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**TITLE:** Long Standing Traditions of Sexual Harassment in the Hospitality Industry: Leaders' Perspectives on Customer Sexual Harassment in the Workplace

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## **Abstract**

This master thesis explores three different interconnected themes: *Acknowledging Sexual Harassment, Practice of Prevention and Challenging the Status Quo: Tolerance of Sexual Harassment*, which were developed by utilizing reflexive thematic analysis (RTA). By conducting 8 semi-structured interviews with 9 relevant leaders from the Norwegian hotel industry. Addressing sexual harassment (SH) with specific attention to customer sexual harassment (CSH). The participants' reflections on the scope varied, ranging from zero incidents to descriptions of prevalent workplace issues. Legislative reforms and the promise of a comprehensive report on SH in the workplace from the Norwegian Government, underscore the continued relevance of discussing SH prevention. Awareness of these changes also varied, with the majority not being familiar with the new amendments to the Norwegian Work Environment Act. The distinction between customer and employee perpetrator SH raises important considerations regarding power dynamics and organizational responses. Ultimately, changing attitudes and norms surrounding SH remains a significant challenge, requiring concerted efforts from all stakeholders.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>WHY ALL THIS TALK ABOUT SEXUAL HARASSMENT?</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>LITERATURE REVIEW</b> .....	<b>4</b>
WORKPLACE SEXUAL HARASSMENT .....	4
CUSTOMER SEXUAL HARASSMENT (CSH).....	5
JOB DEMAND RESOURCE MODEL .....	7
<b>CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND</b> .....	<b>9</b>
NORWAY'S LEGAL PROHIBITION OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT .....	9
#METOO .....	10
PREVENTING SEXUAL HARASSMENT .....	10
<b>METHOD</b> .....	<b>14</b>
A QUALITATIVE APPROACH .....	15
REFLEXIVE THEMATIC ANALYSIS - 'JUST A METHOD' .....	15
<i>The Reflexive TA Process</i> .....	16
<i>Phase 1: Familiarization</i> .....	17
<i>Phase 2: Generating Initial Codes</i> .....	17
<i>Phase 3: Generating Themes</i> .....	18
<i>Phase 4: Reviewing Potential Themes</i> .....	18
<i>Phase 5: Defining and Naming Theme</i> .....	19
<i>Phase 6: Producing the Report</i> .....	19
THE SAMPLE.....	20
<i>Sample Size</i> .....	20
ETHICAL CONSIDERATION .....	21
THE REASON FOR CHOOSING A SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW APPROACH .....	22
DESIGNING THE INTERVIEW GUIDE.....	22
THE PROCESS OF THE INTERVIEWS .....	23
<i>Preparation</i> .....	24
<i>Introduction of the Interview</i> .....	25
<i>Conversation During the Interview</i> .....	25
<i>Concluding the Interview</i> .....	26
TRANSCRIBING THE INTERVIEWS .....	26
AUDIO RECORDING .....	27
<b>RESULTS</b> .....	<b>27</b>
PARTICIPANT INFORMATION .....	27
THEMATIC MAP .....	29
<b>DISCUSSION</b> .....	<b>31</b>
RECOGNIZING SEXUAL HARASSMENT .....	31
<i>When you encounter the unidentifiable- Gradience of SH and the "Forgotten Grey Zone"</i> .....	33
BEST PRACTICE OF PREVENTING SH .....	35
<i>Risk Analysis</i> .....	36
<i>Action Plan</i> .....	37
<i>Work Environment Mapping</i> .....	38
<i>Reporting SH</i> .....	40
<i>Perception of What is Important When Preventing SH</i> .....	41
<b>CHALLENGING STATUS QUO: TOLERANCE OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT</b> .....	<b>44</b>
<b>STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS</b> .....	<b>48</b>
<b>CONCLUSION</b> .....	<b>52</b>
<b>REFERENCES</b> .....	<b>53</b>
<b>APPENDIX</b> .....	<b>62</b>
APPENDIX A. THE INTERVIEW GUIDE .....	62
APPENDIX B. THE INFORMATION LETTER/ CONSENT FORM.....	65

## **Preface**

The research presented in this master's thesis was conducted as part of the final project of the Service Leadership in International Business master's program at the University of Stavanger (UiS). The reason why we decided to write our master thesis together was because of our shared interest in Human Resources, and not because we share the same first name. We set out to research a topic we both were interested in, choosing a highly relevant pervasive work environment issue in the hotel industry. At the final stage of completing this thesis we would like to acknowledge all the people who have helped us along the way. First of all, we would like to thank our supervisor Gro Ellen Mathisen for your invaluable support and meaningful conversations. We appreciate your time and effort, it wouldn't be the same without you. Additionally, we would like to give thanks to our dear friends and family for supporting us throughout this journey, both in challenging and good times. Last but not least we would like to thank the participants who dedicated time in helping us making this research possible, giving us a look into the daily challenges of leaders in the hotel industry.

