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A qualitative study of how young leaders in the service industry work to prevent sexual harassment in the workplace and how they handle reported incidents.

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Abstract

Leaders play a crucial role in preventing sexual harassment in the workplace. Their commitment and efforts are essential in creating a safe and healthy work environment. Young leadership can result in challenges based on the need for more knowledge and better judgment calls. However, young leaders can also contribute to changing attitudes, providing new perspectives, and establishing clear guidelines to combat sexual harassment. This master's thesis investigates how young leaders, specifically from the fitness and nightlife industries, are working to prevent sexual harassment from happening in the workplace. A part of the research also includes how young leaders deal with situations related to sexual harassment if a case arises.

Sexual harassment is a prevalent issue that can severely impact employees and organizations. However, there is a lack of research on how young leaders address this problem. A qualitative research study has been carried out by collecting eight in-depth interviews, allowing for a rich and precise understanding of their perspectives to help answer the research question. The study sample comprised young leaders aged 24-31 working in the mentioned sectors. The study explores young leaders' experiences, strategies, and challenges in preventing sexual harassment. Findings shed light on how the leaders included in the study are working proactively with sexual harassment, such as implementing policies, conducting training with employees, and promoting a safe and healthy working culture. The research also highlights the need for prevention work regarding sexual harassment and sheds light on the leaders' ability to know their position and how they deal with reported incidents. This includes their response mechanism, support for victims, and attitude related to this topic.

By exploring the aspect of young leaders from the service industries, moreover, their experience and practices related to sexual harassment, this thesis contributes to a deeper understanding of their role in preventing sexual harassment. Furthermore, the study explores how young leaders should take this matter seriously, encourage open communication, and establish a safe workplace culture with a zero-tolerant policy against sexual harassment.

Key words: young leaders, sexual harassment, prevention, service industries, workplace culture.

Table of contents

ABSTRACT

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

1.0 INTRODUCTION.....	5
1.1 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY.....	6
1.2 THE EMPIRICAL PROBLEM.....	7
1.3 THE REASON I CHOSE THIS RESEARCH.....	8
1.4 STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS.....	9
1.5 DEFINITIONS.....	10
<i>1.5.1 Sexual harassment.....</i>	<i>10</i>
<i>1.5.2 Why is sexual harassment happening?.....</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>1.5.3 Who is experiencing sexual harassment?.....</i>	<i>12</i>
<i>1.5.4 Perpetrators and bystanders.....</i>	<i>13</i>
<i>1.5.5 Managers perspective.....</i>	<i>13</i>
1.6 LEGAL FRAMEWORKS.....	14
1.7 CURRENT STATE OF KNOWLEDGE.....	15
1.8 RESEARCH QUESTION.....	18
2.0 THEORY AND LITERATURE.....	20
2.1 PREVENTION STRATEGIES.....	20
2.2 SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE.....	24
2.2 LEADERSHIP RESPONSIBILITY.....	27
2.3 CUSTOMER MISBEHAVIOR.....	30
2.4 LIMITATIONS AND CLARIFICATIONS.....	33
2.5 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS AND ANONYMIZING.....	33
3.0 METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK.....	34
3.1 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH DESIGN.....	34
3.2 SELECTION OF INTERVIEW OBJECTS.....	34
3.3 DATA COLLECTION.....	36
3.4 ANALYZING DATA.....	38
4.0 RESULTS.....	40
4.1 PREVENTION PRACTICES.....	42

4.2 LEADERSHIP ACTIONS.....	47
4.3 CHALLENGES.....	50
5.0 DISCUSSION	57
5.1 PROACTIVE PREVENTION PRACTICE	57
5.2 LEADERSHIP ACTIONS.....	60
5.3 CHALLENGES.....	62
5.4 LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH.....	66
6.0 CONCLUSION.....	68
7.0 REFERENCE LIST	70

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1.0 Introduction

Awareness of sexual harassment has gradually taken part of the society throughout the years and the importance of the aspect are highlighted by several researchers and studies. Young leadership can potentially pose challenges in dealing with sexual harassment for several reasons, such as lack of experience and knowledge, weakened authority and trust, and challenges related to cultural barriers (Buengeler, Homan, & Voelpel, 2016, p.1128). However, not all young leaders will face these problems and it is important to realize that young leadership may also lead to advantages for the company, such as fresh perspectives and a modern approach to leadership (Goh & Okumus, 2020).

Today, Norwegian legislation prohibits sexual harassment, and it is clarified consequences for leaders if they are not taking this aspect seriously in the workplace (Jardim, Gaustad, Langøien, Næss, 2022, p.16-18). Despite these laws and consequences sexual harassment is identified as a major concern generally in the society. This aspect is a widespread issue and the need for prevention work is essential, especially in particular branches. Regarding this issue, it will appear questions of what counts as sexual harassment, who is responsible for the action, who is responsible for handling the situation, and the degree of severity of the incident. These questions appear because of an existing knowledge gap in the field of sexual harassment (Svensson, 2020, p.12). Based on the facts mentioned above, it can be both positive and negative sides of young leadership in a workplace, and this aspect can affect the prevention work of sexual harassment one way or another. I find it interesting to investigate how young leaders in the most exposed industries, such as the fitness and nightlife industry, work to prevent sexual harassment in the workplace. Recent research shows that these industries have a tendency of hiring young leaders and employees because the younger workforce will bring along new perspectives and often has higher work capacity than older employees (Goh & Okumus, 2020). This thesis is shedding light on this aspect by the help of information collected from eighth in-depth interviews with young leaders that is working in these industries. The research is relevant and important for these industries and hopefully it can bring out some founding's that gives the topic of sexual harassment at the workplace more attention.

This master's thesis is affiliated with the ongoing project "Nordic Research Funding Initiative on Sexual Harassment at Work" which is investigating sexual harassment in the tourism and hospitality sector. I found it relevant for my thesis because of their research related

to which actions important actors are doing related to sexual harassment and prevention. Power systems and gender equality are also central aspects in the society. This project looks at how certain groups in the society are excluded from general norms and are more exposed of experiencing sexual harassment than others. These groups are categorized as sexual minorities, such as gay, lesbian, transgender and other LGBTQ+ people. I found the project very inspiring and based on my own experience from the service industry I want to investigate how young leaders are working with sexual harassment, specifically prevention and actions taken.

1.1 Purpose of the study

This master's thesis is investigating how leaders in the service industry work to prevent sexual harassment at the workplace from a young leader's perspective. The service industry consists of many young leaders coming straight from studies, with little or no experience with HR or personnel responsibility. Yet these leaders get put in a position where they have the responsibility to ensure a safe work environment for young employees in a branch where cases of sexual harassment are particularly widespread (Hulin et al., 1996).

By collecting valuable data through in-depth interview from actual young leaders working in this branch, I will explore how sexual harassment are taking place the daily operations on these platforms. From a perspective where these statements are put in context with experience and how they are handling the situations. Furthermore, the thesis will approach which measures that are appropriate to implement change targeting this subject. All kinds of workplaces are exposed to sexual harassment, some more than others, such as the service industries. It is the leader's responsibility to secure a safe work environment for the employees (Vardiman et al., 2014).

From a working life perspective, the service industries stand out because of the high interaction with people (Harris Daunt, 2013). The young average age is also a factor that plays its role in the service industry where the lack of experience is central in the context of sexual harassment (Vardiman et al., 2014). I also find it interesting to investigate sexual harassment in the workplace considering the fact of how much time we spend there and how much it can really affect a person or a work environment. Gender equality is also factors that needs to be taken under consideration when investigating sexual harassment.

1.2 The empirical problem

- *Why it's worth looking into*

Sexual harassment is happening in more areas than we might think, including the workplace, public places and generally in the society. I have chosen to investigate this empirical problem because of the extent of the problem and my engagement of highlighting this aspect. New research points out how the service industry is especially exposed to sexual harassment because of young employees and leadership, and the high interaction with customers every day (Booyens, Hadjisolomou, Nickson, Cunningham, & Baum's, 2022). Sexual harassment is an important aspect to highlight and include in more organizational work because of the traumatic consequences that can harm individuals. This subject is a sensitive topic, and leaders can experience social barriers when it comes to talking about it. The incidents can be hard to define and categorize because of indistinct of where to set reasonable boundaries for itself. This can result of incidents related to sexual harassment easily can go under the radar and be hard for managers and organizations to catch (Vardiman et al., 2014).

Norway as a welfare state has laws and regulations where sexual harassment is included as an individual topic and according to the Norwegian Labor Inspection Authority (2023), the manager of the department is responsible to make sure secure a safe work environment and prevent sexual harassment from happening. In case an employee is being exposed to sexual harassment at the workplace in Norway, the local manager is responsible to take actions and secure follow up in the coming process. Service industries are more exposed to sexual harassment based on many reasons, such as late-night shift, high interactions with customers and young employees. These branches often consist of a young management which is unexperienced and uneducated, which can lead to poor decision making under challenging circumstances (Grimsø, 2011).

Young leadership can potentially pose challenges related to sexual harassment and prevention because of several reasons. Young leaders often have limited experience and knowledge handling complex and sensitive issues like sexual harassment, they may need assistance to help identifying, understanding and guidance in how to respond in such a situation. A leader of young age can also face challenges related to asserting authority and gaining respect from older or more experienced employees. This can make it harder to create a zero tolerant policy of sexual harassment and foster a safe workplace culture. Aspects of cultural challenges

are also worth mentioning, young leaders may also encounter cultural barriers related to attitudes and perception about sexual harassment. One culture can be different from another, and in some cultures, it may be higher tolerance of such behaviors than others. It may be difficult to challenge established norms and change certain attitudes (Vardiman et al., 2014).

Organizations have a responsibility of creating policy structure and taking actions to prevent sexual harassment. Finding a trend of young leadership in an organization may also mean that the organization have not established clear policies, guidelines, or procedures for addressing sexual harassment. This can lead to a lack of structure in preventing, handling, and enforcing policies against sexual harassment (Vardiman et al., 2014). During this research of how young leaders work to prevent and handle sexual harassment I am aiming to create a bigger understanding in this area of knowledge.

1.3 The reason I chose this research

The master's program of Service leadership in international business has given me a lot of knowledge and new theoretical perspectives related to the professional field. This master's program has been interesting because of the many different research fields we have been through. During this couple of years, I have thought of several topics that I will use in my master's thesis, but in the final decision ended up being research related to social science and the aspect of young leaders' prevention of sexual harassment. I chose this research topic because first, I find my own experience relevant and interesting for this subject. After many years of working in the service industry I have experienced that sexual harassment is a persistent problem that needs attention and awareness. After taking a minor in gender studies last year I got more aware of how widespread sexual harassment is in the society and especially in the workplace and how we need more research and knowledge in this field.

I work today as a manager in the fitness industry, and I will consider myself as a young leader with a big responsibility. As the manager I have the full responsibility to create a safe work environment for the employees at my department, and this includes preventing sexual harassment. I chose to investigate how to prevent this theme because I find it challenging from where I stand today, and after going through research and articles related to this topic, I can see that there is a lack of research of young leaders' responsibility of preventing sexual harassment.

These crimes are happening more than we think and it can be hard for a manager to catch if the employees do not report the incident. Challenges that are already mentioned in the introduction are challenges that I can relate to myself, which is why I find it interesting to deeper investigate the daily life of a young leader and how their perspectives and attitudes are to prevention of sexual harassment.

1.4 Structure of the thesis

This master's thesis will be structured into six chapters that will consist of several subsections to shed light on the empirical question and answer the research question. The first chapter consists of an introduction where I explain the purpose of this thesis, the empirical problem and why I chose this research. Further in chapter one definitions of concepts and questions related to the thesis are described and the current state of knowledge is also included. The research question and limitations are also elaborated in the first chapter to create a solid framework for this thesis. In the second chapter I have included several theoretical aspects that I find relevant for this research question. The theory chapter has four subsections, Prevention strategies, sexual harassment in organizational culture, leadership responsibility and customer misbehavior. The chapter of theory creates the fundament for the empirical problem and is used in the discussion and when answering the research question.

The third chapter consist of methodological framework and data sampling. In this chapter there is argued for why I chose the research method, how the selection of interview candidates has been collected, how the interview has been done and which way I have used an interview protocol, and how I have planned to analyze the data found in the process. This chapter also includes necessary information about the candidates. In the fourth chapter of the thesis the result from the interviews is presented, this part is highly influential on the fifth chapter that includes the discussion. It is finally time to discuss the findings in chapter five. In this chapter I will discuss the findings and consider the presented theory at the same time. The research that is conducted gives me the opportunity to measure how young leaders are working with prevention and cases of sexual harassment while I consider relevant theory to investigate if there are some parallels that can be drawn. The final chapter six consist of a conclusion, and a summary of discussion and founding's related to the research question and the purpose of the study. I have also included how this research can be useful for future research in this field, and suggestions of how future research can continue to improve the awareness and knowledge

around this topic. In this chapter I have also mentioned some questioned that came up during my research with this empirical problem.

1.5 Definitions

Defining sexual harassment and aspect surrounded by this subject are necessary to get a holistic understanding of the thesis and in percentage of prevention work, and leadership actions and responsibility. First, I will start defining the concept of sexual harassment. Further, it is also given a short description of why this crime is happening, who is seen as the victims and perpetrators, and the perspective of the manager.

1.5.1 Sexual harassment

The phenomena of sexual harassment are described differently in the research literature. Regardless how the aspect is formulated it turns out to be significantly relevant to all platforms in the society, such as the workplace, at home, in public, or at leisure activities. The concept is still suffering from a lack of clarity and awareness and actions, statements, words, gestures, looks can be perceived in a different way depending on who you are. The lack of knowledge results in challenges for prevention strategy, plan of action and identification of sexual harassment (Svensson, 2020, p.12). Actions of sexual harassment that has its purpose of being intimidating, offensive, hostile, degrading, humiliating, or bothersome are categorized as sexual harassment. One case of actions is enough, it does not need to happen more than one time to be defined as sexual harassment (McDonald, 2011).

