four questions about your feelings on aspects of your life. There are no right or wrong answers.

For each of these questions we'd like you to give an answer on a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is "not at all" and 10 is "completely".

[0-10 Likert scale, 0 = Not at all, 10 = Completely]

1. Overall, how satisfied are you with your life nowadays?
2. Overall, to what extent do you feel that the things you do in your life are worthwhile?
3. Overall, how happy did you feel yesterday?
4. On a scale where 0 is "not at all anxious" and 10 is "completely anxious", overall, how anxious did you feel yesterday?

Social connection

We would also like to ask you about how connected you feel socially.

I feel connected with others

1-7 Likert scale, 1 = Strongly disagree, 7 = Strongly agree.

Frequency

Perception of relative frequency of harassment behaviours in a remote working environment

We are interested in **whether you believe certain behaviours, such as everyday sexism or sexual harassment, have become more or less common** throughout the time that people have been working remotely.

Compared to a face-to-face workplace environment, how would you rate the relative frequency of anyone at your work doing the following things to others in a remote workplace environment? If you are not sure, please give your best estimate:

Randomised order of presentation of these items	I believe this happens less frequently when working remotely than when working in-person	I believe this happens equally as frequently when working remotely as when working in-person	I believe this happens more frequently when working remotely than when working in-person	I have never witnessed these when working remotely or in-person in the workplace

Sending comments, jokes or put-downs when working remotely (for example on email, instant messengers, or social media) based on someone's sex or gender that makes them feel uncomfortable?	[Tick box]	[Tick box]	[Tick box]	[Tick box]
Making comments, jokes or put-downs in a work meeting based on sex or gender that makes others feel uncomfortable?	[Tick box]	[Tick box]	[Tick box]	[Tick box]
Asking intrusive or offensive questions about someone's private life or physical appearance that makes them feel uncomfortable?	[Tick box]	[Tick box]	[Tick box]	[Tick box]
Treating someone differently because of their sex or gender, for example interrupting them while on a work call, or excluding them from workplace meetings?	[Tick box]	[Tick box]	[Tick box]	[Tick box]
Taking credit for someone's work or ideas disproportionately because of their sex or gender?	[Tick box]	[Tick box]	[Tick box]	[Tick box]
Excluding someone from important tasks or decision-making because of their sex or gender?	[Tick box]	[Tick box]	[Tick box]	[Tick box]
Suggesting or implying that someone is not capable of performing part of their role because of their sex or gender?	[Tick box]	[Tick box]	[Tick box]	[Tick box]

Making assumptions about someone's career/role/interest in career opportunities on the basis of their sex or gender (e.g. that women have to take care of children's learning from home and don't want responsibilities, or that men do not want flexible working arrangements because they only care about their career)?	[Tick box]	[Tick box]	[Tick box]	[Tick box]
Assuming, commenting, or indicating that someone is not committed to their job or can't perform their job adequately because they have family or personal commitments?	[Tick box]	[Tick box]	[Tick box]	[Tick box]
Criticising someone for not behaving 'like a man/woman should'?	[Tick box]	[Tick box]	[Tick box]	[Tick box]

Other: Are there any other relevant behaviours that we have not captured above? Please describe the behaviour: *[free text response]*

Organisational culture

To what extent do you think **colleagues in your workplace tolerate** the inappropriate behaviours listed on the previous page? (i.e. don't challenge or do anything about these behaviours)

- Not at all tolerated
- Slightly tolerated
- Moderately tolerated
- Very tolerated
- Very much tolerated

To what extent do you think your **organisation tolerates** the inappropriate behaviours listed on the previous page? (i.e. don't challenge or do anything about these behaviours)

- Not at all tolerated
- Slightly tolerated
- Moderately tolerated
- Very tolerated
- Very much tolerated

To what extent do you think your **workplace proactively prevents** the inappropriate behaviours listed on the previous page from happening?

- Does not at all prevent
- Slightly prevents
- Moderately prevents
- Proactively prevents
- Very proactively prevents

Experiences

Behavioural inventory of harassment during remote work

We would like to know about your individual experience of inappropriate behaviours when working remotely during the last 8 months while more people have been working remotely.

Within the last 8 months, have you experienced, seen or heard of someone in your organisation or one of your colleagues doing one of the following things when working remotely, either to you or someone else?

You can select multiple answers for each behaviour:

<i>Randomised order of presentation of these items</i>	Yes, this happened to me while working remotely	I saw or heard about this happening to someone else while working remotely	I have not seen or heard of anyone doing this while working remotely	Prefer not to answer
Sending comments, jokes or put-downs when working remotely (for example on email, instant messengers, or social media) based on your sex or gender that made you feel uncomfortable?	[Tick box]	[Tick box]	[Tick box]	[Tick box]
Making comments, jokes or put-downs in a work meeting based on your sex or gender that made you feel uncomfortable?	[Tick box]	[Tick box]	[Tick box]	[Tick box]
Asking intrusive or offensive questions about your private life or physical appearance that made you feel uncomfortable?	[Tick box]	[Tick box]	[Tick box]	[Tick box]

Treating you differently because of your sex or gender, for example interrupting you while on a work call, or excluding you from workplace meetings?	[Tick box]	[Tick box]	[Tick box]	[Tick box]
Taking credit for your work or ideas disproportionately because of your sex or gender?	[Tick box]	[Tick box]	[Tick box]	[Tick box]
Excluding you from important tasks or decision-making because of your sex or gender?	[Tick box]	[Tick box]	[Tick box]	[Tick box]
Suggesting or implying that you are not capable of performing part of your role because of your sex or gender?	[Tick box]	[Tick box]	[Tick box]	[Tick box]
Making assumptions about your career/role/interest in career opportunities on the basis of your sex or gender (e.g. that women have to take care of children's learning from home and don't want responsibilities, or that men do not want flexible working arrangements because they only care about their career)?	[Tick box]	[Tick box]	[Tick box]	[Tick box]
Assuming, commenting, or indicating that you are not committed to your job or you can't perform your job adequately because you have family commitments?	[Tick box]	[Tick box]	[Tick box]	[Tick box]
Criticising you for not behaving 'like a man/woman should'?	[Tick box]	[Tick box]	[Tick box]	[Tick box]

Responses and barriers in responding to sexism and sexual harassment

(Individually, for each item they have answered that they experienced or saw/heard of this happening to someone else) ... (without giving them the ability to go back and change their answers on the previous page)

When you experienced this, or saw (or heard of) this happening to someone around you, what did you do?