We would like to dedicate this master thesis to all those who have been affected by sexual harassment. And to the collective effort to create workplaces where everyone feels safe, valued, and empowered.

Stavanger 15<sup>th</sup> of May 2024  
Stine Kaland & Stine Soland

## **Why All This Talk About Sexual Harassment?**

The #Metoo movement emerged in 2017, when it all started with actress Alyssa Milano encouraging women to share their story under the hashtag #metoo on Twitter (Sletteland, 2018). The movement has since then immensely impacted the discourse of Sexual Harassment (SH), inspiring research and conversation on the topic. Over the span of a few months in the winter of 2017-2018, Norway also experienced a collective awakening in the realm of working life. Which resulted in a substantial but in many ways incomplete norm change in Norway concerning SH (Sletteland, 2018). The #Metoo Movement has contributed a broader focus on cultural and structural premises that enables, sustains, and directly make SH and discrimination in the workplace invisible (Fjørtoft, 2020). It is still apparent that sexual harassment in the workplace is a serious and extensive social challenge in Norway (Svensson, 2020). As of late, 2024 stand out as a pivotal year, serving as an important reminder of the journey towards increased awareness and emphasis on addressing SH in the workplace in Norway. The Norwegian Government, referred to as "Regjeringen", is currently developing a comprehensive white paper on SH in the workplace, promised to be published in May of 2024 (Regjeringen, n.d.). Furthermore, the legal premise that ensures employees safety and wellbeing has been further strengthened with changes in the Norwegian Working Act (Backe et al. 2024).

According to Bråten (2020) 54% of those who experienced sexual harassment in the hotel and restaurant industry were harassed by customers. "Early theory and research on workplace aggression, as well as sexual harassment, has focused on members of the organization as both the source and the targets of these behaviors and neglected other possible perpetrators" (Yagil, 2008, p.142). Meaning, that customers could also be recognized as a source of misbehavior and SH in the service industry (Yagil, 2008). Additionally, The Equality and Anti-Discrimination Ombud acknowledges [Norwegian: Likestillings- og

Driskrimineringsombudet (LDO)] that employees on short-term contracts, interns, and smaller minorities are also at greater risk of sexual harassment at work (The Equality and Anti-Discrimination Ombud, n.d.-g). Employees in temporary positions or hired workers often experience lower job security and have weaker connections to the workplace, and notably a more passive work situation than permanent employees (NOU 2021:9, p.232). This affects the security work conducted in the workplace because volatile employment conditions hinder the capacity to address sexual harassment proactively in the workplace (Gulstad, 2023).

Getting a general understanding of the scope of SH, data from the "Harassmentbarometeret 2023" [Norwegian: Trakasseringsbarometeret 2023], reveals that one in five individuals reported experiencing unwanted sexual attention in the workplace over the past 12 months (Hov et al., 2023, p.21). Additionally, in the context of the service industry, 'In pursuit of fair work' reports 71% of the respondents in the study reported having experienced some type of abuse "(verbal/psychological, physical, racial, ethnic, sexual abuse, harassment, or bullying)" (Linge et al., 2023). Where the reported main perpetrators were customers, however, managers and co-workers also contribute to the overall landscape of harassment and abuse in the workplace. "Levekårsundersøkelsen om arbeidsmiljø 2022" uncovers that SH is most prevalent in medical professions among nurses and caretakers and in customer service professions (Haugland, 2023). A cross-industry paper on SH reports the consequences of SH in the hotel industry are severe compared to other industries (Bråten, 2015). The results showed that 47 % of workers who experienced SH at work felt dissatisfaction with their work life, 28% wanted to leave their jobs as a result, and 16% reported mental health issues, while 39 % reported not experiencing any of these consequences (Bråten, 2015). Therefore, it is important to understand how SH is embedded in the hospitality industry, compared to other industries customer perpetrator SH is a real threat to employees in the service industry. Prevalence studies, such as quantitative approaches

towards understanding the scope SH have been ubiquitous as there have been multiple studies in the Nordic countries (Svensson, 2020, p.9). In relation to this there has been research done within many sectors but there is a lack of comparison between them. Nonetheless, this does not mean that there is an oversaturation of research, henceforth it could be beneficial to shift focus in order to attack knowledge gaps. The disparities and imbalances in research focus leaves identifiable knowledge gaps in the research field (Svensson, 2020, p.12-14). The most important gaps mentioned in relation to our thesis are as follows:

- **Efforts to prevent** sexual harassment: points to a gap in understanding and addressing preventive strategies for sexual harassment within the research studies reviewed.
- **The individualization of the problem of sexual harassment:** There is a focus on behavior at the individual level. Meaning there is a gap, concerning structures that result in sexual harassment occurring.

Based on this knowledge, the master's thesis research question will focus on investigating how leaders within the hotel industry acknowledges customer sexual harassment (CSH), reflecting on preventative actions within the workplace.

1. How do leaders in the hotel industry approach the prevention of SH in the workplace?
2. To what extent are leaders adequately prepared to meet the evolving legal requirements concerning sexual harassment prevention?
3. What is the depth and breadth of leaders' knowledge regarding sexual harassment in the workplace?

## Literature Review

Chapter 2 covers a presentation of the theoretical underpinnings of this master thesis. Focusing on definitions of SH, CSH and reflecting over the JDR-model to understand demand and resources in relation to SH.

### Workplace Sexual Harassment

Much of the literature on SH pays attention to the different types of SH. It is common to distinguish between *verbal harassment*, such as voicing sexual suggestions or comments on body, appearance or private life (Bråten & Øistad, 2017). *Non-verbal harassment* concerns intrusive staring, body movements, displaying sexual images, flashing and similar behavior. Lastly, *physical harassment* encompasses everything from unwanted hugging, and kissing to assaults such as rape and attempted rape. Additionally, SH also occurs to a significant extent online, via email, online, on social media, or through text and/or picture messages (Bråten & Øystad, 2017, p.10). It is worth mentioning that cyber harassment is more widespread in countries with high rates of internet access (Latcheva, 2017). Indicating that cyber harassment is a real threat.

There is no commonly agreed-upon definition of the concept SH, suffering from a lack of clarity, which leads to identifiable knowledge gaps and restrictions on what we really can know about the phenomenon (Svensson, 2020). Mona Bråten (2015) highlighted one of the challenges of conceptualizing SH is because the definition is also contingent on the subjective perception of the person being harassed. Meaning, an objective approach, such as being determined by law, could also restrict us from fully comprehending what SH entails. According to Carstensen (2016) problematic behaviors in the workplace might pass as acceptable and perceived as “normal”. The paper also explores the subjective perception and conclusions of the collective perception of SH, many situations are often clouded by “grey areas”. In the context of the service industry, “grey areas” might also be blind spots on how we understand SH in the workplace.



While there is a variety of different definitions and interpretations of the concept SH, this paper will use the definition provided by The Norwegian Work Environment Act (2023, §4-3-3).

“The employee shall not be subjected to harassment, including sexual harassment, or any other inappropriate conduct. Harassment refers to actions, omissions, or expressions that are intended or have the effect of being offensive, intimidating, hostile, degrading, or humiliating. Sexual harassment is defined as any form of unwelcome sexual attention that is intended or has the effect of being offensive, intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating, or bothersome.”

Previous research has focused on legal and individual foundations, limiting the exploration of different perspectives other than legal frameworks of comprehension (Svensson, 2020). At the same time a legally grounded definition would be relevant when examining leaders' perspectives on SH in the workplace.

### **Customer Sexual Harassment (CSH)**

When examining the interaction between the service provided and customer perception, it becomes evident that the quality of the service delivered is intricately linked to meeting or exceeding customer expectations (Folgerø & Fjellstad, 1995). Granting customers significant influence over the interaction, where the customer exerts a powerful symbolic and functional influence in the service relationship (Good & Cooper, 2016, p.425). Several articles reflect upon situations where customers are led to believe they have the right to abuse the power they have over the service interaction (Folgerø & Fjellstad, 1995; Gettman & Gelfand, 2007; Yagil, 2008; Poulston, 2008; Good & Cooper, 2016; Kundro et al., 2022). In the organizational climate where customer satisfaction is a major priority, the responsibility of navigating customer misconduct then shifts over to the individual and is often not seen as an organizational concern but rather a matter of the employee setting boundaries (Friborg et al.,

2017). Also, a service climate where the focus is mainly on service or sale at any cost could put employees in particularly vulnerable positions (Gettman & Gelfald, 2007). Consequently, subjecting them to increased harassment by customers.