Different types of actions and behaviors that can be categorized as sexual harassment. Examples of these are physical sexual harassment, that can be anything from unwanted touching to sexual abuse, verbal sexual harassment which is when comments and allusions are being told to a person, and non-verbal sexual harassment, when a person is exposing certain body parts to another person without consent. Although there are several separate definitions of how to define and categorize sexual harassment the definitions described in this paragraph will be considered in this master's thesis (Jardim et al., 2022, p.5-7).

However, it is important to measure the degree of severity in a such case where the circumstances will play a role in the assessment of whether sexual harassment has occurred. Any situation where someone are perceives an experience of this crime should always be

considered as critical. Incidents may occur during working hours at the workplace, but it may also take place outside the workplace, such as Christmas parties, business trips and through social media. This aspect is known as sexual grey-areas where the person that is giving the unwanted attention might take advantage of the situation. Sexual harassment also occurs in situations where there is an imbalance of power in the relationship between parties that is involved (Jardim et al., 2022, p.7-8).

Sexual harassment can have serious consequences both for the person that is experiencing it, but also for the society in general. It can lead to severe difficulties for the victim because of a traumatic situation that the person is being exposed for. Sexual harassment can lead to personal consequences such as sexual problems, anxiety, depression and even suicide. The issue of sexual harassment has through the recent years gotten more attention and it has become an increasing concern where actors are starting to realize the need for more research, awareness, and highlighting.

In the research literature, sexual harassment has frequently been described as "unwanted sexual attention" or "unwanted sexual approaches" (Fasting & Sundgot-Borgen, 2000, p. 5). Furthermore, due to the subjective nature of interpreting unwanted attention, sexualized behavior can be perceived differently by individuals. Some individuals can perceive actions as harmless, flirting, or joking, but from another individual's perspective, they can be perceived as harmful and unwelcome. This example highlights the personal aspect of defining sexual harassment. To sum it up, the definition of sexual harassment is not based on a fixed description; it depends on the victim's personal experience, beliefs, and perception (Stockdale & Bhattacharya, 2008).

1.5.2 Why is sexual harassment happening?

To uncover the reasons behind sexual harassment, social science research has found various concepts from sociocultural environments that enable such behavior. Thomas and Kitzinger (1997) argue that these concepts are based on gender imbalanced structure in a society where the difference between men and women plays a significant role. This perspective emphasizes the economic power held by men, which creates an acceptable social environment for sexual harassment to happen against women. Inequality of power dynamics between males and females has persisted from earlier eras. This kind of power difference is evident when certain men occupying influential positions within a company exploit their power by engaging

in sexual harassment against women. Additionally, research also indicates that cases of sexual harassment go underreported, which makes it hard for managers and organizations to catch incidents (Hershcovis, 2021).

1.5.3 Who is experiencing sexual harassment?

Inequalities between people in the society contributes to the facts that some people are more exposed of experiencing sexual harassment than others. The question of which people and why these people are more exposed is a result of how the society has been build up over a long time. Age, skin color, sexuality, gender, and ethnicity are all factors that can determine sexual harassment (Svensson, 2020, p.11). Research argue that gender harassment is one of the most common types related to sexual harassment. This type of harassment is related to the individual's sexual orientation and can happen at any platform. These actions of sexual harassment can be linked to gender discrimination where actions of insulting, degrading and contemptuous are targeting a specific gender (Fitzgerald et al., 1995). A recent research study from The Public Health Institute in Norway shows that more than twice as many women than men are experiencing sexual harassment at work. These facts indicates that gender plays a role in the aspect of sexual harassment, and it is seen as discrimination of women. Considering facts of gender harassment, female employees are in greater risk of experiencing sexual harassment than male employees. This is because of differences between men and women that has been created in the society, which makes women more vulnerable in relation to this topic (Poulston, 2008, p.238).

Most of the employees in the service industry are working at the frontline with high level of customer-contact which makes them easily exposed for sexual harassment and abuse. The service industry has also one thing in common which is young employees and young managers working for the companies. This people naturally have lack of experience because of age which makes them vulnerable and easy targets of experiencing sexual harassment from perpetrators (McDowell et al., 2009; HRF, 2016). Employees working parttime in a company can make the situation of sexual harassment worse, this is because the employee often avoid speaking out when a case of sexual harassment is happening and instead choose to leave the workplace without giving up the reason. (Poulston, 2008, p.238).

1.5.4 Perpetrators and bystanders

Research related to sexual harassment are mostly considering the scope of the problem and which consequences the actions have for the individual victim and for an organization (Hulin et al., 1996). Perpetrators are referred as the people that subjects others to sexual harassment and bystanders are referred to the people that is watching but takes no action. There are no studies found that investigates the reasons of why the perpetrators are doing these crimes which means that it is also difficult to analyze the reasons of exactly why sexual harassment is happening. The same goes for bystanders. By starting to investigate why the perpetrators and bystanders are doing these actions it can contribute to a wider scope of knowledge both in research settings and in the society on general (Svensson, 2020, p.13).

Nordic research has found that perpetrators of sexual harassment are mainly men, but the position of the perpetrator can vary based on their sector, occupation, and power position. Sexual harassment can happen between colleges, from a superior or from customers or guests in the service industry (Svensson, 2020, p.8)

1.5.5 Managers perspective

The manager has the overall responsibility of preventing sexual harassment at the workplace, and consequences will follow if this is not prioritized (Vardiman, Shepherd, & Jinkerson 2014).

Actions of sexual harassment can have a serious negative effect on a work environment if happening, which is why the managers role of creating a policy against sexual harassment is essential (Stockdale et al., 2004). It can lead to a very intense and strange atmosphere among the employees at the workplace and have massive consequences for the company. Seen from a manager's perspective, prevention policy of sexual harassment is important, but it can also be problematic based on changes, work environment and experience. Some workplaces are experiencing more sexual harassment than others, such as the service industries. Leaders in this branch needs to support proactive work against prevention of sexual harassment, otherwise a hostile work environment can easily occur. It can be decisive how managers chose to deal with cases of sexual harassment, it all depends on knowledge, confidence, and experience (Grimsø, 2011).

Young leadership is a central aspect because of the young average age of leaders in the service industry and based on the chosen topic in this thesis (Jardim et al., 2022, p.16-18). Young leaders can often face other challenges at the workplace than senior leaders, based on lack of knowledge and experience in the field. These facts can affect the leader's decision-making process and it can make it difficult to navigate through complex organizational challenges, for example cases of sexual harassment (Buengeler, et al. 2016, p.1128).

As the main responsible for securing a safe work environment, it can be difficult for a young leader with lacking experience and a nonexistent follow up to secure knowledge from the company. These are crucial factors that should be taken care of by the company to secure responsible management at the workplace. According to The Public Health Institute in Norway the exposed sectors need more systematic work of prevention and a safety net to ensure that the local managers have enough knowledge to handle situations when they happen (Jardim et al., 2022, p.16-18).

1.6 Legal frameworks

In this section I will describe legal frameworks made from the Norwegian Labor Inspection Authority, these laws are related to the work life and how people that has a manager role in organizations based in Norway have a responsibility towards employees.

Norwegian Labor Inspection Authority includes statements where the employer is responsible for maintaining a safe working environment and make sure that no employees are experiencing sexual harassment at work. If a case of sexual harassment were to happen anywhere, the employer needs to ensure that the employee knows how to report the incident. Further, it is the managers role to follow up with the employee and take actions to prevent these incidents from happening again. As a manager you have the responsibility of prevent, handle, and make risk assessments regarding sexual harassment. This are important work, and it can determine whether an employee feels safe and enjoys work or not. This aspect can also affect daily work environment at a workplace (Equality and Anti-Discrimination Act, 2022, §13). The Norwegian Labor Inspection Authority has created a definition of sexual harassment which describes actions that is prohibited.

“Sexual harassment is unwanted sexual attention which has its purpose or effect of being offensive, intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or bothersome. Sexual harassment can be sexual comments of the body, simulations of sexual movements, scratching, pawing, touching or abuse. Incidents as display of images and videos with sexualized content or single instance of unwanted behavior is also sexual harassment. In such cases there is required more from the action and situation to ascertain sexual harassment. Especially aggravating is whether the relationship of strength and power are out of balance.”

– The Norwegian Labor Inspection Authority (2023).

There is also a definition of sexual harassment in the working environment act in section 13 which describes prohibition against sexual harassment (Equality and Anti-Discrimination Act, 2022, §13).

“Sexual harassment means any form of unwanted sexual attention that has the purpose or effect of being offensive, frightening, hostile, degrading, humiliating or troublesome.”

– The working environment act (2022)

1.7 Current state of knowledge

In the work of establishing knowledge of the research question in this thesis, knowing the current state of knowledge in this field is essential. In this part of the thesis, I will present previous research regarding sexual harassment and prevention work.

Sexual harassment was first recognized as a socio-legal phenomenon in the year of 1970, since then it has become a widespread issue. Sexual harassment has been proven to potentially take place anywhere, however, the problem is specifically widespread in many organizations and causing hostile work environments (McDonald et al. 2015). The landscape of knowledge surrounding sexual harassment changed after the #MeToo movement came to light. This campaign increased public awareness and highlighted sexual harassment in all working sectors. Sexual harassment has been identified as a significant issue from an organizational and societal perspective, and some of the key sectors that is categorized as highly affected is service industries, such as the fitness, nightlife, tourism, and hospitality sectors (Ineson et al. 2013).

Vardiman, Shepherd, & Jinkerson (2014) has conducted research based on practical prevention work of sexual harassment related to organizations and managers. Their research has found that implementing policies against sexual harassment in the workplace is an effective prevention strategy and helps employees to get a clear understanding of acceptable behavior. Current research indicates that in workplace cultures perceived as tolerant of sexual harassment, victims of sexual harassment often feel reluctant to report incidents due to fear of not being taken seriously. A fair of lacking disciplinary actions against perpetrators are centrally related to this aspect. The importance of leadership actions is also highlighted by research in the form of addressing the issue and making sure of a solid sexual harassment policy in the workplace (Stockdale et al., 2004).

Creating a policy against sexual harassment in the workplace has proven successful if the process is done right. Several elements are essential to include in the process, described as identifying the problem, training employees, and prioritizing prevention work from the leader (Vardiman et al. 2014). The #metoo movement was recently shed light on which resulted in increased attention of the apparent prevalence of sexual harassment at the workplace. Several individuals and managers expressed their concerns related to this matter, but somehow the issue of sexual harassment is still a widespread phenomenon in the society (Bråten & Øistad, 2017).

Based on collective findings from research on sexual harassment, it is evident that women are the primary targets, with younger women experiencing a higher frequency of harassment compared to older women. Existing research focuses on reporting the prevalence rates of sexual harassment experienced by women, highlighting their vulnerability related to such behavior. However, research has acknowledged that males can also be targets of sexual harassment, although the prevalence rates tend to be lower than females (Cortina and Areguin, 2021). Furthermore, studies reveal that most perpetrators are men. The perpetrator's position can vary depending on the sector or occupation in which the harassment occurs. Customers or guests are often the perpetrators in service industries like fitness and restaurants, although superiors and colleagues can also be involved. The impact on the victim varies significantly depending on the perpetrator's identity, whether it is a colleague, manager, patient, customer, or client (Svensson, 2020, p.8-9).

The service industry encompasses various sectors, including retail, fitness, restaurants, hotels, and general customer service. Research has found that sexual harassment can severely

impact employees and lead to high turnover, decreased productivity, and low motivation. The hospitality is an example of a sector that stands out as a branch with an above-average high turnover because of sexual harassment (Ødegård, Andersen, Jordfald, Nergaard & Trygstad, 2020). Regarding the current state of knowledge, research suggests that sexual harassment is also prevalent in the hospitality sector and that employees are affected by it. Ineson, Yap & Whiting (2013) have highlighted various forms of harassment, including unwanted sexual attention, inappropriate comments, and sexual coercion. The research has found that these actions come from male employees or guests and target front-line employees, such as servers, housekeeping, receptionists, and bartenders who often interact directly with customers. These victims are also shown to be mostly female or young employees. Managers in this sector are not providing employees with enough education and material to create an overall understanding of sexual harassment to prevent it. Leadership is essential to provide the workplace with proactive prevention work, and many hospitality organizations have recognized the importance of implementing policies and addressing sexual harassment. However, the effectiveness of these measures varies a lot. Challenges related to inconsistent enforcement, lack of research, and a culture of tolerance can hinder the process (Ineson et al. 2013).

Researchers also argue that the nightlife sector is another area where sexual harassment is a significant concern. This environment includes bars, clubs, and entertainment venues which foster an atmosphere that can facilitate inappropriate behavior. This is because of social dynamics, alcohol, loud music, and dim lighting. Some stakeholders recognize the need for change and awareness in the hospitality and nightlife sectors and are taking steps to address sexual harassment. These initiatives include training programs for employees, security measures, and creating zero tolerant policies. However, Ineson et al. (2013) address that these sectors require a higher focus on awareness and proactive actions to prevent sexual harassment.

As we can see, sexual harassment and prevention methods has been briefly investigated by several researchers. Research shows that organizational and workplace culture encompasses the norms, values, and social dynamics that define various industries and sectors (Vardiman et al. 2014). However, there is a knowledge gap existing regarding the processes surrounding sexual harassment incidents, the allocation of responsibilities, and the necessary preventive measures. Enhancing the understanding of how leaders create a safe and solid organizational culture can be crucial in identifying prevention work against sexual harassment. Workplace culture can

either encourage or discourage employees from speaking out about their experiences, and this knowledge is essential as it forms the foundation for enabling effective prevention efforts.