Did something when I experienced, saw or heard about it	Did something after I experienced, saw or heard about it	Planned to do something, but then didn't do it.	Did not do anything
--	---	---	---------------------

[If responded in the moment]

How did you make the decision to respond to what you experienced or witnessed? What did you do?

[If responded after the fact]

Why did you make the decision to respond to what you experienced or witnessed after the moment? What did you do?

[If planned to do something]

What happened between planning to do something and then not doing anything about what you experienced or witnessed?

[If didn't do anything]

What were the reasons for not doing anything about what you experienced or witnessed?

Norms regarding actions

Changing your own behaviour

We would like to know whether you think your behaviour has shifted since working remotely as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Please indicate whether you think you have done the following more often since working remotely: *[All yes/no]*

Offered support or advice to someone who has experienced inappropriate workplace behaviour, such as sexism or sexual harassment

Reported a behaviour that you thought was inappropriate or unfair to a manager or senior colleague.

Privately called out or reprimanded someone for making an inappropriate comment or joke after the moment.
Publicly called out or reprimanded someone for making an inappropriate comment or joke in the moment
Made a light-hearted comment to try and stop the situation

The Bystander Framework

Interpreting need to intervene

We are interested in your perceptions of what people should do if they see or hear these behaviours happening to someone else at work. Below is a list of behaviours that could occur in the workplace context. Some of these behaviours are sexism or sexual harassment, some are not.

Regardless, please indicate whether you think **someone should intervene or say something** either in the moment, or after the moment, if they see (or hear about) one of these behaviours happening to someone else in their organisation or workplace while working remotely:

Randomise order of presentation of these items

1. Someone sending comments, jokes or put-downs, for example email, instant messengers, or social media based on sex or gender that made the target feel uncomfortable?
2. Someone making comments, jokes or put-downs in a work meeting based on sex or gender that made the target feel uncomfortable?
3. Someone asking intrusive questions about someone's private life or physical appearance that made them feel uncomfortable or were offensive?
4. Someone treating another person differently because of their sex or gender, for example interrupting them while on a work call, or excluding them from workplace meetings?
5. Someone taking credit for another's work or ideas disproportionately because of their sex or gender?
6. Someone being excluded from important tasks or decision-making because of their sex or gender?
7. Someone suggesting or implying that another person is not capable of performing part of their role because of their sex or gender?
8. Someone making assumptions about another's career/role/interest in career opportunities on the basis of their sex or gender (e.g. that women have to take care of children's learning from home and don't want responsibilities, or that men do not want flexible working arrangements because they only care about their career)?
9. Someone assuming, commenting or indicating that another person is not committed to their job or can't perform their job adequately because they have family commitments?
10. Someone criticising another person for not behaving 'like a man/woman should'?

11. *A manager requesting that someone works late to finish a key deliverable at work but offers them time in lieu on another day?
12. *Someone asking a colleague for help on a project they weren't assigned to?
13. *Someone asking when a piece of work would be finished?
14. *Someone making polite small-talk throughout the day?
15. *Someone providing constructive feedback on a task?

Response options [in a table]:

Some form of action is needed in the moment

Some form of action is needed after the moment has passed

No form of action is needed

*(Items marked with * are not sexism or sexual harassment)*

Assuming responsibility

Please tell us how much you disagree or agree with the following statements:

I feel personally responsible to intervene and assist in resolving sexism or sexual harassment incidents.

If I am not the one harassing others, it is still my responsibility to try to stop it.

1-7 Likert scale, 1 – Strongly disagree, 2 – Disagree, 3 – Somewhat disagree, 4 – Neither agree nor disagree, 5 – Somewhat agree, 6 – Agree, 7 – Strongly agree

Deciding to help and acceptability of intervening

We're interested in what you think about sexism and sexual harassment at work, and what your role is in intervening after you see (or hear about) it should be.

Please tell us how much you disagree or agree with the following statements:

1. It is important for all employees in an organisation to play a role in reducing sex and gender discrimination
2. Friends and colleagues will look up to me and admire me if I intervene
3. Intervening might have a negative impact on me at work, for example cost me friendships or promotion in my organisation*
4. I could make the wrong decision and intervene when nothing was wrong and feel embarrassed or get in trouble*
5. If I intervene, people might think I'm too sensitive and am overreacting to the situation*
6. I don't think there's much I can do about sexism or sexual harassment in my organisation*.