According to Good and Cooper (2016) employees tend to respond to SH from customers by using coping strategies and also engaging in individual or collective condensations. These coping mechanisms are likely to be informal, temporary, and targeted to specific situations and immediate circumstances. However, an important point to bring forth, analyzing how employees cope with the job demand, does not address the systematic problem at hand, such as addressing workplace policy or organizational practice. Kroczyński's framing of "the enchanting myth of customer sovereignty" encompasses the service encounters in terms of the relational superiority of customers, where the power balance is skewed, and customers are encouraged to believe they have elevated social status and control over the encounter on the basis of financial power (Kroczyński & Evans, 2013; Kroczyński and Ott, 2014, as cited in Good & Cooper, 2016). Furthermore, Kroczyński and Evans argue that the power disparity and inherent tension in the service relationship leads to situations where customers abuse service providers. This could be a result of frustrations when customer demands are not realized and partly due to the weakened power of labor and low status of service workers (Kroczyński & Ott, 2014, as cited in Good & Cooper, 2016).

Exploring the sexualized nature of service work and many organizations in the hospitality industry, either tacitly or explicitly, encourage and/or tolerate incidences of SH from customers (Hadjisolomou et al., 2023). Some workplace contexts intensify the structural vulnerability of workers to SH, in particular, workers in the hospitality industry (Minnotte & Legerski, 2019). In many ways, this could be understood as a unique organizational climate for SH in the service industry. Henceforth, it is important to acknowledge structural discrepancies when implementing and evaluating effective SH or assault training programs.

There are different approaches to understanding SH depending on the harasser/perpetrator (Gettman & Gelfald, 2007). This indicates that there are several reasons why CSH is dealt with differently compared to intraorganizational SH, which occurs within the organization (Medera et al., 2018). Firstly, service organizations rely heavily on customers, which might excuse certain behaviors. Secondly, intraorganizational harassment may be perceived as more controllable than customer behavior, "Customers come and go, but coworkers do not." (Medera et al., 2018, p.1214). Therefore, organizations might be more pressured to deal with coworker SH. Excusing CSH as a temporary and fleeting problem. Lastly, employees might be informed and trained in what SH is, but not the customers. Also, organizational policies and procedures might only address internal harassment. Leading to a huge blind spot in their preventative actions towards SH. These circumstances make CSH less visible (Medera et al., 2018).

### **Job Demand Resource Model**

In the hospitality industry, pleasing customers is an important part, but it can be perceived as very demanding for employees. According to Park et al. (2019), highly demanding job situations demotivate employees. Some people are more sensitive to interpersonal mistreatment than others, and these are also more vulnerable to SH, which could negatively affect work engagement (Li, 2016). The Job Demand-Resource (JD-R) model describes how every job needs to balance out the negative sides that come with a job, also known as demands, with resources which are positive factors (Schaufeli, 2017). Both resources and demands can come in many shapes and forms, and the meaning will differ from person to person. People will have different opinions on what they view as a resource or a demand, and the limit for when something becomes a demand can vary. Studies have shown that customers' emotions and SH is identified as a job demand (Park, et al., 2019).

Hameduddin and Lee studied SH and employee engagement using the JD-R model (Hameduddin & Lee, 2023). They considered three moderators, which were gender, perceived

supervisory support, and the gender equity climate, to build further on the JD-R model. The results indicated that when there are high demands because of SH, it could hurt employee engagement, but this can differ between women and men (Hameduddin & Lee, 2023). Most organizations use a lot of resources and time to reach goals within diversity and inclusion, but SH has proven to be a barrier for reaching these goals (Hameduddin & Lee, 2023). Because SH can trigger a hostile work environment, and even though the workplace has diversity, this can lead to exclusion.