While research has been collected regarding sexual harassment prevention in various workplace settings, including the role of leadership, there is still a research gap in specifically investigating the involvement of young leaders and prevention. Some key points that stand out regarding this research gap are how existing research on sexual harassment prevention has primarily concentrated on leadership in general without specifying direct contributions and challenges faced by young leaders despite the average young age of leaders in the most exposed sectors. The gap leaves a need for more perspective on how young leaders are working to address this matter. Effectivity of prevention strategies related to sexual harassment varies from sector to sector. Understanding the challenges young leaders face in sectors such as fitness, nightlife, or other service industries is crucial for developing prevention work. However, limited research has focused on this specific context of young leaders.

Overall, the presented research gap shows the need for more investigations targeting the specific focus of the young leaders' role in sexual harassment. Based on the lack of research, it is relevant to investigate how young leaders from the service industry are working to prevent sexual harassment in the workplace and how they deal with occurring situations. Exploring their fresh perspectives and experiences will contribute to a better understanding of creating practical prevention approaches.

1.8 Research question

Considering the purpose of this thesis, the problem statement, and the aim of this study compared to the current state of knowledge regarding sexual harassment there is a need for more research in this field. Based on the gap in research of how young leaders prevent sexual harassment at the workplace I have established this research to gain more information about this topic. The following research question aims to gain an understanding and insight in how young leaders work to prevent sexual harassment.

- *How do young leaders in the service industry work to prevent sexual harassment at the workplace and how do they deal with occurring cases?*

It is also interesting to look at how young leaders are experiencing guidance and work from their organization related to sexual harassment and how they deal with occurring situations, based on their answers in the interview process.

2.0 Theory and literature

This master's thesis is focusing on the young leader's perspective related to sexual harassment and how they are working to prevent this crime from happening at their area of responsibility at the workplace. This chapter consists of theory that describe aspects of sexual harassment, prevention strategy, and organization policy. I find these theories relevant to include in the thesis because it will contribute the understanding of the empirical problem and answer the research question. Young leaders with limited experience of work related to sexual harassment is also essential in this thesis, which is why I have included theory of leadership responsibility on preventing sexual harassment. Research also shows the need for more attention from an organizational perspective regarding sexual harassment, and measures that can contribute the leaders in their work of prevention. The listed theory will be relevant in the chapter of discussion later in the thesis where the theory will be linked up to findings from the data collection.

- Prevention strategies.
- Sexual harassment in organizational culture.
- Leadership responsibility.
- Harris & Daunt's (2013) and Booyens, et al. (2022) theory of customer misbehavior.

2.1 Prevention strategies

Preventing sexual harassment in the workplace can be a comprehensive process that includes many phases and aspects. This is because of the complexity of an organizational environment. However, it is a critically essential aspect that should be prioritized because it provides the workplace with a safe and healthy environment, protects the employees, and contribute to keeping up motivated and well-being employees (Bell, Quick, & Cychota, 2003).

Bell et al. (2003) argues that proactive prevention management of sexual harassment involves several crucial aspects, including management commitment, zero tolerance, raising awareness among existing employees and new hires, and conducting regular assessments and training.

Each organization and workplace have their own work environment and culture that refers to norms, values, and social patterns. These are also factors that can determine if sexual

harassment happens at the workplace and why it happens. According to Bell et al, (2003) the preferred point of intervention is before a problem is developed. This statement is referring to sexual harassment prevention where the manager should work to develop a healthy organizational culture which is aiming for prevention work. Both employees and managers contribution to influence the culture in an organization is necessary to establish a workplace which is free of sexual harassment (Bell et al., 2003). A stable and solid organizational policy is central in the work of establishing a healthy workplace culture. Establishing and implementing an organizational policy does not happen automatically because a workplace environment is constantly changing based on the facts that employees come and go. Research has demonstrated the significance of implementing organizational policies, including sexual harassment policies, as an effective prevention strategy. It is essential to first address and understand the problem to optimize this process. In order to implement organizational policy in a changing environment, it is critical to have a solid fundament established at the workplace. Careful planning and consideration are necessary and approaching eventual risk factors of sexual harassment and possible challenges. Implementing organizational policy by rushing or without full consideration can have consequences for the workplace (Vardiman et al., 2014).

As work environments are constantly changing, managers can face the challenges of making consistent decisions regarding policies and procedures for the organization. Vardiman et al. (2014) illustrates an example that can create problems for a leader is the "Zero tolerance policy" concept. The term "Zero Tolerance" is frequently used when discussing policies related to sexual harassment. The term signifies a strict stance against sexual harassment in the organization, where all instances of harassment are unacceptable and subject to punishment. However, according to social research, this concept does not truly exist in reality. Such policies increase the stress level for managers' responsibility of implementing an inoperable policy (Vardiman et al., 2014).

A comprehensive workplace prevention program for sexual harassment requires more than a clear zero-tolerance policy. While such a policy is necessary, more is needed. Formal policies play a crucial role in establishing behavioral guidelines that discourage potential harassers and empower targets of harassment to report incidents. An effective sexual harassment policy should provide multiple safe channels for reporting, ensuring freedom from retaliation. Complaints coming from employees regarding sexual harassment should be taken seriously and investigated, and consequences for perpetrators must be ensured (Bell et al., 2003,

p.162). O'Leary-Kelly et al. (2000) argues that providing certainty of consequences can be more efficient in preventing sexual harassment than the severity of the consequence because, in this case, the victim is sure that the perpetrator gets punished for their action. Vardiman et al. (2014) also addresses the importance of evaluating and improving the implemented workplace policies. Leaders should regularly review and update their policies and procedures related to prevention strategy of sexual harassment. This to ensure that they remain effective and matches the legal requirements. Feedback from employees is also crucial related to work environment because this can identify and address issues that may contribute to sexual harassment (Bell et al., 2003).

Several of the aspects mentioned by Bell et al. (2003) are also supported by other researchers, among these are McDonald, Charlesworth, and Graham (2015) in their primary prevention strategy. This prevention strategies are focusing on the hiring new employees, politics at the workplace, creating awareness, and training of employees. The authors argues that these strategies are necessary tools for a leader in the work of preventing sexual harassment. First, a solid onboarding is important when hiring a new employee. In this part it is important to secure knowledge at the employee and make sure they are aware of situations that may occur at the workplace. Regular education sessions that is mandatory for all employees should be included at the workplace. According to the McDonald et al, (2015) these sessions are proven to be successful and to influence organizational culture because it leads to a greater recognition of sexual harassment among the employees. Sexual harassment can be difficult for many employees, especially if they are completely unfamiliar with the concept. Therefore, it can be argued that a good onboarding process is crucial for the organization. Four principles are included in the article as important training concepts. Risk factors of where and how sexual harassment can happen should be assessed early, map any differences of gender, and implement anonymous surveys that can locate any sexual harassment at the workplace (McDonald, et al, 2015, p.43-45).

The second principle of prevention training is to identify and raise awareness around sexual harassment to avoid misunderstandings. To identify misunderstandings and make a clear perception of the subject, studies shows that role-play among employees can be an effective tool. This gives the employees the opportunity to practice challenging situations. This, however, can also have a negative effect and be experienced as traumatizing if any of the employees have experienced difficult situations from before (McDonald, et al, 2015, p.46).

The third research includes training for managers to make them more able to handle situations of sexual harassment. The article argues for the importance of emotional work and communication for managers to secure their ability to show empathy for their employees, listen and to care. It is the managers responsibility to help the employee get through a case of sexual harassment and make sure they have someone to talk to inside the organization. Conflict management are also essential for a manager to be aware of in case sexual harassment occurs, it can reduce fair and make it easier for a manger to handle (McDonald, et al, 2015, p.45-46).

Some organizations are more gender dominated than others. The fourth principle of prevention training consists of challenging these organization cultures. Studies shows that sexual harassment occur more often in organizations that is dominated by male than in gender balanced work contexts. Considering the facts of gender differences, these are not the biggest challenges related to sexual harassment. Hierarchy and power abuse in an organization are problematic factors that creates a hostile work environment. Through a stereotypical view, women are being sexualized and looked down at. Based on these facts, McDonald, Charlesworth, and Graham argues that culture and gender equalities are important aspects to include in the training process of managers (McDonald, et al, 2015, p.45-46).

Cases of sexual harassment can occur in different types of organizations, but research suggests it is more prevalent in specific circumstances. This includes organizations where there is an imbalance of gender, significant power differences between male and female workers, or work environments that are highly sexualized. It can also be organizations lacking focus on sexual harassment or where the subject is considered with humor. These aspects are considered risk factors of sexual harassment that need to be taken care of by the organization. Bell et al. (2003) argue that a solid prevention strategy is to secure the stability between gender and power in the organization (Bell et al., 2003, p.162).

To sum up the facts, the researchers all agree that continuous work with prevention strategies are essential for managers to be able to keep sexual harassment away from the workplace. Furthermore, establishing and implementing organizational policies addressing sexual harassment are critical aspects of prevention work. The leader's ability to understand their responsibilities concerning sexual harassment will also be a practical element in preventing sexual harassment (Vardiman et al, 2014).

2.2 Sexual harassment in organizational culture

Organizations and workplaces create their own work environment and culture based on norms, values, and social patterns. The organizational culture plays a crucial role in sexual harassment. A culture that does not take these crimes seriously or have unclear guidelines of what behavior that is tolerated at the workplace can affect the environment negatively and create a hostile work environment. However, young leadership can contribute to changing an organizational culture and make room for promoting a zero-tolerant attitude and a safe environment (Vardiman et al., 2014). Fitzgerald, Gelfand, & Drasgow (1995) defines a three-dimensional concept model of sexual harassment that consists of the aspects: gender harassment, unwanted sexual attention, and sexual coercion. The concept is touching the area of sexual harassment at the workplace and is a well-known and accepted theoretical aspect in social science.

To begin with, the most common form of sexual harassment is related to gender harassment, which encompasses all forms of discriminatory behavior based on the individual's sexual orientation. Gender harassment does not involve explicit sexual interactions but includes various ways of humiliating someone based on their type of gender. The next aspect is unwanted sexual attention which refers to inappropriate displays of sexual interest. Examples of this can be unwelcome sexual conversations or non-consensual and forced touching. The range of verbal and non-verbal behaviors are being encompassed as abusive, unwelcome, and not reciprocated actions, such as making sexual comments, groping, and making other unwelcome sexual advances. Lastly, sexual coercion is categorized as behavior that offers professional advantages or rewards in exchange for sexual acts or attention. Examples of this can be a manager promising a promotion in return for a sexual favor, or threatening an employee to terminate the contract unless sexual actions are provided. Manipulation is central in this aspect because the perpetrator exerts control over someone else's behavior using implied rewards or punishment to elicit sexual favors (Fitzgerald et al., 1995).

The authors Fitzgerald & Drasgow have also participated in a research study regarding sexual harassment in the workplace. This study highlights the significance of the organizational climate as a crucial factor in the occurrence of sexual harassment. The environment of the organization sets the tone of the tolerance towards sexual harassment and plays an important role in determining consequences of actions related to sexual harassment. In cases where sexual

harassment occurs, the organization climate determines whether such behavior, including reporting incidents will be punished, rewarded, or ignored. The dimension of organizational climate and tolerance for sexual harassment are being shaped by employee's perception regarding these contingencies (Hulin et al., 1996).

Organizations that foster a climate tolerant of harassment play a significant role in facilitating incidents of sexual harassment. Individuals who engage in sexual harassment are more likely to do so when they find themselves in circumstances where such behavior is allowed. This type of organizational environment where employees are motivated to sexually harass other colleagues implies a higher probability that this behavior can occur under organizational circumstances that either facilitate or tolerate sexual harassment. Consequently, the specific characteristics of the workplace's organizational environment are crucial factors in determining the occurrence of sexual harassment incidents (Hulin et al., 1996).

A significant number of victims of sexual harassment choose not to share their experiences with others in their workplace. For the employees who come forward, the perception of organizations as tolerant of sexual harassment creates additional risks, particularly for female employees. Reporting an incident of sexual harassment in such an organization is often seen as risky because there is a risk of the complaint not being taken seriously. In this case, the perpetrator will face minimum severe consequences for the actions due to the prevailing climate of tolerance towards sexual harassment. Fitzgerald et al. (1997) argue that female employees who perceive their organization as tolerant of sexual harassment can experience a higher level of sexual harassment than male colleagues. It is also discovered that in workplaces with mostly male supervisors, more women than men characterize the organization they work in as accepting sexual harassment (Hulin et al., 1996).

After the #metoo movement was introduced for the Norwegian workplaces in 2017, sexual harassment got a lot of attention. This campaign influence women to share their stories and suddenly sexual harassment was shed light on in many organizations (Burke, 2018). The campaign had its purpose of stopping men that possess higher positions in organizations and generally in the society to take advantage of exploiting woman (Burke, 2018). The aspect of power abuse at the workplace are reality, where young women are targets of sexual harassment performed by leaders. This makes the facts of "leaders' responsibility of preventing sexual harassment" problematic (Bråten & Øistad, 2017). However, sexual harassment can happen to

anyone at the workplace, including men. Stereotypes of gender differences and sexualization of women are left over from the old times and still plays a role in some organizations. This aspect can be linked to the concept of gender discrimination. This is measured as the most occurring form of sexual harassment where the actions and intimidations are targeting gender, especially young women (Jardim et al., 2022, p.19).

Svensson (2020) argues that sexual harassment happening in a workplace for a longer period can also result in bad performance, low motivation and make it difficult to collaborate between the employees. This will lead to negative consequences regarding the financial and economic area for the organization. Employees that do not thrive at their workplace are more likely to go on sick leave or long-term absence that will reflect negatively back on the organization. Sexual harassment will slowly create a hostile work environment if no prevention or measures are taken by the manager. A hostile environment like this can also make people leave the organization with a bad experience that can result in bad reputation. In cases where the employee feels the lack of attention around sexual harassment in the company it can easily lead to a “culture of silence and under-reporting in the workplace”. When the number of reported cases is lower than the number of unreported cases of sexual harassment in a company, it will result in employees that chooses look away and not report an incident because there is no actions or prevention work from the company (Svensson, 2020, p.12).