1-7 Likert scale, 1 – Strongly disagree, 2 – Disagree, 3 – Somewhat disagree, 4 – Neither agree nor disagree, 5 – Somewhat agree, 6 – Agree, 7 – Strongly agree

**Items are reverse coded*

Confidence and self-efficacy to help

If I saw or heard about any of the incidents discussed in this survey happening to someone while working remotely:

1. I would feel confident in knowing what to do

1-7 Likert scale, 1 – Strongly disagree, 2 – Disagree, 3 – Somewhat disagree, 4 – Neither agree nor disagree, 5 – Somewhat agree, 6 – Agree, 7 – Strongly agree

Please tell us how much you disagree or agree with the following statements:

1. I believe that my actions can help to reduce sexism and sexual harassment while working remotely
2. I have the skills and knowledge to support a colleague who is being harassed while working remotely

1-7 Likert scale, 1 – Strongly disagree, 2 – Disagree, 3 – Somewhat disagree, 4 – Neither agree nor disagree, 5 – Somewhat agree, 6 – Agree, 7 – Strongly agree

Intentions to take action

If I saw or heard about any of the incidents discussed in this survey happening to someone while working remotely:

1. I would intervene at the time I saw it
2. I would intervene later

1-7 Likert scale, 1 = Extremely unlikely, 2 = Unlikely, 3 = Slightly unlikely, 4 = Neutral, 5 = Slightly likely, 6 = Likely, 7 = Extremely likely

Demographics

Please select your gender

- Man
- Woman
- Prefer to self-describe another way
- Prefer not to say

What is your residential postcode? (i.e., the postcode of the location that you live)

[Text box entry, four digits]

What is your workplace postcode? (i.e., the postcode of your usual workplace, prior to working from home)

[Text box entry, four digits]

What is the highest level of education you have attained?

- Have not completed high school
- Completed high school
- Certificate level (Certificate 1-4)
- Advanced Diploma or Diploma
- Bachelor's degree
- Graduate diploma or certificate
- Post-graduate degree: Masters or PhD

What industry are you employed in?

If you are employed in multiple industries, please select the industry for your primary source of income

- Agriculture, forestry, and fishing

- Mining
- Manufacturing
- Electricity, gas, water, and waste services
- Construction
- Wholesale trade
- Retail trade
- Accommodation and food services
- Transport, postal and warehousing
- Information media and telecommunications
- Financial and insurance services
- Rental, hiring, and real estate services
- Professional, scientific, and technical services
- Administrative and support services
- Public administration and safety
- Education and training
- Health care and social assistance
- Arts and recreation services
- Other services

What is your level of seniority in your workplace?

If you are employed in multiple roles, please select the role for your primary source of income

- Director / Senior Management
- Senior Professional Staff / Middle Management
- Professional Staff / Administrative Staff / Associate or Assistant
- Entry-level employee

On what basis are you employed?

If you are employed in multiple roles, please select the role for your primary source of income

- Full-time
- Part-time
- Casual
- Contract

Please select your sexual orientation

- Heterosexual or straight
- Gay or lesbian
- Bisexual
- Other
- Prefer not to say

Which broad grouping of cultural backgrounds best reflects your own cultural background i.e. your ethnicity and ancestry? *[can select more than one]*

- Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander
- Oceanian
- North-West European
- Southern and Eastern Europe
- North African and Middle Eastern
- South-East Asian
- North-East Asian
- Southern and Central Asian
- Peoples of the Americas
- Sub-Saharan African

Financial wellbeing

Would you be able to pay off a \$1000 bill for something such as medical treatment or a car repair in an emergency, without relying on credit cards or borrowing money?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

Appendix 3 / Survey sample demographics

In the table below we describe the demographic characteristics of the survey participants.

Gender	Proportion of participants⁵⁵
<i>Woman</i>	51.5%
<i>Man</i>	48.4%
<i>Prefer to self-describe another way</i>	0.1%
Age	
<i>18-24</i>	10.7%
<i>25-34</i>	22.3%
<i>35-44</i>	21.4%
<i>45-54</i>	20.0%
<i>55-64</i>	18.0%
<i>65+</i>	7.8%
Type of current employment	
<i>Full-time</i>	67.6%
<i>Part-time</i>	19.8%
<i>Contract</i>	3.7%
<i>Casual</i>	8.8%
Level of seniority	
<i>Entry-level employee</i>	15.4%
<i>Professional staff / administrative staff / associate or assistant</i>	49.9%
<i>Senior professional staff / middle management</i>	23.0%
<i>Director / senior management</i>	11.7%

⁵⁵ The proportion of participants does not sum to 100% for some demographic items as some survey participants indicated that they preferred not to answer the question.

Industry of employment	
<i>Agriculture, forestry, and fishing</i>	1.2%
<i>Mining</i>	0.3%
<i>Manufacturing</i>	4.3%
<i>Electricity, gas, water, and waste services</i>	1.6%
<i>Construction</i>	3.7%
<i>Wholesale trade</i>	1.9%
<i>Retail trade</i>	6.1%
<i>Accommodation and food services</i>	2.1%
<i>Transport, postal, and warehousing</i>	2.2%
<i>Information media and telecommunications</i>	6.4%
<i>Financial and insurance services</i>	8.3%
<i>Rental, hiring, and real estate services</i>	2.7%
<i>Professional, scientific, and technical services</i>	13.6%
<i>Administrative and support services</i>	6.8%
<i>Public administration and safety</i>	6.5%
<i>Education and training</i>	10.2%
<i>Healthcare and social assistance</i>	8.3%
<i>Arts and recreation services</i>	2.6%
<i>Other services</i>	10.9%
Highest level of education completed	
<i>Less than high school</i>	1.4%
<i>High school or equivalent</i>	13.0%
<i>Certificate level (1-4)</i>	9.1%