Bakker et al. (2004) conducted a study where they examined “the relationship between job characteristics, burnout, and performance.” Utilizing the JD-R model to predict burnout and performance. The first presented hypothesis is related to work pressure and emotional demands, assuming that it could be a leading factor for creating burnout, which also could be a predictor for performance (Bakker et al., 2004, p.83). Secondly, they also assumed that job resources like autonomy and social support, could be essential to predict extra-role performance. Their third assumption was related to job resources affecting the connection between “job demand and exhaustion” (Bakker et al., 2004, p.83). Lastly, the fourth hypothesis was “that exhaustion would be positively related to disengagement” (Bakker et al., 2004, p.83). By using a structural equation modeling analysis, they concluded that hypotheses 1,2, and 4 had strong support, while hypothesis 3 was rejected. These results support the arguments of the JD-R model, which claims that “job demands, and job resources initiate two psychological processes, which eventually affect organizational outcomes” (Bakker et al., 2004, p.83). SH represents an emotional job demand, and therefore the JD-R model can be utilized to examine the extent of emotional demands in relation to job resources. This approach offers a perspective on how much the organization is affected by SH.

According to Koon and Pun, “job demands are considered a risk factor for uncivil behavior in the workplace” (2018, p. 187). However, the mechanisms behind the higher

numbers of demands that increase risk of uncivil behavior is unknown. They did a study with the purpose to examine “emotional exhaustion and job satisfaction as sequential mediators of the relationship between job demands and instigated workplace incivility within the integrative framework of affective events theory and the job demand-control model” (Koon & Pun, 2018, p.187). The results showed that job demands on instigated workplace incivility are influenced by emotional exhaustion and job satisfaction. The most significant finding was that if an employee is experiencing high job demands, they will be at a greater risk of experiencing emotional exhaustion, which will lead to instigated workplace incivility (Koon & Pun, 2018). To prevent employees from becoming emotionally exhausted, organizations should do preventative work such as lowering the job demands (Koon & Pun, 2018). Most organizations focus mainly on increasing their profit, possibly failing to prioritize their employees.

### **Contextual Background**

Chapter 3 will cover the contextual background that forms the foundation for understanding the concept of CSH in the context of the research questions addressed in this master's thesis. This exploration will encompass the Norwegian legal framework, the impact of the #metoo movement, scope of SH in the service industry, and lastly looking into the six preventative measures provided by The Equality and Anti-Discrimination Ombud.

#### **Norway's Legal Prohibition of Sexual Harassment**

The Norwegian approach towards work environment legislation rests on long-standing social traditions (Innstrand et al., 2021). “Arbeidsmiljøloven”, also known as the Norwegian Work Environment Act, encompasses regulations of work environment, job security, labor hours, leave, employment, and termination conditions (Gisle et al., 2024). Developing and understanding the work environment has traditionally focused on conditions that contribute to the onset of diseases, and how to evade or reduce these conditions. Later, the focus has broadened to encompass health-promoting measures (Innstrand et al., 2021). In 2024, a

change was made in the Norwegian Work Environment Act saying explicitly that all employees must be protected against SH (The Norwegian Hospitality Association, 2023). The changes are intended to raise awareness of SH as a work environment problem and urge improvement of preventive efforts. Failing to adhere to systematic prevention strategies concerning discrimination determined by employers will guarantee the continuation of excluding people from working life, undoubtedly unnecessarily (Retterås, 2015). Issues of discrimination and harassment are considered equally important concerning work environment issues compared to the physical health and safety climate (Retterås, 2015).

### **#Metoo**

At the time the #Metoo movement broke through in Norway, one thing became clear in the discourse regarding equal rights, 'it's on its way' was replaced by a collective 'No, we are not living in a society that is equal for all' (Sletteland, 2018). The newfound urgency propelled further development of the 'status quo'. Political anomie is a state of political chaos arising in certain situations where collective norms fall short and interactions with others, both in language, acts, and institutional practices (Sletteland, 2018). Sletteland (2018) raises the argument that the state of 'political anomie' ensures resistance against the #Metoo movement, also making it harder to prevent and sanction SH. The discourse concerning SH in the workplace intended to urge institutional change. The debate uncovered an existing institutional anomie, where people in Norway rarely exercise the right to report cases of SH, and the people who do rarely see results (Sletteland, 2018). This suggests that the legal framework and reporting institutes fail to fulfill their intended purpose.