As previously mentioned, sexual harassment is more prevalent in specific sectors. This includes all kinds of service industries that interact with customers daily. Based on these facts, these companies must work harder to contain a workplace where sexual harassment does not occur. Said & Tanova (2021) argues that workplace bullying, and harassment are also concerning in sectors like hospitality. Their study addresses how sexual harassment affects employees' mindfulness and emotional exhaustion. These crimes are proven to have significant negative impacts on employees and the organization. The researchers refer to workplace bullying as persistent mistreatment, harassment, or abusive behavior that happens repeatedly. Sexual harassment is not limited to just one sector; it can quickly occur in various industries (Said & Tanova, 2021). This fact can also link sexual harassment to the aspect of pan-industrial culture, which refers to common challenges in several sectors. Pan-industrial culture is a cultural phenomenon that cuts across multiple sectors. The aspect refers to shared values, norms, beliefs, practices, and attitudes prevalent in various industries, regardless of their specific nature or focus. Lee-Ross (2005) addresses that a broader pan-industrial cultural

phenomenon has also been recognized as influencing employee attitudes and behavior (Lee-Ross, 2005).

The prevailing norms and attitudes regarding sexual harassment can reflect a pan-industrial culture in the organization because it may exist across industries (Lee-Ross, 2005). Certain attitudes, such as gender stereotypes, power imbalance, and tolerance of inappropriate behavior, can be acknowledged and hinder the organization from creating a zero-tolerance policy against sexual harassment. Said & Tanova (2021) address that lack of trust, fear of retaliation, and an unreliable report system are challenges that can affect employees not to report an incident of sexual harassment. Understanding these shared challenges can bring an effort to improve the organizational reporting mechanisms and support systems (Said & Tanova, 2021).

The study's findings suggest that bullying and sexual harassment at the workplace harm the employee's ability to perform well and be fully present and engaged at work. Furthermore, Said & Tanova highlight that workplace bullying in the hospitality industry is associated with the employee's emotional exhaustion. The study emphasizes the significance of protecting employees against these crimes by creating policies that hinder sexual harassment from taking place. Like other researchers, Said and Tanova (2021) agree on the importance of creating a safe and healthy work environment (Said & Tanova, 2021).

Through collaboration between industries, prevention strategies for sexual harassment can develop powerfully and effectively. Organizations and industries should identify common challenges and share insights in order to make this happen (Lee-Ross, 2005).

2.2 Leadership responsibility

As previously mentioned, managers have the full responsibility of preventing sexual harassment from happening at the workplace. Bell et al. (2003) recommends leaders to establish a policy against sexual harassment in the workplace to be able to identify the problem before it evolves. Leaders must create an environment that foster respect, dignity, and guidelines of accepted behavior for all employees. This involves setting clear expectations from the employees that sexual harassment will not be tolerated and promoting a culture where all employees have equal respect regardless of their positions. It is also argued that leaders have a

strong power of influencing the rest of the workplace, which makes it important to create valuable statements related to the commitment of the prevention work of sexual harassment. These actions can influence employees to believe and participate in a work environment that is zero tolerant of sexual harassment. Leaders should develop and implement solid policies and procedures explicitly addressing sexual harassment. These policies should clearly define what constitutes sexual harassment, outline reporting procedures, and specify concrete actions that will be taken to address the reported issue (Lindenberg & Reese, 1996). Considering this research, the leader emerges as a crucial factor in the occurrence and prevention of sexual harassment in the workplace. Therefore, leaders must have a thorough understanding of employment law and organizational policies and be able to apply these rules when addressing cases related to sexual harassment issues (Vardiman et al., 2014).

Actively observant leaders are more likely to address factors contributing to a work environment supporting sexual harassment prevention. Research by Stockdale & Bhattacharya (2008) also argues that this leadership characteristic creates a trustful relationship with employees and shows that the leader takes sexual harassment seriously by effectively handling occurring situations. When sexual harassment is reported or observed, leaders must respond promptly, and impartially. This process involves investigating the incident, keeping a professional attitude, and take appropriate disciplinary actions when necessary. The researchers also highlight two essential measures managers can implement to prevent sexual harassment in the workplace. First, leaders need to be observant of gender imbalance in the workplace to create a more balanced work environment between males and females. By also looking at power differences between gender, it will reduce incidents of sexual harassment related to this aspect. The second measure involves proactive leadership by identifying employees with a tolerance for sexual harassment and eliminating these (Stockdale & Bhattacharya, 2008).

The work of addressing and preventing sexual harassment at the workplace can be challenging for the manager, especially if they do not have necessary prior knowledge or experience. These actions can have significant legal, ethical, and social implications on the work environment, personally for the employees, and for the manager. Cortina & Areguin (2020) are specifying some reasons why;

Legal responsibility: Laws is describing that sexual harassment are prohibited in the society, and organizations can face legal consequences if they are not addressing the problem

and preventing it from happen. The leader is responsible for ensuring that laws and regulation are being included at the workplace, which means they have the overall responsibility of preventing sexual harassment (Cortina & Areguin, 2020).

Ethical considerations: Ethical principles that includes fair treatment and respect are being excluded from an action of sexual harassment. Creating a safe and respectful work environment are one of the most important tasks you have as a leader (Cortina & Areguin, 2020)..

Negative work environment: The moral of the employees and effective work is easily something that can be affected if sexual harassment is occurring at the workplace. This can have huge consequences for the financial parts of the company (Cortina & Areguin, 2020).

Public considerations: Low morale among employees, ineffective work, and bad numbers for the company will also reflect on the company's reputation. Sexual harassment can therefore result in bad reputation for the company and lead to negative publicity which the leader must handle (Cortina & Areguin, 2020).

The leader's role in establishing prevention work of sexual harassment is critical. This is based on the facts of responsibility that lie on the leader. Their significant influence on employees through their position is essential to have in mind to demonstrate their commitment to preventing sexual harassment. It is requiring the leader to work proactive with addressing and preventing these problems when they occur. Creating a zero tolerant culture for discrimination and a work environment where respect is central, this can be important actions from a leader's perspective (Stockdale et al., 2004). Another important aspect related to the working life is to increase the knowledge around sexual harassment, especially for the managers that has the overall responsibility. Creating awareness around sexual harassment for employees in an organization can have a huge impact on the possibility to work with prevention. This can also have a psychological effect on employees where they feel safe and suddenly gets the courage to speak out if they have experienced any cases, which can lead to a better work environment (Hulin et al., 1996).

Overall, a responsible leadership involves creating a safe and healthy work environment, where sexual harassment does not exist. This is done by implementing solid

policies and procedures, providing training, effectively response to incidents, support victims, and keeping up a continuous prevention work.

2.3 Customer misbehavior

As the research in this thesis aims to answer how young leaders work to prevent sexual harassment among employees and how they deal with situations, I find it relevant to also include theory of eventual perpetrators in this chapter. The thesis is considering young leaders working in primary fitness and nightlife branch, which is categorized as service occupations. Challenges of gender differences, male perpetrators and young employees are already mentioned in the introduction of the thesis, but the challenges related to customers as perpetrators and their misbehavior have yet to be presented.

Customer misbehavior can present challenges for young leaders in several ways. In the research paper written by Harris & Daunt (2013) “managing customer misbehavior: challenges and strategies” the authors aim to explore how customer misbehavior affects frontline employees and managers in the service industry. This research includes strategies and management techniques of how to minimize the impact of customer misbehavior at the workplace. Founding’s from this research paper indicates that customer misbehavior is highly widespread among employees working in the service industry which is why I find this research relevant for this thesis (Booyens, et al., 2022).

There is no specific definition of customer misbehavior based on the research literature, however, there has been a primary research focus on examining the dynamics of individual types of customer misbehavior. My definition on this concept is that customer misbehavior can be seen as actions that has its purpose of damaging or destroying the company’s business in some way. The research article of Harris & Daunt (2013), are exclusively investigating which consequences that can follow when frontline employees are being exposed of customer misbehavior such as sexual harassment. Data found in this research suggest that customer misbehavior has an impact on frontline employees and managers working in the service industry. The founding’s shows that these actions will result in negative outcomes for the employees where the intention to quit are increasing, restrained behavior around customers, and low motivation and interest of their work. The article includes three outcomes that are classified within frontline employees that are experiencing sexual harassment by customers.

Emotional reactions, work related attitude and behaviors, and physical harm. All three are all negative outcomes where emotional reactions include the psychological impact on the employee, such as depression or anxiety. The second, work related attitudes and behavior are based on reduced work-moral, motivation and low satisfaction at work. The third outcome includes any physical harm the employee has gotten during the sexual abuse. The given outcomes all include critical aspects that can have great impacts on a company and affect the employees negatively. Based on this study customer misbehavior including sexual harassment at the workplace are doing serious harm to the frontline workers and managers and most of them are experiencing personal consequences from the incidents (Harris Daunt, 2013).

Further down the research, Harris & Daunt (2013) describes several management challenges that is connected to the outcomes of customer misbehavior against employees. There are four challenges that is being highlighted in the paper: conflicting pressure, recruitment and retention, counseling and motivation, and time expenditure. The conflicting pressure challenge occurs when customer misbehavior is persistent and the manager gets in the dilemma of following the company's high quality customer service, where "the customers are always right. But in the other hand it is their responsibility to protect the young employees from getting hurt at work. Recruitment of new employees and retention of the ones that are already working there are important factors for a manager to consider carefully. In the recruitment work it can be beneficial for the company to hire employees that fits for the position. This means also finding personalities that can handle a tough feedback or misbehaving customers. Counseling and motivating employees are a big part of a manager's role. This part of the job is essential for the employees to perform well, especially if there is misbehaving customers that makes it harder to work. Data from the research paper indicated gender difference in the work of counseling and motivation, and female employees are more likely to implement this work. The last challenge listed are now much time managers are spending in handling customer misbehavior. This affects other work tasks, and the manager ends up with a big backlog on things to do (Harris Daunt, 2013).

Young leaders may have limited experience of dealing with situations of customer misbehavior, such as physical or verbal sexual harassment. In relation to these facts, they need to develop necessary skills to be able to know how to act in certain situations and at the same time address the situation effectively. Mentorship is argued as a measure taken that can contribute to fulfill the knowledge and train the young leader to manage such situations. This

can also be helpful if a leader is struggling with maintaining confidence when facing a difficult case of customer misbehavior (Harris Daunt, 2013).

The article by Booyens et al. (2022) also addresses customer misbehavior and its implications pointed at the hospitality industry. The researchers investigate how organizations ignore customer misbehavior to maintain a good public reputation. The article also includes aspects of employees' perspectives. This study agrees with Harris & Dautns (2013) that customer misbehavior is more prevalent in the hospitality industry, where employees interact highly with customers. Booyens et al. (2022) describe customer misbehavior as verbal abuse, harassment, rule-breaking, and other disrespectful behaviors that target the employee. The research shed light on social washing, which refers to the workplace overlooking customer misbehavior to benefit the organization and maintain customer satisfaction. However, the researchers also argue that customer misbehavior can harm employees and affect their well-being and performance at work (Booyens et al., 2022).

As Harris & Daunt (2013) mention, this research also supports the state that customer misbehavior negatively impacts employees. Furthermore, the research discusses how the organization can contribute to social washing by emphasizing customer service and the fear of negative reviews. Implementing structured policies and training programs are suggestions mentioned by the researchers to keep customer misbehavior at a minimum. It also encourages employees to speak up and hold customers accountable for their behaviors (Booyens et al., 2022).

Considering the serious consequences highlighted in the studies, there is also listed specific tactics that can be useful for both frontline employees and managers to deal with occurring situations. These tactics includes how the employees should prepare for an incident by being aware of clothes and observing customers. The second tactic indicates how the employee should act in a “here and now” situation by ignoring customers, altering speech patterns and generally take control of the situation. The work after a situation of sexual harassment has happened the employee should talk to the manager preferably or other colleges, if necessary, make sure to express feelings and try to make sure that the customer get the consequence they deserve (Harris Daunt, 2013). Overall, both articles highlight the prevalence of customer misbehavior in the hospitality industry and address this as a critical aspect that organizations must handle.

Organizations must create a safe and respectful environment for their employees by recognizing and taking appropriate measures to address customer misbehavior (Booyens et al., 2022).

2.4 Limitations and clarifications

Sexual harassment can happen anywhere at any time in the society, at home, in a public place or at the workplace. Since the scope of this problem is wide, I had to set some limitations for this thesis. The focus in this thesis are therefore young leaders that has primary personnel responsibility in the service industry, how they are working with prevention of sexual harassment at the workplace, and how they are handling occurring incidents. The candidates chosen for the data collection included young leaders from the service industry, especially from two branches, fitness, and nightlife industry. These industries are both similar too each other which is why they can be used in comparison throughout the project and the discussion of data. However, the two branches also have some differences related to the work of sexual harassment that is interesting to investigate.

2.5 Ethical considerations and anonymizing

Before starting the interview process, I applied for granted from the knowledge sector's service provider in Norway (Sikt). After my application was approved, I could start with the in-depth interviews. I made a consent form for the interview candidates to sign before we began the interview. In this form I included basic information of the candidate's rights related to the project.

By anonymizing the interview candidates, the candidate's participation is being anonyme in the thesis to protect their privacy. It is therefore important that this project is written the right way to ensure the confidential part of the project. Considering the anonymous participation, I have chosen to use fictive names when presenting the results of the interviews. I have also left out certain private information about the participants, such as specific age, place of residence, and which place they work. I consider this information as irrelevant for this thesis to be able to answer the research question.

3.0 Methodological framework

Based on the research question that is presented in this thesis the natural method to choose was qualitative research and in-depth interviews because I wanted to investigate and go in the in-depth of the chosen topic.