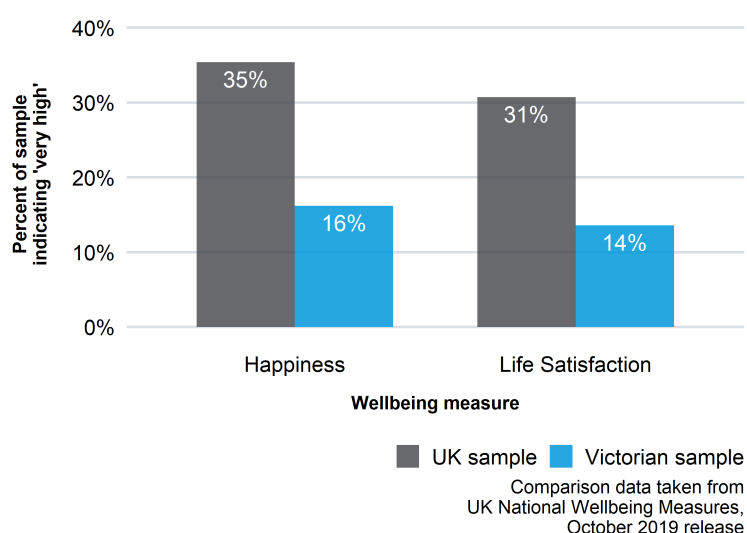
<i>Diploma or advanced diploma</i>	13.1%
<i>Bachelor's degree</i>	38.7%
<i>Graduate diploma or certificate</i>	8.7%
<i>Post-graduate degree (master's or PhD)</i>	16.0%
<hr/>	
Sexual orientation	
<hr/>	
<i>Heterosexual or straight</i>	88.7%
<i>Gay or lesbian</i>	3.3%
<i>Bisexual</i>	3.4%
<i>Other</i>	0.6%

Appendix 4 / Wellbeing during coronavirus

In this Appendix we outline levels of wellbeing, social connectedness, and financial wellbeing for our sample.

Overall, most participants indicated that they had relatively good levels of wellbeing, as reflected in ratings of happiness, life satisfaction, how worthwhile life is, anxiety, and social connectedness. Comparing this to a Victorian sample from 2018, we see a reduction in the number of individuals rating their life satisfaction and feelings that life is worthwhile as “very high” (a rating of 9 or 10), compared to a Victorian sample from the Victorian Population Health Survey (2018 results; (as is shown in Section 1 of this report).

Similarly, comparing this to a sample from the United Kingdom⁵⁶ who were surveyed prior to the COVID-19 pandemic we see substantial decreases in wellbeing relative to a UK sample. Note that due to changes in working environments as a result of coronavirus, our sample included only workers working remotely, whereas the data from the UK was collated prior to the pandemic and national lockdowns.



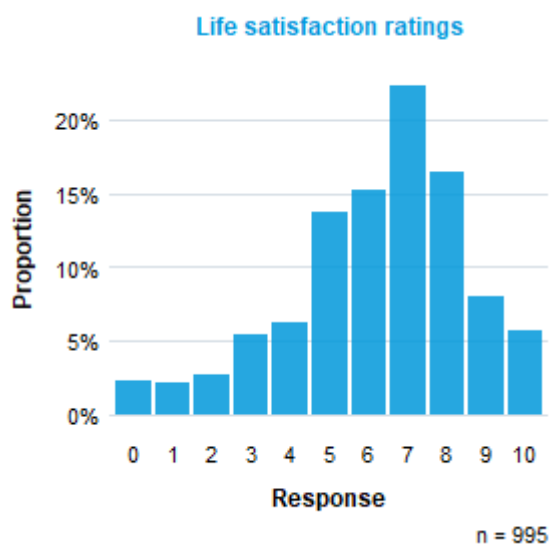
While we note that understanding the general impact of remote working on wellbeing is important, we cannot say from this survey if experiences of sexism and sexual harassment have caused the levels of wellbeing we see here. This is because our survey measured behaviours and psychological states at one specific moment in time.

⁵⁶ We compared our Victorian data to data from the UK as the measures of wellbeing were taken from the UK's Office for National Statistics ONS-4.

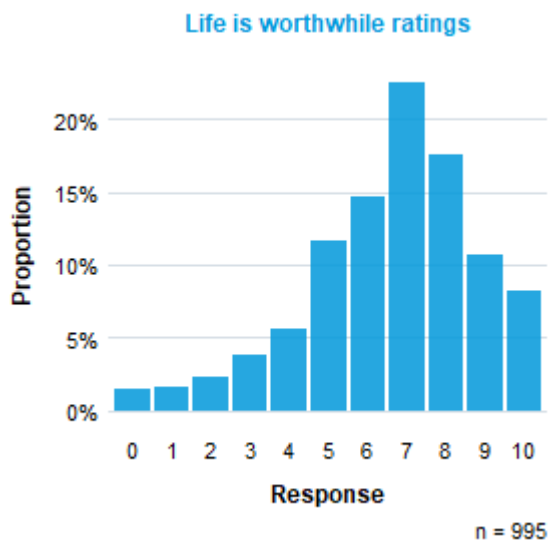
We are therefore unable to state conclusively whether remote working, and/or sexism and sexual harassment has had an influence on wellbeing directly. It is also plausible that the wellbeing of Australians was directly affected by anxiety relating to coronavirus, or the ensuing economic recession. We did not ask questions to distinguish whether participant wellbeing related directly to experiencing/witnessing sexism and sexual harassment, or other contextual factors such as COVID-19 and ongoing remote working as this was not the aim of our survey.

Overall wellbeing

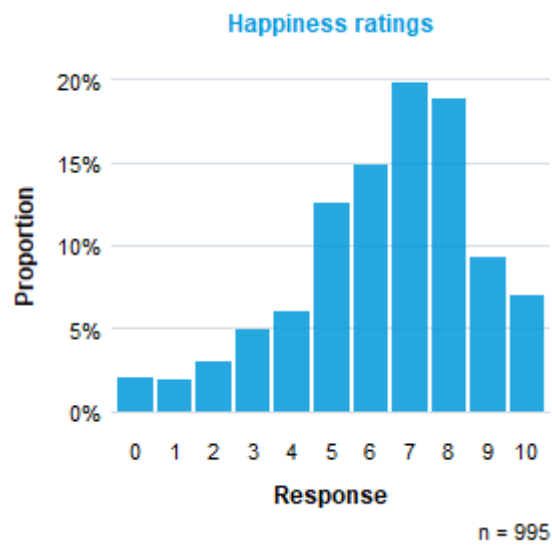
On a scale from 0 to 10 where 0 is “not at all” and 10 is “completely”, overall, how satisfied are you with your life nowadays?