### **Preventing Sexual Harassment**

An important action campaign developed with the intention of preventing SH in the service sector launched in 2018, where multiple organizations gathered and made a campaign called "sette strek." (The Norwegian Hospitality Association, n.d). This campaign was a

collaboration between Arbeidstilsynet, Likestillings og diskrimineringsombudet, NHO Reiseliv, Fellesforbundet, Parart, KS and Virke. The campaign represents the importance of drawing a line between right and wrong and that all employees should be protected so that customers don't step over the line. All leaders have a responsibility to actively work towards reducing harassment in the workplace and during all activities that are arranged by the company (The Norwegian Hospitality Association, n.d). The Norwegian Hospitality Association states that workplace harassment is highly destructive as the severe consequences can lead to unmotivated employees, a bad work environment, high sickness absences, and an elevated turnover rate. An example of what the campaign has done is to create a drink called "The Saviour" that is recommended for customers. This can, for example, be served during Christmas parties as this is one of the arrangements where there is an extra high risk of SH. The drink can be used as an informative way to engage people to talk about these topics during events and as a reminder that the company has zero tolerance for that behavior. According to The Norwegian Hospitality Association, as many as 8 out of 10 say that there is not enough focus on SH during the season of Christmas parties (The Norwegian Hospitality Association, n.d).

The Equality and Anti-Discrimination Ombud, also known as LDO, has created 6 measures that are meant to prevent SH in the workplace (The Equality and Anti-Discrimination Ombud, n.d.-g). The first measure is identifying and mapping risks, meaning the employer and the safety representative must examine the workplace carefully to detect all safety hazards, including the risk of SH (The Equality and Anti-Discrimination Ombud, n.d.-a). As SH can look different in every case, it is also essential to include the employees in this process and ask them questions about their experiences. It is crucial to examine risk factors, risk situations, and at-risk groups (The Equality and Anti-Discrimination Ombud, n.d.-a). Risk factors are, for example, that employees are scared of telling others about their

experiences as they are scared of the consequences. Potentially risky situations could be when employees have to work at night, work alone, or work that includes serving alcohol. Groups that are more at risk for experiencing SH are young adults, especially women, apprentices, part-time employees, and employees who represent minority groups (The Equality and Anti-Discrimination Ombud, n.d.-a).

The second measure that LDO proposes, is to develop codes of conduct and expectations of behavior in the workplace (The Equality and Anti-Discrimination Ombud, n.d.-b). As all people are unique, have different experiences, and come from different societies, it can be hard to understand where the line goes from good to bad. Therefore, LDO recommends that employers collaborate with employees when creating rules for the workplace that are understandable and cover their risk factors. These rules must be well implemented so that every employee knows them, and they must be communicated to new employees. Aiming to protect employees from harassment and unwanted situations (The Equality and Anti-Discrimination Ombud, n.d.-b). Another important factor to consider is that these rules should also apply to customers and guests as well. An example of rules outlined by LDO specifies the need for workplaces to have strict rules concerning the use of derogatory terms (The Equality and Anti-Discrimination Ombud, n.d.-b). Including calling each other disrespectful names and nicknames that are related to race, sexuality, or that are in other ways oppressive. Other examples of rules related to SH is that all sexual abuse should be reported to the police. There should be no sexual approach in the workplace that counts in any case, such as pictures, jokes, and touching, to name a few examples.

The third measurement LDO recommends is to have routines for handling SH (The Equality and Anti-Discrimination Ombud, n.d.-c). Lack of routines can lead to uncertainty in the workplace. It needs to be clear for all workers what their responsibilities are and how they are expected to appear. The lack of routines can lead to uncertainty about who is responsible



for handling cases regarding SH, resulting in it not being handled properly. This could be connected to higher sick leave and conflicts, leading employees to resign in the worst case (The Equality and Anti-Discrimination Ombud, n.d.-c). Therefore, employees must know how to report harassment, as this should always be reported. Employees in Norway have the duty to report harassment even if it is not directed toward themselves. Supervisors are then obligated to examine the claims and act on them immediately. When it comes to harassment from customers, there should always be a responsible person present with the authority to prosecute unwanted behavior and ensure that there are immediate consequences for guests who misbehave (The Equality and Anti-Discrimination Ombud, n.d.-c). Situations like this must always be reported and saved for potential follow-ups.

The fourth measure is centered around the fact that violations must lead to reactions (The Equality and Anti-Discrimination Ombud, n.d.-d). These reactions can look different depending on the severity. Each workplace must have routines for how they should react to CSH, both for handling the situation and for future conditions. Companies should have internal guidelines to follow in such situations (The Equality and Anti-Discrimination Ombud, n.d.-d). Many companies in the hospitality industry use security services companies, and reactions to harassment should be included in these agreements. In situations where harassment incidents could be covered by the Norwegian Penal Code, the employer should always consider reporting it to the police (The Equality and Anti-Discrimination Ombud, n.d.-d). Appropriate reactions to customers harassing employees in general could be warnings, eviction, blacklisting, and police report (The Equality and Anti-Discrimination Ombud, n.d.-d). Regardless, employees must always be safeguarded through preventive measures to deter repeated or recurring situations.