3.1 Qualitative research design

This master's thesis includes a complex, empirical problem that I have chosen to investigate. The methodological framework is the key instrument in collecting relevant data for the study to be able to answer the research question. In the choice of method, it is important that the method is suitable according to the research question. After careful consideration, it was decided that the most relevant results would be obtained by using qualitative research method. Silverman (1997) suggests that the qualitative research method is well-suited for studying individuals and obtaining personal insights and experiences from participants. This approach allows researchers to understand diverse perspectives and experiences comprehensively. Additionally, qualitative methods are precious for exploratory studies, as they provide a broader perspective and facilitate in-depth exploration (Ryan et al., 2009). By using qualitative research method, it will allow me to investigate on a deeper level how young leaders are working to prevent sexual harassment. I find it convenient to speak personally with different young leaders that works in service industries where sexual harassment are more likely to happen, also to understand which challenges they are facing.

The thesis aims to understand the characteristics of young leaders from some specific branches in the service industry, and which challenges related to sexual harassment they face in their daily work. In the work of research, the focus is pointed at how they work with specifically with prevention of sexual harassment, but also their own experience and cases they have already handled.

3.2 Selection of interview objects

In the process of finding interview candidates, I was prepared for a comprehensive process and challenges along the way. I identified candidates for the interviews through a snowball sampling technique, whereby leaders in the fitness and nightlife industry were asked to provide names of young leaders they had interacted with or knew. Multiple leaders from the

same company were suggested, resulting in a diverse pool of potential candidates. Using the snowball sampling is identified as a highly effective technique. However, this technique has its limitations and often leads to a lack of diversity (Morgan, 2008). In addition to snowballing, I used purposeful sampling, carefully selecting candidates that could offer in-depth knowledge and unique perspectives relevant to the chosen topic. The goal was to consciously choose participants who could contribute rich and meaningful data to address the research question. To measure and secure diversity among the candidates the selection of gender, personalities and experience was highly relevant.

After selecting candidates, I started the process with eleven in-depth interviews planned, but three of the candidates ended up withdrawing their consent to the interview, which lead me to only eight valuable candidates to include in the project. The question of why the other three candidates chose to draw back their participation in the project is interesting. Sexual harassment is an uncomfortable topic that can be difficult many people to talk about and we can discuss if this is the reason why the candidates chose to withdraw from the project. One of the candidates that backed out indicated that it was because she did not have any knowledge about sexual harassment as a leader, and she was embarrassed by it. The other two candidates draw back consent without any reason. However, eight young leaders still consented to participate in-depth interviews and all of them completed the interview. The eight candidates are young leaders in the age of 24-31 years old. The selection of candidates fell on young leaders working in the service industry because this industry is known for hiring young leaders, especially the fitness and nightlife industry.

Six of the candidates work in the fitness industry at different fitness clubs in Norway, the remaining two candidates are working as managers in two different nightclubs in Norway. The choice of these two specific groups for the in-depth interviews is based on their age and the industry. They are all working in the service industry, in two very different branches, despite the differences it is many common aspects the leaders must deal with. I assumed some of the interview candidates to have experience of incidents related to sexual harassment at the workplace from before, and this assumption was right. The managers I have interviewed all agree that their role consists of responsibility to contain a safe and healthy work environment in industries where sexual harassment are highly common. The workplaces consist of mainly young employees that are easy targets of sexual harassment.

In the process of selecting candidates, I experienced skepticism from the candidates, may because of a sensitive topic. Some of the candidates was hesitating to agree to the interview before I told them that their participation was anonymous. While I was arranging the interviews, I was working to keep a balanced structure of interview objects between leaders from the fitness industry and the nightlife industry. This balance become hard to achieve because of the three interview candidates that backed down was all working in the nightlife industry. I also tried to include a combination of men and women in the project which was also difficult because most men I asked to participate in the project was not interested. This is also an interesting aspect based on the facts that women are more exposed of sexual harassment than men. Despite some unbalance in the sampling of interview candidates I would still argue that the research and findings that has been done through this project is valuable in the work of sexual harassment at the workplace.

Studies from the central statistical office in Norway (SSB) are explaining that young women stand out of being targets of sexual harassment at work, especially in the service industry (Olsen, 2010). Research related to this aspect also shows that male and female has different perceptions of what counts as sexual harassment. Based on these facts, I think the findings from the interviews could be significantly different if there were only men included. It was still important to include some male interview candidates as well as women to investigate if there is some truth in this claim.

3.3 Data Collection

The data for this master's thesis was primary collected in March and April 2023 by conducting eight personal in-depth interviews. The interviews have been conducted online by Zoom and recorded with a personal consent from all the interview candidates. The interviews lasted between 30-60 minutes each depending on how much the candidate wanted to share and had experienced. The aim of this interview process was to collect as much data as possible from experience and observation as the interview candidates was holding on to.

I used an explorative approach in the in-depth interviews to gather this sensitive and uncomfortable data from the candidates. I designed an interview guide where my focus was to create open-ended questions to be able to make the interview candidates to talk and describe their experiences. The explorative design was the primary approach I used in this interview

process because the scope of this subject is deficient. To apply this approach, I was encouraging the candidates to open their minds and to talk about their experiences as a part of a conversation instead of a formal interview. By asking open-ended questions and using explorative design in the interview process I believe made it easier for the candidates to speak and for me to listen (Ryan et al., 2009).

Ahead of the interviews I created an interview guide as a fundament to bring into the interviews. This interview guide is based on the protocol that “Nordic Research Funding Initiative on Sexual Harassment at Work” has been applying through their interviews. I used this as an instrument to keep track during the interviews and to make sure I asked mostly the same questions to all candidates. However, the guide was also semi-structured because I wanted to have an open conversation with the candidates where they got the opportunity to talk as much as possible. In settings where I noticed that the conversation topic floated over to an irrelevant subject, I used the interview guide to lead us back into the right questions. The guide consists of six categories: 1. Previous work that has been done, 2. Questions related to the fitness industry, 3. Questions related to the nightlife industry, 4. Questions related to both branches, 5. Projects and knowledge, 6. Further questions related to perpetrators, gender, sexuality, and race.

Table 1: Information about informants.

Who?	How many years of experience in the service industry?	How many years working as a leader?	Has the leader experience with a specific case? Yes/No
Ine	5 years	2,5 years	Yes
Sofie	3 years	1,5 years	Yes
Andreas	2 years	1 year	No
Line	5 years	1 year	No
Nina	7 years	5 years	Yes
Olivia	5 years	2 years	Yes
Hanna	5 years	4 years	Yes
Daniel	3 years	1 year	Yes

The table presents a short and precise description of how many years they have been working in the service industry, how many years as a leader, and if they have experienced cases of sexual harassment at the workplace. All the interview candidates have worked in the service industry for several years and could relate to the sensitivity of sexual harassment in this industry. All candidates have minimum one year of leader experience, which I find important because it takes time to possess a role. Six of the leaders has experienced et least one case of sexual harassment with an employee involved and two of the candidates did not have any specific case to relate to.

3.4 Analyzing data

The purpose of the analysis is to connect the chosen method, thematic analysis, to the research question. I experienced the time after finishing all interviews as critical because I was left with a lot of impressions, thoughts, and information that I could not wait to analyze. After finishing the eight interviews it was important for me to go through notes and sound recording to ensure that the documentation was included. All interviews have been transcribed automatically through Microsoft Word. I went through every transcription to correct mistakes and to make sure the written information was valid. In this process I have used much time in analyzing the important statements that was said by the interview candidates and to separate the most important information to be included in the chapter of results. In the transcription I also included different word usage, tone of voice where relevant, and breaks, to be able to go back and listed to the interview if necessary.

All interviews were held in Norwegian, so after I was done with the transcription, I started to mark out important quotes and translated them to English. In the process of translating the quotes I was aware of the risk that some of the statements might be indistinct because of the issue of fragile translation, but it is important to include quotes from the candidates in the thesis and link these statements to relevant theory.

The first time I read through the transcription I wrote only key words and marks in the text where I found the most interesting statements. The second time I went through the transcriptions I started to sort out the most relevant information using codes. I used this technique to systemize the transcription and make it easier to analyze. I noted different codes

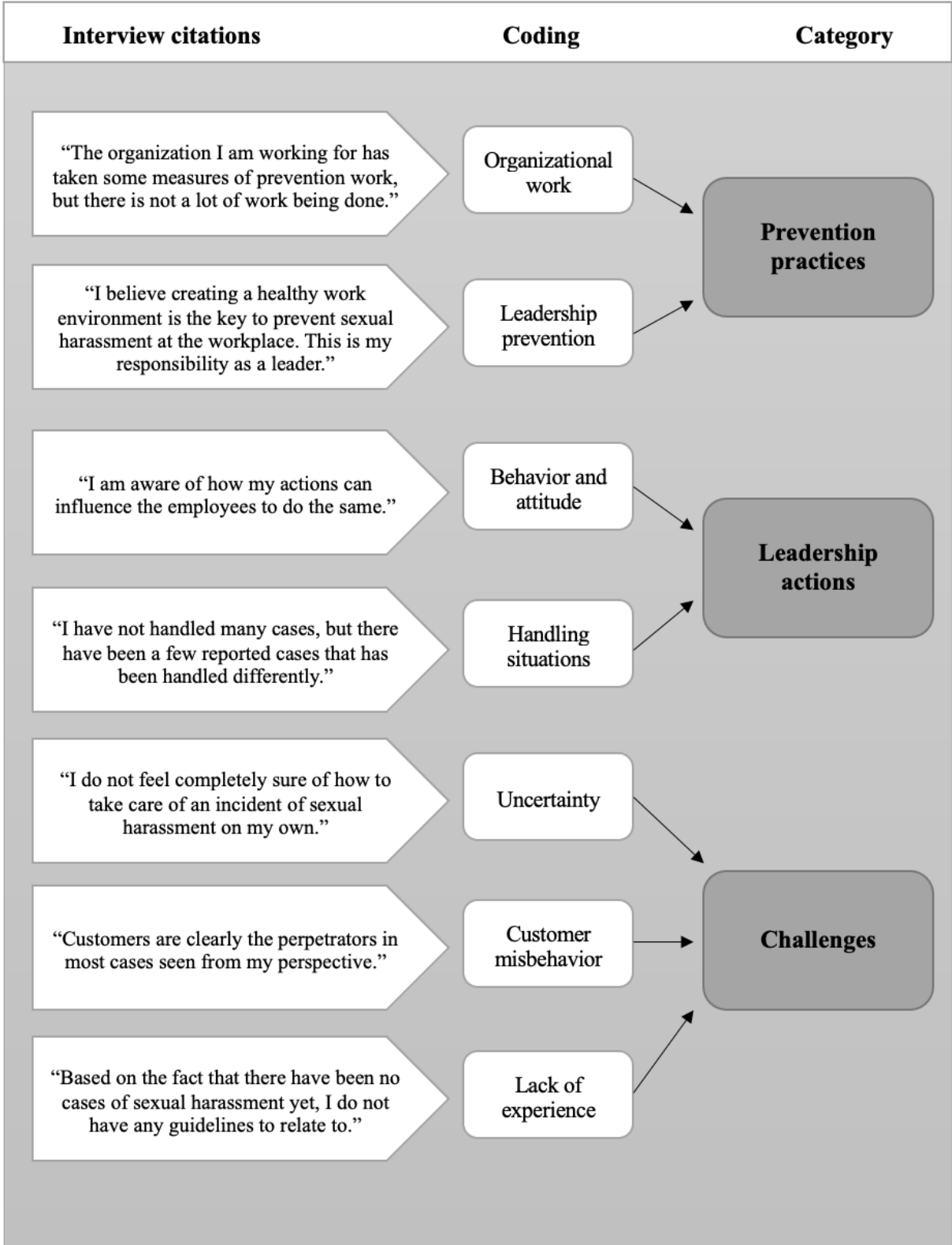
as key words throughout the text and used this in the comprising of the candidates, identify patterns, and eventual differences that might occur. The outcome of this phase created three main categories which will create the foundation and structure in the following chapter of results. The categories are elaborated in the next chapter, and they are created through a collection of key words and important statements from the interview candidates. The further work of analyze and discussion in the thesis will be based on these categories.

4.0 Results

In the following chapter I will present the results and the findings that is interpreted from the interview data. The presented results are affiliated to the empirical problem and the research question in the thesis where young leadership and sexual harassment is central. In the end of this chapter, I will summarize the findings from the interviews which will be central for the next chapter of discussion where the results will be linked to relevant theory.

During the data analysis, I created categories to help the process of presenting the results. In the following *table 2* I have created a structured overview of how I created the categories from the interviews. The table shows citations taken directly from the interviews, codes that are created based on the citations and lastly, the identified category. In the work of identifying citations and separating it into categories, I found it hard to choose the number of categories and identify where each code belongs. I chose to split the results into three categories with relevant subcategories to follow. The three categories are all based on the information that is collected from the interviews and are made to give the chapter of results a better structure. After going through the data material from the interviews I noticed that some aspects were rapidly repeated by the candidates, while some aspects were less mentioned. These findings are presented below.

Table 2, Category overview, based on data from the interviews.



4.1 Prevention practices

As the primary focus in this thesis is to identify how young leaders are working to prevent sexual harassment at the workplace, it was natural to ask the candidates how they are working with prevention at the workplace today. The candidates were asked of two different aspects, how their organization was working with prevention of sexual harassment and how they as a leader was performing prevention work. The findings identified differences related to the organizational perspective which is illustrated by citations below. Regarding the aspect of leadership prevention, all leaders was addressing a safe work environment and a policy against sexual harassment.

Organizational prevention

The organizational work of prevention and previous actions performed to prevent sexual harassment was the first topic the candidates were asked questions about. I asked the candidates how they experienced contribution from their company regarding sexual harassment prevention work. As mentioned, it was given several different answers to these questions which is illustrated in citations below. Firstly, the dialog between Julie and Ine is presented.

“Julie: Has there been any prevention work related to sexual harassment in the fitness organization you are working in?”

Ine: Yes. Last year it was given information and material to all leaders in the organization about this topic where the purpose was to conduct a workshop with the employees to create awareness in the work environment. As the manager, my job was also to create action plans and risk analysis regarding sexual harassment.

Julie: Has there been any prevention work before this was implemented?”