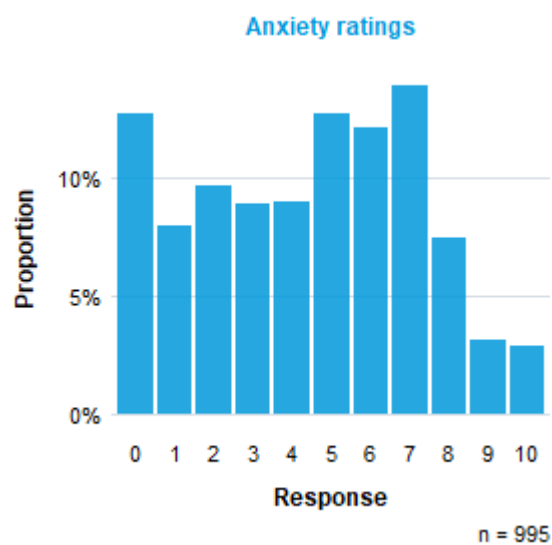
On a scale from 0 to 10 where 0 is “not at all” and 10 is “completely”, overall, to what extent do you feel the things in your life are worthwhile?



On a scale from 0 to 10 where 0 is “not at all” and 10 is “completely”, overall, how happy did you feel yesterday?

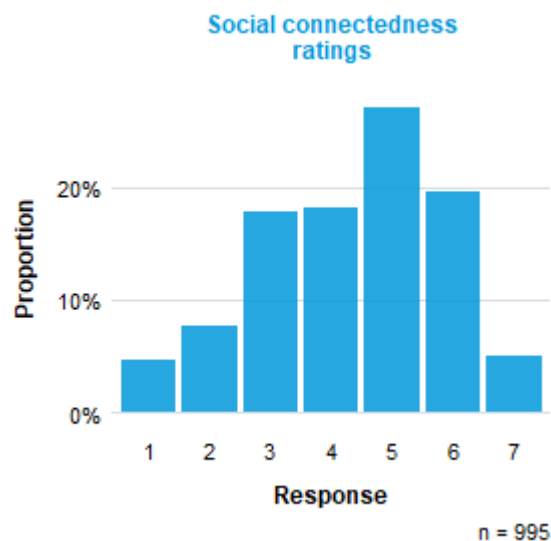


On a scale from 0 to 10 where 0 is “not at all” and 10 is “completely”, overall, how anxious did you feel yesterday?

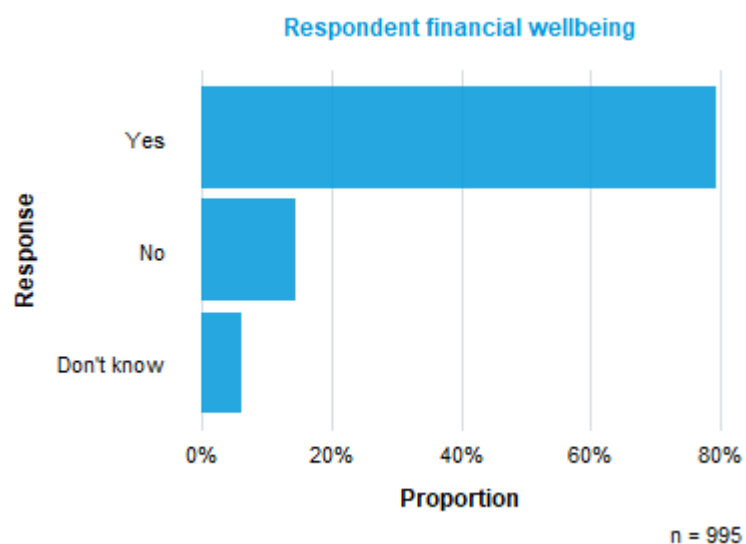


“I feel connected with others”

Participants rated this on a 7 point Likert scale, where 1 = Strongly disagree and 7 = Strongly agree.



Would you be able to pay off a \$1000 bill for something such as medical treatment or a car repair in an emergency, without relying on credit cards or borrowing money?⁵⁷

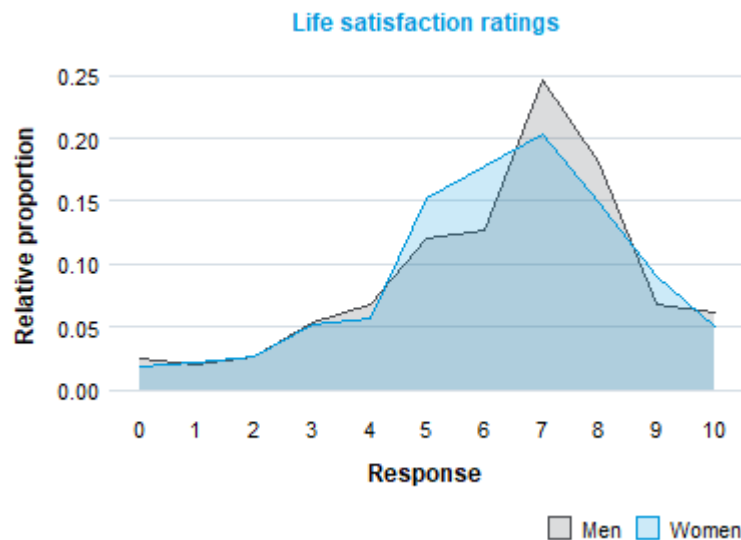


⁵⁷ Questions such as this are commonly used by researchers to understand the experiences of financial hardship and wellbeing in the survey sample.