The fifth measure is related to the expectation of clear managerial responsibility (The Equality and Anti-Discrimination Ombud, n.d.-e). Leaders should do concrete work to

prevent and deal with cases of SH responsibly. The leaders are responsible for ensuring that their employees are not harassed at work under any circumstances. To prevent harassment from happening, leaders should prepare routines, implement measures, and map risks. The employees must participate in this process so that the leader understands what a typical working day looks like for them. If and when SH cases arise, the leader is responsible for following up and handling the situation. The health and environmental safety training for leaders should include information about SH to ensure that leaders can fulfill their roles. Leaders should be able to get assistance from occupational health services, other managers, or the HR department when handling harassment cases (The Equality and Anti-Discrimination Ombud, n.d.-e).

The sixth and final measure that LDO recommends is to talk about SH in the workplace (The Equality and Anti-Discrimination Ombud, n.d.-f). SH should be discussed regularly so that the threshold for bringing it up is low. The topic should regularly be on the agenda and talked about in meetings where all employees are present. This can, for example, be done in meetings to review the working environment when cases arise and before high-risk seasons. The purpose of the meeting is to inform employees of the organizational preventative actions against SH. The meetings should include a review of implemented rules and reflect upon acceptable behavior and identify if there is any need for clarification regarding this. Moreover, including information about risk mapping for different work areas and measures to prevent SH. Another important aspect of the meeting is to encourage employees to share their experiences, and also revise routines for reporting SH (The Equality and Anti-Discrimination Ombud, n.d.-f).

## **Method**

Chapter 4 is concerned with detailed descriptions of research design, the chosen method and analysis used for this study. First part of the chapter will cover the reflexive thematic analysis

(RTA). Following sections will include description of the sample, ethical considerations, the interview process, and lastly transcription and audio recording.

### **A Qualitative Approach**

This thesis employs a qualitative research design to capture the nuanced perspectives of leaders and uncover insights and perspectives on SH prevention. Utilizing a critical qualitative approach, aiming at an interrogative stance on the meanings expressed in the data, while also unpacking the ideas and concepts associated with them, which is often tied to broader social meanings (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 334). By conducting in-depth interviews, geared toward collecting detailed data (Wang & Park, 2016, p.94), the semi-structured interview approach was chosen because it allows for a flexible scrutinization of a certain topic. Moreover, it allows us to explore newly emerging interests and questions during the process. An interview guide was prepared, with additional probing questions, to ensure the course of obtaining valuable insights related to the master thesis research questions.

The mode of data collection technique for this master thesis was enabled by semi-structured interviews, meaning an interview guide was constructed before the participants were contacted. The nature of semi-structured interviews allows for flexibility during the interview process. Where adding questions or changing the order of questions are encouraged. (Johannessen et al., 2010, p. 137). The interviewer can, therefore, go back and forth during the interview to match the conversation. In qualitative studies, normally, the questions are open so that the candidate can formulate their answers, as this gives more supplementary answers (Johannessen et al., 2010, p. 137).

### **Reflexive Thematic Analysis - 'Just a Method'**

We came to the conclusion that Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) was the best suited method for analyzing the data collected. Thematic Analysis is generally a widely adopted method used in qualitative research, especially after Virginia Braun & Victoria Clarke (2006) published their most cited article "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology".

Regardless, since 2006 there has been a lot of confusion, and thematic analysis is often misunderstood (Byrne, 2022). That is why Braun & Clarke have dedicated their careers to bring clarity to the qualitative method and conceptualized RTA.

In the positivist-empiricist model of research, where objectivity is valued, avoiding bias will then be of the prime concern. The reflection over bias refers to the idea that the researcher inadvertently influences the results in the research process, resulting in 'untrustworthy' data (Braun & Clarke, 2013 p.36). However, in the qualitative paradigm questions concerning how research is influenced by bias becomes less relevant. Because research is understood as a subjective process by bringing in the researcher's history, values, assumptions, perspectives, politics, and mannerism into the research (Braun & Clarke, 2013 p.36). Being Reflexive is essential for good qualitative research and refers to the process of being able to critically reflect on the knowledge produced in the process, and the researcher's role in producing that knowledge. Addressing underlying theoretical and paradigmatic assumptions would allow us to ensure that the qualitative data was collected and analyzed in a way that respected and expressed the subjectivity of the participants' accounts of their attitudes (Byrne, 2022). At the same time acknowledging and embracing the reflexive influence of our own interpretations as researchers (Byrne, 2022).