Ine: No. During the five years I have been working in the company this topic has not been shed light on before recently.

Julie: How often do you use this material?”

Ine: To be honest, not very often, I look at it less than once per month. On the other side I have been more conscious about sexual harassment after the company brought it up to light.”

- Citations, interview.

In the dialog, Ine is expressing how she experiences prevention work from the organization she is working in. The candidate's individual point of view of how their organization is working with prevention and activities related to sexual harassment is an

interesting and relevant question because this can also affect how the leaders are working with this matter. She describes how she recently has gotten more aware of work related to sexual harassment because the company has started to point awareness at this topic. On the other hand, she is telling that this is the first time in five years she has heard anyone in the company lift this matter which tells me that there has not been a continuous work regarding prevention of sexual harassment in this company. Other candidates' opinions are illustrated by two citations where the candidates are disagreeing in the organizational work of prevention.

“We have recently gotten information and material related to sexual harassment centrally from the company where the purpose was to use this to create prevention work and culture at the local workplace.” - Olivia, interview.

“My experience is that there is very little focus on sexual harassment in the company that I am working for. It is not carried out any specific prevention work to the employees and I have no guidelines to relate to.” - Sofie, interview.

Based on the presented dialog and the two citations, findings indicates that most of the leaders were aware of how their organization operates with prevention work of sexual harassment, but as we see in the citations, not everyone is aware. According to Sofie, she has not observed any organizational work regarding sexual harassment prevention. I find these answers interesting because six of the interview candidates are working in the same fitness company where four of them are aware of the organizational work and the remaining two are not aware. As illustrated, Sofie and Olivia are disagreeing on whether the company has focus on prevention work regarding sexual harassment or not. This can indicate that Sofie has not paid attention to information and material coming from the company and not acted responsibly as a leader, which will be discussed in the following chapter.

The interview candidates were also asked the questions if they knew about any campaigns or material from their organization regarding sexual harassment, and if yes, how often they were using it. One of the answers is illustrated in the citation below.

“I think I have gotten some material regarding sexual harassment at SharePoint, but I am not sure, and I have never used it.” Daniel, interview.

Findings indicates that most of the leaders are aware of material presented from their company, but they do not see the importance of taking the material into practice. Several of the interviewed candidates is also supporting what Ine is saying in the dialog. Four of the candidates from the fitness industry are agreeing that the company recently has been observant to sexual harassment and therefore taken some measures that will contribute to their prevention work. The two candidates that was working in the nightlife industry was both agreeing that their workplaces and branch did not take any measures regarding prevention of sexual harassment and the young leaders was left by their own in the work of preventing and handling these crimes at their workplace. This statement is illustrated in the citation below.

“It has never been any focus on preventing sexual harassment in our branch, it is almost like these crimes are expected to happen but there are no measures taken. Everything I have done is based on my own initiative.” - Nina, interview

Proactive prevention practice by the young leaders

One of the most interesting parts of the interviews was to ask questions that pointed directly at the subject of how the young leaders had been working with proactive prevention against sexual harassment in the workplace. When I asked the candidates what they were doing to prevent sexual harassment at the workplace they were all agreeing that a healthy work environment and creating policy against sexual harassment was crucial. However, findings indicates that the leaders also are working in different ways to prevent sexual harassment, this is illustrated by to examples below.

“I am arranging one meeting with the whole staff once per year where we include the topic of sexual harassment at the agenda. During this meeting we are using 2-3 hours for discussion and making room for the employees to talk.” - Nina, interview.

“Despite the lack of focus from the company, I have organized specific activities at the club that I am responsible for. I have tried to build up trust among the employees and create awareness around this subject, so they know what to do if they experience a case.” -Sofie, interview.

Findings indicates that the leaders are working differently to prevent sexual harassment. Based on Nina’s answer, she is finding it effective to gather all employees once per year to

discuss and create awareness around sexual harassment and make lines of what is acceptable or not at the workplace. Sofie is approaching prevention work in a different way where she finds it more effective to build continuous trust between the employees by talking directly to each one of them. She is also following up on the statement presented earlier where she indicates that she has taken responsibility despite the missing focus from the organization. Throughout the interviews it was found that Sofie's approach are supported by several other candidates.

In the findings related to proactive leadership prevention work there is also specified that personnel leadership is a big part of their role as a manager, especially because of the number of young employees. The findings indicates that most of the leader's values relationship and trust and sees this as a way of preventing sexual harassment at the workplace. The same leaders are also arguing that high interaction between themselves and the employees contributes to a safe and healthy work environment. Regular conversations and follow up is characterized as effective prevention work according to the candidates. Two examples of this are illustrated in citations below.

"I have tried to create focus on sexual harassment by talking about it and creating trust relationship with the employees, so they feel comfortable reporting incidents."

-Ine, interview.

"There is a continuous communication between me and the employees to firstly, make sure they know that I am paying attention to their thoughts and behaviors, and second, that they can feel comfortable talking to me if something deviant happens. I think personnel responsibility is the biggest and important part of my job because a lot of the young employees are looking up to me, which makes me able to influence and create a good work environment."

- Hanna, interview.

Hanna has been working as a manager in the fitness industry for four years which makes her kind of experienced compared to some of the other candidates. She is describing how she is taking advantage of her position as a leader to prevent sexual harassment by creating a healthy work environment with building trust and confidence between her and the employees. The findings indicates that several of the candidates also uses this technique in preventing sexual harassment at the workplace.

“We work in an industry that requires employees that can handle specific cases coming from customers. As a manager, I have seen that some of the younger girls working here finds it challenging to create boundaries between them and customers. This is something to have in mind when hiring new employees.” - Nina, Interview.

Findings indicates that prevention work also can take place in the recruitment process. This is illustrated in Nina’s citation above where she describes the service industry as a tough branch which makes it important to hire the right employees that fits into the environment to prevent sexual harassment. She is also cynical when it comes to the staffing schedule where she argues the importance of having the right people at the right shifts. In this citation, Nina is also mentioning other aspects that is interesting to shed light on. First, she is highlighting customers as perpetrators, and second, she is presenting young girls as victims. Data related to these aspects will be presented further down in this chapter.

Findings related to this category also shows that some of the young leaders do not work with prevention against sexual harassment because they do not see the purpose of this work. This is illustrated in the two citations below.

“There has never been any case of sexual harassment here, so I do not see the purpose of starting with prevention work.” Daniel, interview.

“To be honest, I have not done anything to prevent sexual harassment. I do not know what measures I could have taken to prevent this, and I do not think it is relevant.” Andreas, interview.

According to Daniel’s answer, he argues that prevention work against sexual harassment is unnecessary where he works. Daniel has been working in the service industry for three years and one year as a leader. This statement was also supported another candidate, Andreas, which also has been working as a leader for one year. They are both working in the fitness industry. A remarkable finding here is that both male candidates are supporting this statement, while none of the female candidates are agreeing to this.

Summing up this category there is remarkable divided opinions and actions of prevention work. Most of the candidates are agreeing that their company has provided them

with material and information regarding prevention work against sexual harassment while a few others disagree to this statement. When it comes to the leader's proactive work against prevention there are several different opinions on how to prevent sexual harassment, but several of the candidates are agreeing that a safety work environment is the key to prevent the crime from happening. Lastly, findings shows that several of the candidates has suggestions of how prevention work of sexual harassment could be elaborated more from the organization, an example of this is illustrated in the citation below.

“I think there is much potential work targeting sexual harassment that has not been done yet. I believe that more awareness and focus on sexual harassment would lead to a higher number of reported cases and contribute to better workplace policy around this subject.”

-Hanna, interview.

4.2 Leadership actions

In the category of leadership actions, I will present some of the leadership behavior and attitude illustrated by the candidates, which actions they have taken based on situations of sexual harassment they have handled, and other statements that is categorized as responsible or irresponsible leadership styles.

Leadership behavior and attitude

The findings collected throughout the interviews suggest that some of the leaders are confident and expresses a proactive approach toward addressing sexual harassment in the workplace. They emphasized the significance of the leaders' attitudes towards sexual harassment policies and their stance on acceptable and unacceptable behaviors, recognizing their crucial role in creating a positive environment. Furthermore, some of the leaders emphasized that effectively communicating these attitudes and behaviors to the employees are important. This approach is illustrated by the following citations.

“I know that my behavior and attitude related to sexual harassment will affect the other employees' point of view which makes it important that I am aware of what I do.”

- Olivia, interview.

“As the manager, I would say that I set the standard at the workplace and the rest of the employees follows my lead because they are young and unexperienced. I create the

limit of what is acceptable and not, and the employees contribute to building the work environment based on that.”

- Line, interview

Findings indicates that the leaders are aware of their position and how their behaviors can influence the employees in the workplace and that they need to be consistent in how they act. It shows that most of the leaders are aware of their actions because they are working with operative leadership in the service industry, which leads them to go forward by good example at work. The candidates are trying to influence the employees to draw a line between the job and the customers to make sure sexual harassment does not happen. These statements are supported by most of the leaders, but another part of the candidates is saying something else.

“I have never thought of how my behavior at the workplace can affect the level of sexual harassment. I think the employees act the way they are independent with what I do”

- Daniel, interview.

This citation indicates that the leader is not aware of his own actions at the workplace, which is a very different answer compared to the other candidates. However, it is interesting how his mindset related to leadership is different.

Handling occurring situations.

The findings show variations between leaders that has experienced specific cases of sexual harassment and the leaders that have not. Findings indicate a clear distinction between the two groups where the leaders that has gotten reported cases are more aware of their actions and measures of how to take case of an incident than the leaders that does not have any reported cases. The leaders that have experience is also saying the same thing regarding how each case is different, which is illustrated in the citation below.

“There have been several cases of sexual harassment that has been reported directly to me. Every case is different, which makes it hard to have a fixed plan on how to handle it, but the first thing I have done in all cases is to identify how serious the incident is and take actions based on that.”

- Line, interview.

In “Citation eight” illustrated in table 2, one of the interview candidates are describing a reported case of sexual harassment from a young female employee. The citation indicates that

the case was hard to move forward with the reported case because of the problem of identifying the perpetrator. Regarding this example, the candidate was asked how she handled the reported incident, and her answer was:

“Because I did not manage to identify the perpetrator, my focus was to ensure that the employee got the help and support she needed, and that she had someone to talk to if she wanted to.”

- Sofie, interview.

This answer is showing that the leader is taking proactive actions even though she did not have the possibility to contact the perpetrator. Several of the leaders in the study are addressing that their most important focus when it comes to handling specific cases is to focus on the victim first.

Findings indicate some insecurity among the leaders when it comes to handling cases of sexual harassment based on the candidates' answers. A few of them are also saying the same thing in the interviews, that their expressions are that most cases resolve on their own. The citations below are examples of this.

“Some of the reported cases are not handled because of a careful consideration where I think it would make things worse.”

- Line, interview.

“In this case, the actions of harassment stopped before I got involved in the situation. I did not take any actions because of this.”

- Ine, interview.

The citations indicate that the leaders disclaim their responsibility to take care of incidents of sexual harassment because they resolve on their own. The findings also show that the employee that has experienced this crime does not get any follow up or support from the leader.

Julie: *As a young leader, do you have clear routines and guidelines of how to handle in case there is an incident of sexual harassment targeting your employees?*

Olivia: *If I am completely honest, no, I have not worked actively with this topic even though I know it is relevant for this branch.*

- Citation, interview.

As a young leader in the service industry, Olivia describes her position as important based on the many young employees that has their first introduction to the working life under her management. Despite this statement she admits that she has not been actively working with prevention of sexual harassment even though she has experienced cases of sexual harassment several times during her time as a manager and knows it is relevant for the branch, she is working in. Olivia's point of view is that actions of sexual harassment easily can be pushed under the table because employees find it humiliating and choose to not notify her. As Olivia is recognizing the relevancy of proactive work against sexual harassment, not all candidates are agreeing with her.

"I am not sure if it is relevant to use much time on creating guidelines and strategies against sexual harassment when it has never happened here." - Andreas, interview.

This citation indicates an irresponsible leadership style where he refuses to think that sexual harassment can happen at his workplace. This finding is also showing that not all leaders are taking their responsibility and preventing sexual harassment from happening.

4.3 Challenges

In the category of challenges, I have gathered findings that is categorized as challenges or barriers the candidates have described during the in-depth interviews. This includes challenges related to uncertainty and irresponsible leadership, the aspect of customer misbehavior related to sexual harassment, and how findings indicate the lack of experience and knowledge among the young leaders as a challenge.

Uncertainty

Based on the interviews, findings show a gap between how the leaders behave and which behavior that can be characterized as responsible or not, which is linked to uncertainty. Many of the candidates are agreeing that responsible leadership includes being observant to the work environment, employee behavior, and doing continuous prevention work of creating a zero tolerant policy against sexual harassment. However, these statements do not cope with other citations that has been said during the interviews. An example of this is illustrated in citation below.

“I do my best to handle every situation of sexual harassment the right way, but I am not sure it I am doing it the best way because I do not have so much experience or knowledge regarding this topic.” Line, interview.

This citation from Line clearly indicated her uncertainty related to sexual harassment. However, she is taking her role as a leader seriously and doing what she can to handle and prevent cases of sexual harassment. On the other hand, findings shows that not all leaders are doing the same which is illustrated in the dialog below.

Julie: *What kind of relationship do you have to sexual harassment at the workplace?*

Andreas: *Well, I work in the fitness industry, so I know this matter exists, but I don't think there is a lot of measures taken to handle it. To be honest there has not happen anything at the gym that I am working for as I know, so I do not have a serious relationship to sexual harassment. It is something that I am aware of, but not more than that. I would not know what to do if a case would occur.* - Citation, Interview

Findings indicates uncertain behavior in some dialogs related to sexual harassment and the leader's responsibility and actions. Based on the citations below, it is found that some of the candidates does not pay attention to how their company works with sexual harassment and are therefore insecure in how they should answer when they got the question.

“I am not sure, but I think that a big company like this has some guidelines of how to deal with sexual harassment.” - Hanna, interview.