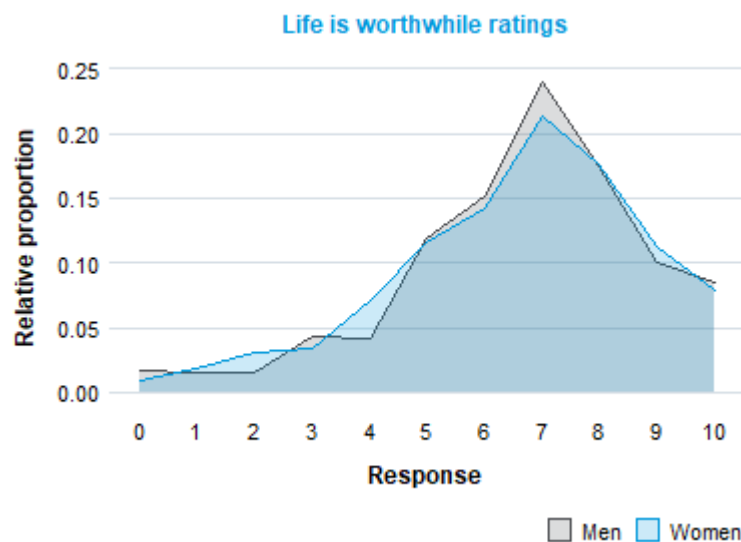
Wellbeing by gender

There were no meaningful differences between males and females regarding participant levels of wellbeing, social connectedness, and financial wellbeing.

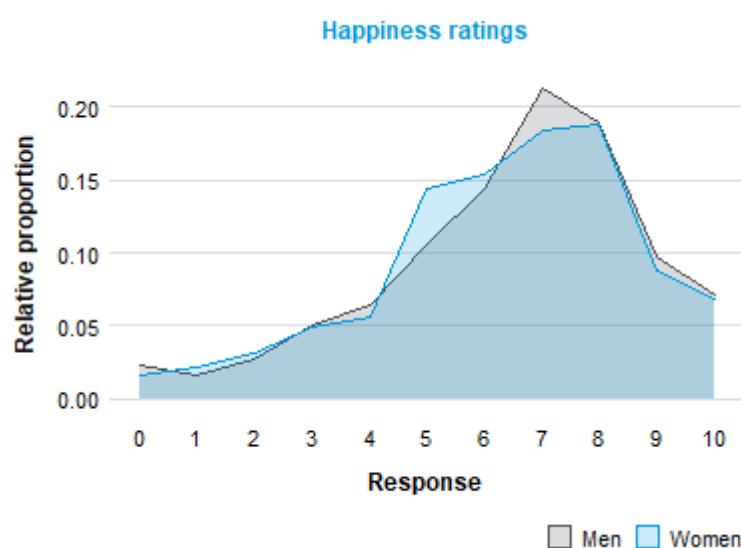
On a scale from 0 to 10 where 0 is “not at all” and 10 is “completely”, overall, how satisfied are you with your life nowadays?



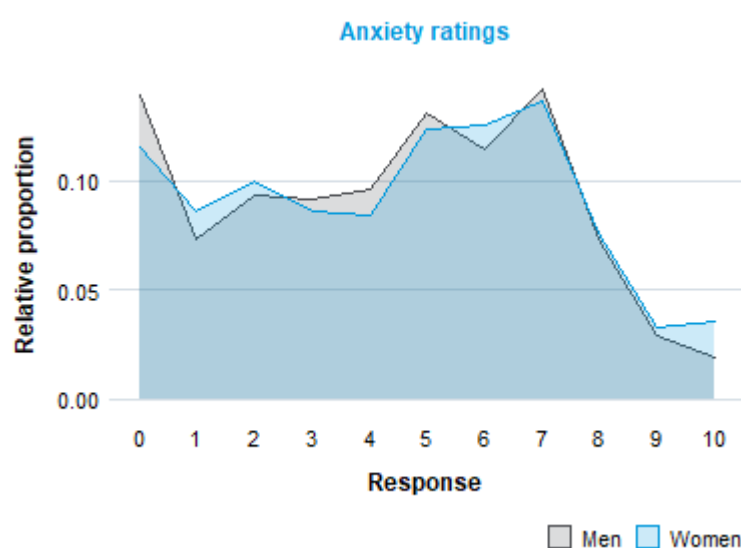
On a scale from 0 to 10 where 0 is “not at all” and 10 is “completely”, overall, to what extent do you feel the things in your life are worthwhile?



On a scale from 0 to 10 where 0 is “not at all” and 10 is “completely”, overall, how happy did you feel yesterday?

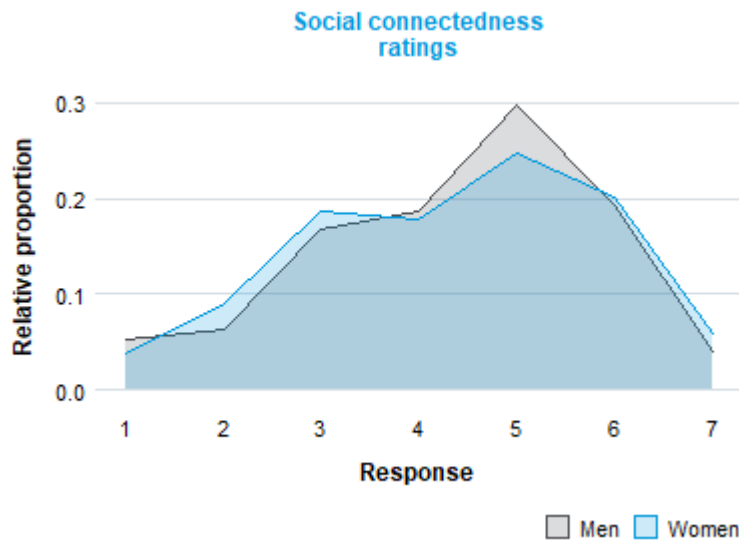


On a scale from 0 to 10 where 0 is “not at all” and 10 is “completely”, overall, how anxious did you feel yesterday?

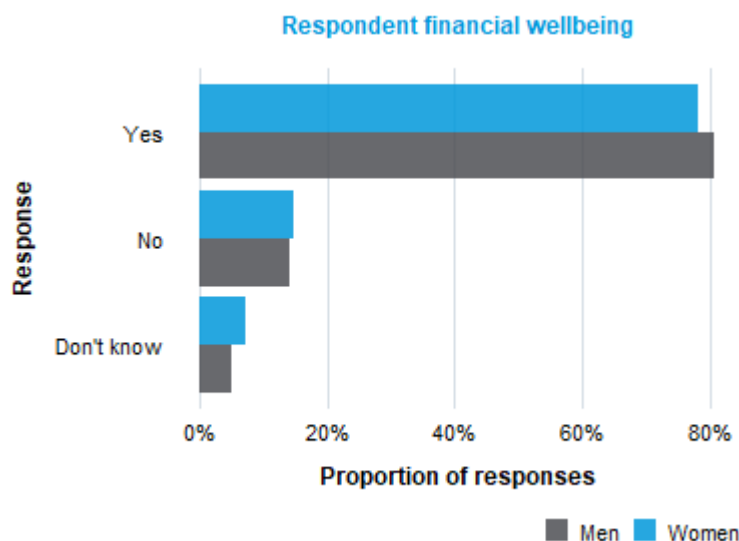


“ I feel connected with others”

Participants rated this on a 7 point Likert scale, where 1 = Strongly disagree and 7 = Strongly agree.



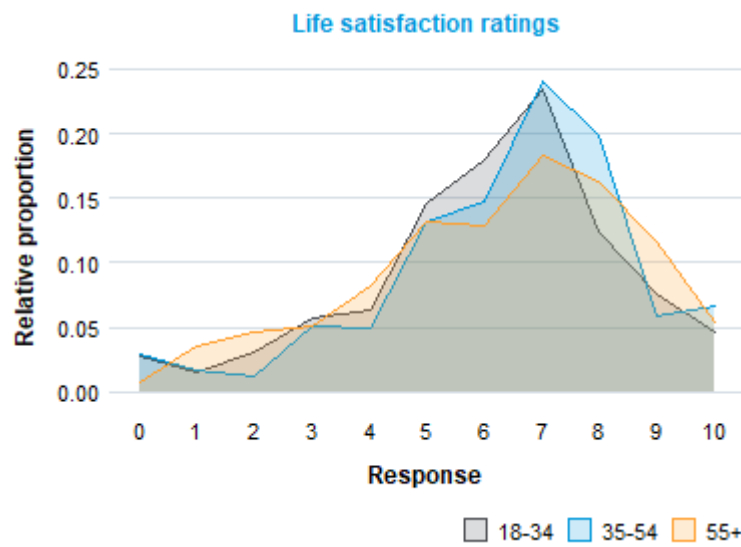
Would you be able to pay off a \$1000 bill for something such as medical treatment or a car repair in an emergency, without relying on credit cards or borrowing money?



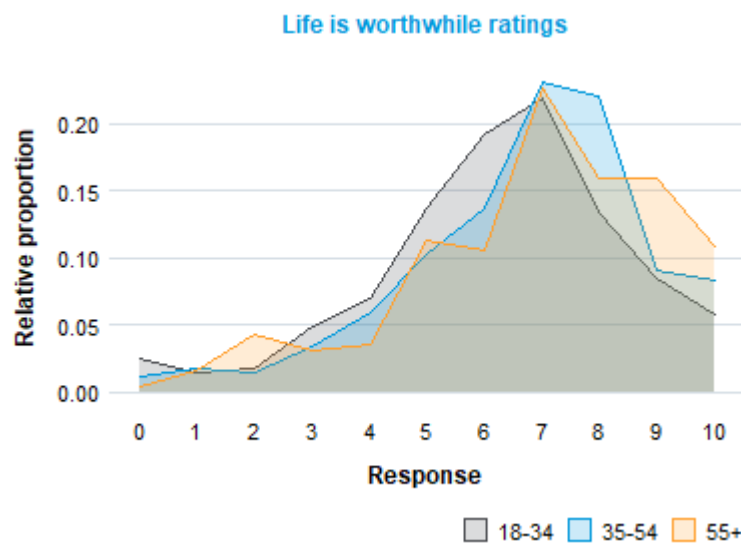
Wellbeing by age

Similarly, to gender, there was no meaningful differences in life satisfaction, ratings of how worthwhile things in life are, or social connectedness. Young workers reported being slightly less happy and slightly more anxious than older workers, however these differences are minimal.