“I am not sure of how the company is working with prevention of sexual harassment. I have never heard this subject has been mentioned as long as I have been working here.” -Line, interview.

Based on these answers from the candidates, there is an indication of uncertainty and irresponsible leadership because of the lack of confident and clarity in their answers. These findings also indicate a lack of interest in the topic and what consequences sexual harassment can have for the workplace. Another statement that indicates irresponsible leadership is the citation from Line.

“I have never heard the topic sexual harassment has been brought up as long as I have been working here as a manager.” – Line, interview.

This quote is copied from one of Line’s statements in the in-depth interview. As a young leader she has the personnel responsibility for over thirty employees working in different roles at the gym. Even though she works in a big well-established company with a solid system of leaders and HR management she has not heard that the topic of sexual harassment has been mentioned during the one year she has been working as a leader.

Handling customer misbehavior

Firstly, the candidates were asked which people they think was experiencing sexual harassment seen from their own perspective. It was also of my interest to hear who they saw as perpetrators of sexual harassment. The candidates were also asked to elaborate the reason for their answer because it was important for me to get an overall understanding. First, the eight candidates were all having very similar thoughts to these questions and agreed that women in general are more exposed to experiencing sexual harassment independent on which platform we are talking about. The risk of younger women being sexually harassed at work was overarching topic that all candidates mentioned at least once through the interviews. Several of the candidates explained how most of their employees was younger people and the gender was varying from each candidate, but everyone had both genders working in their team. An example is this quote from Nina:

“The younger girls are the easiest victims seen from my perspective. They are often very unexperienced, has not been working in the “game” for a very long time, and do not know the difference between which actions that counts as okey or not.” – Nina, interview

Most of the candidates from the fitness industry also specified gender differences related to customer misbehavior in the interview. They could see a clear difference of how women were treated by customers at the front desk versus men.

Throughout the interviews it was identified that almost every one of the candidates had a relationship to sexual harassment had been working with this matter at least one time during their time as a leader. All candidates were asked the same questions of who they experienced as victims, and which type of people that is the perpetrators. All eight leaders described

customers as the perpetrators of sexual harassment and employees as victims. These statements were justified by their own observations and based on cases that had been reported from employees.

“As we have most customers at night and many of them are affected by alcohol and drugs, it can be hard to prevent customers from misbehaving if I am not working nightshift myself.” - Nina, interview.

Nina is working in the nightlife industry, and she has been working as a manager at the same place for five years. During the interviews she is saying that there is a lot more customers at night and this is often when customer misbehavior is most likely to happen. She is also indicating that this is hard to monitor and prevent when she is not working herself. As a parallel to this statement, citations from the leaders in the fitness industry also shows that the same problem can happen at both platforms. These findings indicates that customer misbehavior is an issue that can happen at several branches in the service industry. Further, findings indicates that the young leaders find customer misbehavior as challenging because it often goes out of their control. The citation below is one of many that can illustrate this.

“I try my best to create a work environment that feels safe and motivating for the employees, but it is hard for me when I cannot control the actions of the customers.” -Olivia, Interview

In this citation Olivia is telling that she is trying to build a good work environment between the employees at the workplace, but she does not know how to prevent customer misbehavior from happening. Several of the candidates are supporting this statement and are saying similar citations in the interviews.

I think, in this industry it is sometimes expected that sexual harassment is taking place because the amount of people involved is huge, and nobody is doing anything to prevent it. - Andreas, Interview

As Andreas was saying in the interviews that from his perspective, sexual harassment is somehow expected to happen in the fitness industry because of the high interaction with

people. This topic was where the candidates had the most to say and elaborate and there were several aspects that was brought up in this category that I had not thought about myself. One of these aspects was customer misbehavior which was mentioned as challenging by all candidates without question.

“We have experienced several cases of sexual harassment at my club, often from customers that is frustrated or do not know how to behave in social settings.”

– Sofie, interview.

This citation indicates that some customers are misbehaving because of their lack of social manners. Sofie describes that customers often act in a moment where they are frustrated and may not think their actions through.

“We often see misbehavior from the customer side. They believe that just because they are paying to be here, they can act in which way they want.”

– Nina, interview.

Nina is expressing in the in-depth interview that customers at the bar are thinking that because they are paying for the product and service, they can act how they want. This statement indicates customer misbehaving of choosing to ignore the rules and guidelines from the employees. Customers like this can be experienced as frightening and hard to deal with for employees.

“I have gotten several notifications from female employees where customers are behaving in a way that is not okay, touching the young employees and acting inappropriate by asking if they should follow them home”

– Olivia, interview.

“The matter of customer misbehavior can be a stressful part of the job. There are customers at our gym that is very contact seeking, especially against the younger girls.”

– Line, interview.

Based on the citations, the leaders are experiencing customer misbehavior as a stressful part of the work. The candidates indicates that it is clearly customer misbehavior related to the

aspect of sexual harassment in the service industry. Most of the candidates also relates sexual harassment that is happening at the workplace to misbehavior of the customers.

Lack of experience

During the interviews, the candidates were asked to express their own relationship to sexual harassment at the workplace. This information gave me an indication of how much experience the leader had with sexual harassment, and their interests and attitude regarding the chosen topic. Findings indicates that many of the leaders are freshly introduced to the leadership role and the aspect of sexual harassment. It was also pointed out by most of the leaders that that there were no educational requirements for their job as a leader. The level of education was varying among the candidates from the fitness industry, some of them had education related to personal training, and others had nothing. There was only one of the eight leaders that had education related to HR and leadership. The two candidates from the nightlife industry had no education. Findings shows that lack of experience among the leaders is critical in some cases, which is exemplified in the citation below.

“I have had one case of sexual harassment while working here as a leader. When the employee reported the incident, I was not sure how to approach the case because I had never experienced anything similar, and I find this subject uncomfortable. I delegated tasks of following up on the employee to the safety responsible.”

- Olivia, interview

Olivia is saying in the citation that he does not have enough knowledge of sexual harassment to feel comfortable on following up an employee after an incident. It is a disclaimer from the leader’s perspective when she delegates the responsibility to the safety responsible at the gym. Other findings support the Olivia’s statement and indicates that there is a lack of experience and knowledge, such as in the example below.

“To be honest, I do not have any relationship to sexual harassment, and I am not sure of how to handle a situation if it happens.”

- Daniel, interview.

Daniels answer shows that he does not have enough knowledge to handle specific cases of sexual harassment. More than one of the candidates are supporting this statement. Findings from the interviews shows that some of the young leaders does not know how to handle an

occurring situation. Some of the findings also indicates uncertainty based on their lack of serosity regarding the topic.

“I do not have any background with leadership education or courses; however, I learn quickly as I work and experience cases.” - Sofie, interview.

This statement indicates the lack of relevant knowledge related to leadership education and thereby essential knowledge of sexual harassment. Sofie is however stating that she is fine by this because she has the ability to learn and adapt during her work and by experiencing cases. This shows signs of confidence, but at the same time irresponsible leadership because it should not be necessary to practice and learn the knowledge through actual employee incidents.

5.0 Discussion

In the chapter of discussion, the results and theoretical aspects will be discussed and linked to each other to bring new insight into how young leaders are working to prevent and handle sexual harassment in the workplace. The discussion follows a structured format similar to the results.

The findings indicates that many of the leaders are aware of organizational work of sexual harassment prevention, their own work of prevention and how to create measures to keep these crimes out of the workplace. However, there is also found some unclear answers in the data material that indicates a lack of attention, interest, and work regarding sexual harassment prevention. Findings also shows individual opinions on how prevention and actions of handling cases are functioning for each leader. As young leadership is one of the key words in this thesis, it is also interesting to investigate the findings of how the leaders run into challenges based on their age.

5.1 Proactive prevention practice

Questioning how the leaders define sexual harassment was important for the study because from my opinion, their answer to this question can define their whole mindset related to the topic. This statement is also supported by several of the researchers presented in the theory chapter. The findings shows that the candidates define sexual harassment in different ways, some of them are very invested and have clear guidelines on how to handle it, while others seem more insecure and uninterested. Vardiman et al. (2014) specifies the importance of having a clear definition of what is categorized as sexual harassment, to present for the employees what is acceptable and not. A clear definition is argued for contributing to creating awareness around the topic and increasing the employee's knowledge and attitude regarding their behaviors. These are all factors that contributes to prevention against sexual harassment (Vardiman, et al. 2014).

Findings show that some of the candidates does not have a relationship to sexual harassment at all and is therefore standing without a definition both personally and at the workplace. The same candidates are also not seeing the point of creating prevention work because they have not experienced any cases. Considering the theoretical aspects presented by

Vardiman et al. (2014) this approach will make it difficult for an eventual victim to know how to report an incident and can result in a work environment where cases of sexual harassment go unreported. This can also be categorized as signs of an immature leader with lack of experience and knowledge. This example illustrates two aspects, the importance of having clear definitions, and one challenge related to young and unexperienced leadership (Vardiman, et al. 2014).

As identified in the chapter of theory, observant leadership is crucial. The findings show differences in the level of how observant each leader is regarding sexual harassment. Since most of the candidates are working for the same company, it was interesting to investigate how observant they are in relation to the organizational work of preventing sexual harassment. Bell et al. (2003) argues that the attention the leader is paying here, can reflect on their knowledge and interest regarding sexual harassment. The findings indicate differences in how much attention these young leaders have paid to their company, and it is interesting to look at the deviant answers regarding this question.

According to Bell et al. (2003) studies indicates that actively observant leaders are more likely to succeed in creating a zero tolerant culture against sexual harassment at the workplace. It is clear that some of the candidate's perspective matches this theory, while other candidates that has been less observant cannot be related to this theory. A deviant answer in the findings is Sofie's answer to how she experiences the organizational work of prevention. She has a different answer than the other five leaders that works for the same company. It can be discussed if her young age and unexperienced as a leader has made her not pay attention to these kinds of information, may because she is unaware of the importance of sexual harassment. Another reason could be that she was not at work the same day this matter was brought up and did not pick up on this topic because nobody from the organization followed up, which reflects bad on the company. Anyway, what is the reason, this finding does not cope with the theory of Cortina & Areguin (2020) which argues in the principle of responsible leadership that all leaders have responsibility of paying attention and taking actions of preventing sexual harassment at the workplace. This is because Sofie is missing attention and not taking her responsibility as a leader.

A big part of the presented findings is illustrating that keeping up proactive actions to create a sexual harassment policy at the workplace is the prevention strategy most of the candidates are supporting. These findings support the theories presented by Bell et al. (2003)

that includes continuous and careful planning of prevention, but also the facts of the influenceable part of being a leader. However, when looking at the data presenting some of the leader's uncertainty regarding this topic it can be discussed how these leaders will manage to create awareness and understanding among the employees. As stated by Stockdale et al. (2004) lack of knowledge among the employees at the workplace will result in higher degree of difficulties of creating a policy that excludes sexual harassment. It can be argued that it should be emphasized the importance of preventing sexual harassment for a young leader and how one need to be aware of this topic.

Fitzgerald et al. (1995) argues that workplaces is one of the most common platforms where sexual harassment are taking place. The candidates were asked about their observations of where sexual harassment happens, and it was specified questions if it happened between work and leisure time. The findings support the theory of Fitzgerald et al. (1995) and specifies that all incidents that is described is taking place at the workplace. This fact makes it even more important for leaders to have enough experience and knowledge to handle these crimes.

An interesting observation in the findings is that most leaders emphasize fostering a healthy workplace culture with a policy prohibiting sexual harassment. These findings align with the prevention strategies stated by Bell et al. (2003), which illustrates the importance of a safe work environment with proactive prevention work from the leader. However, the findings also show indications on lack of interest in sexual harassment from some of the leaders which makes it clear that they are not working proactive with prevention work.

According to Norwegian law, the leader's responsibility is to prevent sexual harassment in the workplace and take this matter seriously (Equality and Anti-Discrimination Act, 2022, §13). Based on the theory presented by Stockdale & Bhattacharya (2008) regarding the facts that observant leaders are more likely to be successful in the work of preventing sexual harassment, it was interesting to investigate the leader's response on how much they were working to prevent sexual harassment at their workplace. As presented in the findings, most of the young leaders were aware of their responsibility which copes with the theoretical aspects of leadership responsibility presented by Cortina & Areguin (2020). However, findings indicate low confidence and proactivity related to their leadership practice responsibility and prevention work.

As one of the leadership activities to prevent sexual harassment, Nina is presenting her primary activity as arranging one meeting per year. It can be discussed if this measure is enough prevention work to keep sexual harassment completely away from the workplace. When she presented this measure during the interviews, I also asked myself what happens if an employee cannot attend this annual meeting, do they have to wait another year? It is presented in the chapter of theory one statement that repeats itself which is the facts that continuous work of prevention is essential for the leader to keep sexual harassment away from the workplace. According to this theory, Nina's primary prevention strategy is not in line and is most likely not effective.

In the theoretical chapter, McDonald et al. (2015) is highlighting the importance of an onboarding that is well thought through. Findings shows that the theory is tried out in practice and presented by Nina as one of the other prevention activities she is doing to minimize sexual harassment. It can be discussed of how efficient this technique is in practice because of the amount of time spent in the process. However, it is listed as one of the most important primary prevention strategies and according to Nina, she is taking advantage of this.

Vardiman et al. (2014) argues that the ideal picture of how an optimal workplace culture should look like and how it is free of sexual harassment can cause stress for managers. This theory reflects in the findings of how the leaders are expressing their frustration related to their inability to be around and observe cases around the clock. The findings indicate that creating a zero tolerant policy against sexual harassment is unattainable because the leaders are only working a fixed number of hours. These findings are matching the theory of how approaching risk factors can contribute to a stable workplace culture and keep sexual harassment out of it (Vardiman et al. 2014).