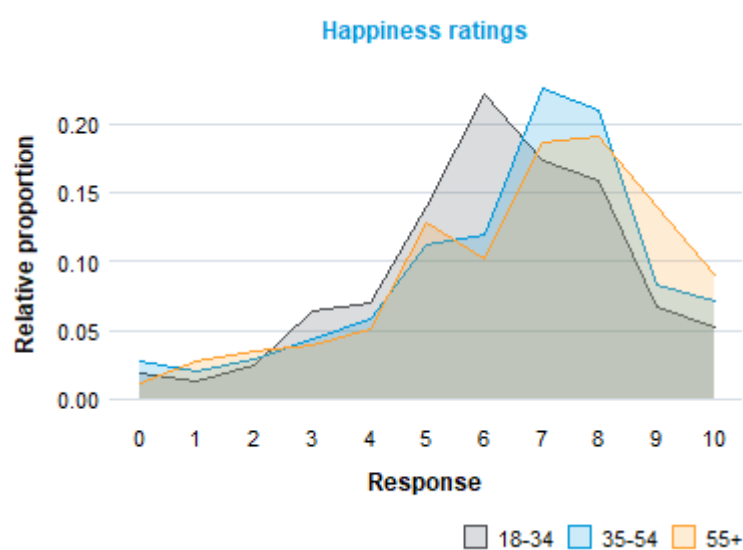
On a scale from 0 to 10 where 0 is “not at all” and 10 is “completely”, overall, how satisfied are you with your life nowadays?



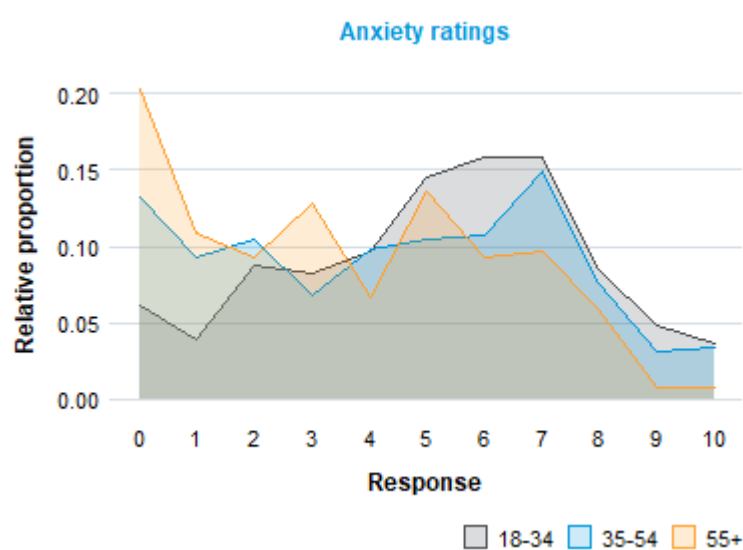
On a scale from 0 to 10 where 0 is “not at all” and 10 is “completely”, overall, to what extent do you feel the things in your life are worthwhile?



On a scale from 0 to 10 where 0 is “not at all” and 10 is “completely”, overall, how happy did you feel yesterday?

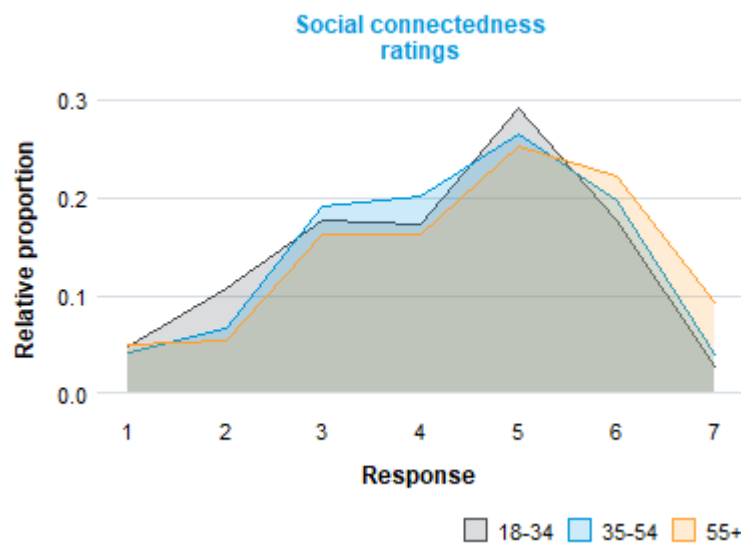


On a scale from 0 to 10 where 0 is “not at all” and 10 is “completely”, overall, how anxious did you feel yesterday?

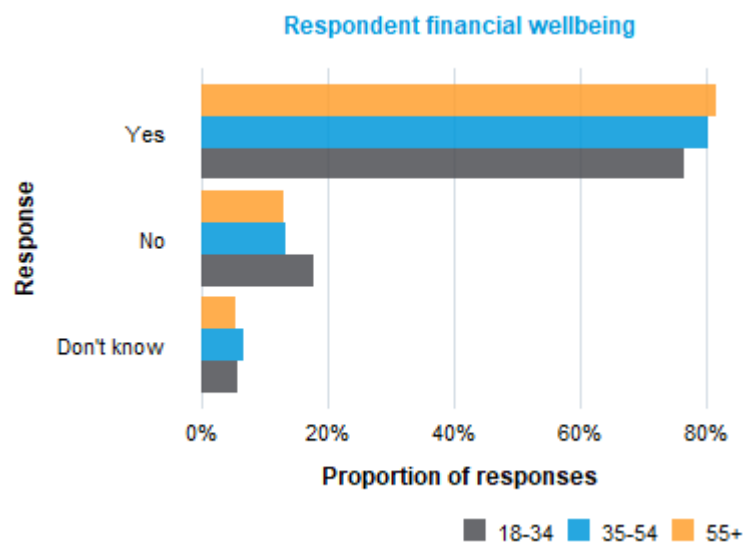


“I feel connected with others”

Participants rated this on a 7 point Likert scale, where 1 = Strongly disagree and 7 = Strongly agree.



Would you be able to pay off a \$1000 bill for something such as medical treatment or a car repair in an emergency, without relying on credit cards or borrowing money?





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VicHealth is committed to health equity, which means levelling the playing field between people who can easily access good health and people who face barriers, to achieve the highest level of health for *everyone*.



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VicHealth acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the land. We pay our respects to all Elders past, present and future.