5.2 Leadership actions

The study's findings indicate that the leaders know their position and how it can influence the employees. Most of them are also aware of their responsibility as a leader. These findings are interesting since several leaders showed signs of uncertainty when asked questions regarding their prevention work. Considering the facts of awareness, this finding aligns with the research of Stockdale et al. (2004) regarding the importance of acknowledging the leader's ability to influence the employee's attitudes related to prevention work. Findings also show that

most leaders are taking action to create awareness because they know how this can affect the employees psychologically and make it easier to report cases and feel safe. These facts support the theory of Hulin et al. (1996), which addresses that awareness and knowledge significantly impact the organization's prevention work.

The findings related to the leaders' proactive actions toward preventing sexual harassment also align with previous research by Lindenberg & Reese (1996). These researchers argue that leaders must advocate the importance of creating sexual harassment policy. However, a few of the candidate's points of view cannot relate to the research because they believed actions of creating a zero-tolerant policy were not necessary. This leadership perspective is showing signs of immaturity and is identifying signs of missing knowledge of the chosen area. Vardiman (2014) addresses that creating a policy against sexual harassment is one of the most important action a leader can do to prevent sexual harassment in the first place. Based on this theory, the findings that indicates immature leadership does not align with the research, however most of the other candidate's perspectives can relate to the theory.

Findings presents that most of the candidates have experienced at least one reported case of sexual harassment. This supports the theory indicating that sexual harassment is prevalent in the hospitality industry. Other findings show that most of the leaders that has experienced cases of sexual harassment are also taking actions to handle it by for example addressing the severity of the incident and following up on the victim. These findings align with the theory of (Jardim et al., (2022) that describes the importance of measuring the degree of severity in relation to the circumstances. It is also addressed that sexual harassment should always be taken seriously as long as the victim perceives to have experiences this. However, the leader needs to consider the severity and circumstances before taking actions. As found during data analysis, the leaders are showing diverse perspectives on how to handle an incident of sexual harassment. According to the research of Vardiman (2014) cases and culture will vary from workplace to workplace, and it is therefore essential that the leaders aims to understand the differences and are prepared to deal with all kinds of reported incidents.

On the other side, more than one of the candidates are saying that most reported cases resolve on its own, and the leader does not need to take any actions. According to the presented research in this thesis, it can be argued that this is not the best approach (Bell, et al, 2003). This is because of the severe consequences sexual harassment can have for the workplace if it is not

handled. Research also argued that it can have serious impact on employees where it causes stress, low motivation, and insecurity. The leaders that have given these answers are not taking their responsibility and doing their job properly. Findings also shows one citation where the leader thinks she will make it worse if she gets involved. Based on the theory of Stockdale & Bhattacharya (2008) the leader should always support and monitor the employee after such an incident because the employee can experience signs of impacts that is not visible for the leader.

Theory that describes proactive leadership that includes collecting guidelines of action, creating zero tolerant policy, and providing prevention strategies are central aspects that is mentioned by several researchers throughout the thesis (Vardiman, 2014). Findings indicates that most of the leaders can relate to at least one of these aspects, but not everyone. A few candidates' answers shows directly that they have not worked with the matter of sexual harassment, one of them are even saying that she is not sure if it is relevant to create guidelines to be prepared to handle cases of sexual harassment. These findings are interested because it shows a gap between how the leaders look at this matter and their serosity. Based on the presented theory, it can be argued that this point of view is not categorized as responsible leadership (Fitzgerald, et al. 1995).

5.3 Challenges

Insecurity related to the leader's confidence and knowledge is presented in the findings based on questioning their awareness of the organizational prevention work. Most of the leaders responded with unclear answers to this question which indicates uncertainty and low confidence. The employees look up to the leader as the main character to follow, which is why the leader must be aware of this work. These findings do not cope with the theory that considers the importance of making the employees understand how the organization works with sexual harassment and which guidelines there are. Bell et al. (2003) argue that the leader must ensure employee knowledge to create a workplace policy against sexual harassment. However, the findings also highlight some aspects of confidence and proactive work of the leaders; this is exemplified by some of the leader's work of creating a safe work environment by building trust and relationships between the employees. The same candidates are also aware of the importance of prevention work and are acting. This finding aligns with the findings of Vardiman et al. (2014), describing how several organizations proactively establish a policy against sexual harassment to be prepared for potential future incidents.

Findings based on unexperienced leadership and lack of knowledge small, but central aspects in this thesis. The candidates are showing signs of lack of confidence in relation to several cases and does not know how to act in some situations. An example from the findings is when one of the candidate's chooses to delegate the tasks of following up an incident of sexual harassment to the safety responsible because she does not feel comfortable in the situation. First, this finding is not in line with the theory of Cortina & Areguin (2020) where it is argued for the leadership responsibility and self-awareness around this topic. Second, theory presented by Buengeler et al. (2016) argues that young and unexperienced leaders can face challenges because of their lack of knowledge. These challenges can lead to poor choices and make it difficult to navigate through an incident of sexual harassment, which is exactly what we can see in the example.

Regarding the lack of knowledge related to leadership and sexual harassment, the findings also show that only one of the eight leaders that was included in the interview has an educational background related to leadership. As cited as an illustration in the findings chapter, one of the candidates are saying that she is fine with this because she learns along with her work. This goes against the theory presented by Buengeler et al. (2016) which argues that knowledge is the key to succeeding on sexual harassment prevention work. It should not be necessary for the leaders to practice their skills on actual cases regarding the employees, in this case the company should take its part and provide the leader with course or training related to sexual harassment prevention and action.

When looking at the findings related to perpetrators, customers stand out significantly. This is one of the few aspects that all candidates are agreeing as challenging because it often goes out of their control. Harris & Daunt (2013) is arguing that customer misbehavior can be everything from doing physical damage to the property, from a customer that is just choosing to not follow the rules of the company. Both cases can be stressful and uncomfortable situations for the employees. This type of stress can be critical for the employee's mental health and the ability to keep working in their position at the workplace. This theory is supported by examples given by the candidates where they specify challenges related to stress, lack of control and uncomfortable situations. According to the research by Booyens, et al (2022) some organizations choose to ignore customer misbehavior in order to maintain a good reputation. This theory is not backed up by the findings. Most of the candidates indicates signs of

frustration related to misbehaving customers and want to put an end to it, even if this compromises the service reputation. However, based on statements from the leaders in the study, customer misbehavior seems to be an issue at most workplaces which can indicate that the leaders do not take a lot of actions to prevent it from happening.

The findings indicates that the leaders seem to think that some of the customers are acting misbehaving on purpose. These types of misbehaving customers are identified by Harris & Daunt (2013) as often aware of their role and power, and they take advantage of the situation where for example the employee at the frontline is young and unexperienced. By using anger and frustration as a tool to getting what they want, the employees are ending up with an abusive experience. The theory aligns with the findings shown in this study. The researchers are also stating that all companies have its own type of customers that often consists of a group of different personalities. The service industry is easily exposed for these types of actions because they are working in the front line and are having direct customer-contact every day (Harris & Daunt, 2013).

Theory addressed by Harris & Daunt (2013) argues how the recruitment process is an important factor to consider when looking at customer misbehavior. As we see in the findings, the recruitment process is highlighted by one of the candidates where she describes how she carefully pick out personalities that can handle tough feedback and misbehaving customers without breaking. This statement aligns with the theoretical aspects and address the benefits of being aware of potential challenges the employee will be standing over before hiring a new employee (Harris & Daunt, 2013).

The aspects of victims and perpetrators related to gender discrimination is also interesting findings related to challenges. As theory presented by several of the researchers, Fitzgerald et al. (1995) is addressing that gender differences are central related to sexual harassment. More specifically, studies argues that female employees are more exposed of being sexually harassed at the workplace than males. Findings clarify several examples where female employees are more exposed to sexual harassment than males. All the cases that were described during the interviews included women as victims and men as perpetrators. One of the candidates specifies that none of the male employees working at her gym has ever reported any case of sexual harassment at work, she only has reported cases from the female employees. This findings and example support the theory of gender discrimination regarding sexual harassment.

According to research presented by Bråten & Øistad (2017), power abuse at the workplace is also reality where younger employees become victims of sexual harassing actions from the leaders. However, findings in this study shows no signs of power abuse by the leaders, instead findings indicate that the leaders care about their employees and want to spare them for this crime.

Another interesting finding to look at is the differences in the male and female candidates' answers. In the dialog between Julie and Andreas presented in the results, Andreas is describing sexual harassment as self-evident to happen in the service industries where no one is doing preventive work against it. The other male candidate is also supporting this statement, and the two male candidates have also none reported cases of sexual harassment at their workplace. I find it interesting how the male candidates perspective stands out from the female statements. Based on the research and data collection in this thesis, the theories of Fitzgerald et al. (1995) claim to be true. By looking at these facts it made me reflect on how it could affect Andreas's perspective on the focus pointed sexual harassment, and it can be questioned if his male orientation has a say.

Central findings that have come to light during this study is that the male candidates are looking at sexual harassment with a different perspective than the female. I asked myself this question; Why are the male candidates looking at sexual harassment as there is no issue? It can be discussed if these facts are related to gender discrimination or if it is just a matter of lack of knowledge. Based on the findings it can look like the male candidates are addressing sexual harassment as no issue at all. This finding can indicate signs of unexperienced leaders that does not have enough knowledge about the topic, so they choose to look ahead of the problem instead of facing it (Buengeler, et al. 2016, p.1128).

According to the findings, young leaders face numerous challenges related to sexual harassment in the workplace, such as a lack of experience and knowledge. This leads to uncertainty and can affect important decisions that have to be taken under pressure. The findings also show that some young leaders are unprepared for the challenges that negatively impact their workplace. However, findings also show that some of the young leaders can provide new thoughts and perspectives and implement these actions at the workplace despite a lack of engagement from the organization.

5.4 Limitations and suggestions for future research

Qualitative research design offers valuable insights and an in-depth understanding of complex phenomena. However, it is essential to acknowledge and consider its limitations. In the case of this research, it was a small sample of candidates focusing on a specific context. Regarding the small sample, findings may not be easily generalized to larger populations. During this study, the emphasis was to understand the unique perspective of each candidate instead of making a statistical inference of a broader population. The risk of bias is also related to the chosen research method; in this case, there was a bias between female and male candidates. This may affect the results of the study; however, more female than male leaders work in the investigated sectors. Qualitative research also requires more time and resources than quantitative methods because of the interviews, observations, and analysis.

Overall, the qualitative method was the better option concerning this data collection. This is because of the sensitivity of the chosen topic and the need for concrete examples.

The research work of this master's thesis has shed light on and answered the empirical problem and the research question of this thesis. However, during the research it has occurred some questions that could be interesting to investigate further. One of these are to investigate the employee's opinions of how they are experiencing the work of their leader to be able to determine the reliability of the statements from the leaders in this project. An interesting topic that is rarely mentioned in studies related to sexual harassment is also the term of "consent". Sexual harassment is actions where in many cases the incidents include overstepping the limit of the victim. Because of the transparent line of what can be categorized as sexual harassment it is also difficult to determine if the victim has consented to any forms of actions or not (Svensson, 2020, p.7).

Future research could benefit from more knowledge and data on workplace organizations and leadership prevention, especially among young leaders. Conducting more qualitative research on how sexual harassment is handled and experienced will also contribute the future work. Regarding the findings of this study, it could be attractive to gather information on how the employees experience leadership work regarding the prevention of sexual harassment. This information could support or deny the presented statements in the study. Ongoing research and initiatives will continue to shape the understanding of sexual harassment in the service industries and make it easier to implement prevention strategies in the workplace.

Regarding future research, it would also be interesting to investigate how the organizations work to provide leaders with the information and material they need to ensure their knowledge of sexual harassment. It is also helpful to look into the combination of theoretical and practical work regarding sexual harassment. Investigating the practical experiences could contribute to new developments of theoretical models to prevent this issue.

6.0 Conclusion

In conclusion, sexual harassment prevention among young leaders remains an area that needs further research. While the literature is slowly growing regarding this area in various industries, there is a distinct lack of research regarding the focus on young leaders and their roles. Young leadership can provide organizations with challenges and opportunities that can affect proactive work, which is why this research gap is essential to fulfilling. This research project has provided valuable insights into these aspects and demonstrates how most young leaders participate in prevention work. The study's findings show that the leaders recognize the importance of their role in fostering safe and healthy workplace culture and implementing a zero-tolerant policy against sexual harassment.

This research can conclude that young leaders are facing challenges related to sexual harassment based on their lack of experience and knowledge. However, it is argued that young leaders can help prevent sexual harassment in the workplace by providing the organization with new perspectives and thoughts. Based on this study's findings, there are significant differences between how each leader works with prevention and actions in the workplace. Most leaders are aware of their position and power in the workplace and use this to create a zero-tolerance policy against sexual harassment. Others do not think this is necessary and choose to disclaim their leadership responsibility. Exploring the young leader's perspectives and approaches can provide valuable insights for future research in developing effective prevention strategies and support systems. The findings also indicate the need for more contributions from higher levels in the companies in terms of sexual harassment prevention, such as providing training and guidance. Young leaders sometimes suffer a lack of knowledge and experience, leading to uncertainty and a lack of confidence.

This study aimed to investigate how young leaders are working to prevent sexual harassment in the workplace and how they are handling occurring situations. Most candidates had worked with some prevention against sexual harassment, which they could elaborate on during the in-depth interviews, some more than others. A few of the candidates did not believe sexual harassment was an issue, which indicates that these leaders do not pay attention to the sector they are working in and society in general.

Based on the study's findings, most leaders seem to work proactively to prevent sexual harassment despite their lack of knowledge and experience. This indicates an awareness of laws and regulations among the leaders and the ability to take responsibility. It is essential to continue raising awareness about sexual harassment, providing resources for prevention, and fostering a safe workplace culture that supports victims and encourages reporting. The aspect of young leaders is still something future research should focus on by exploring specific challenges and examining the effectiveness of prevention strategies. By addressing these aspects, creating work environments that prioritize the prevention of sexual harassment will be easier for organizations with a high number of young leaders employed.

7.0 Reference list

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