### ***The Reflexive TA Process***

The research question for this master thesis was addressed within a paradigmatic framework of critical orientation. "Interrogating patterns and themes of meaning with a theoretical understanding that language can create, rather than merely reflect, a given social reality" (Terry et al. 2017 as cited in Byrne, 2022). It was important to recount the participants meanings and experiences as faithfully as possible, while also taking a reflexive stance (Byrne, 2022). While taking a predominance stance of deductive analysis of the data, adopting a 'theory-driven' approach (Byrne, 2022).

***Phase 1: Familiarization***

The first phase involves an immersion of the data collected, 'familiarization' is prevalent in many forms of qualitative analysis (Byrne, 2022). This is essential for identifying the appropriate information that may be of relevance to the research questions. It is advised to manually transcribe the data, facilitating a deep immersion (Byrne, 2022). To ensure continuous familiarity with the data, it was read aloud initially upon completion of all the manually transcribed data. But also, consistently throughout the entire process. Thoughts and opinions, essentially the sense making of the data, was documented by taking notes. Prior to the next phase a reflection note on each interview were made, based on questions from. Firstly, summarizing the interview at whole by a few sentences reflecting upon what was: familiar, surprising and the reason for the reaction (Victoria Clarke, 2021, 6:30). See example 1.1

**Reflection Note (with participant P9)**

Quiet surroundings, no customers around, the first participant to have their computer nearby, because she wanted to give detailed information, so there was use for it and we didn't feel it was necessary to ask them to put it away. Sometimes very eager to answer questions by interrupting the interviewer mid-sentence.

What was familiar?

- Broad definition of SH.
- Things have gotten better over time.

What was surprising?

- Explaining the impact customer behavior has on employees.
- The role of the person we interviewed is specially tailored for the needs of the hotel.

Why did we react in this way?

- The participant seems well reflected about the theme, compared to the other interviews.
- Longer perspective and references to thoughts around SH.

Table 1.1

***Phase 2: Generating Initial Codes***

The second phase is creating fundamental building blocks, that later will become themes (Byrne, 2022). Interpreting the data involves navigating a spectrum of coding focus, spanning from surface, overt semantic codes to the implicit, underlying, and 'hidden' latent codes (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p.332). Representing the researcher's interpretations of sense

making and patterns across the dataset (Byrne, 2022). With a focus on collaboration exploring various assumptions of the data, aiming at achieving richer interpretations of meaning.

Moving away from aiming to achieve consensus of meaning. Contingent on that qualitative analysis intentions are not to provide a 'single' or correct answer (Barun & Clarke, 2013 as cited in Byrne, 2022). The preliminary coding was conducted using the 'comments' function in Microsoft Word, displaying the codes in the margin of the document. After going through the initial coding process, they were reviewed identifying similarities and differences. To gain a comprehensive overview of the data a spreadsheet overviewing the different codes were created. Cataloging the codes, similarly to 'code books', ensured clarity in the different interpretations of the researchers.

### ***Phase 3: Generating Themes***

After coding all the data, the focus shifts to phase three, moving from examining the data individually to integrating it to gain a comprehensive understanding (Byrne, 2022). The codes were evaluated, deciding which codes that could be combined. Where respondents expressed similar reflections and opinions, merged to form subthemes and themes. In this research project, the data was first reviewed to identify the major differences, which were then assigned as preliminary themes. Subsequently, the information within each theme was reviewed and sorted into subthemes. This process was repeated several times over an extended period, during which the themes were initially quite fluid but gradually became more specific and structured. Sorting the data into preliminary themes was instrumental in gaining more control over the dataset.

### ***Phase 4: Reviewing Potential Themes***

This phase is about evaluating various themes for the codes. It is crucial to consider themes that directly pertain to addressing the research question while ensuring they accurately reflect the dataset (Byrne, 2022). There must be enough relevant information to support the themes being formed. Below, subthemes narrower than the main themes was developed. The

themes and subthemes will be presented using a thematic map highlighting the main themes and the subthemes utilized for analysis (Byrne, 2022). To determine the themes, the dataset was carefully evaluated over an extended period, with considerable time spent reflecting on the codes. As this process unfolded, it became increasingly evident which data was essential for addressing the research question, allowing for the identification of overarching themes.

#### ***Phase 5: Defining and Naming Theme***

The next phase involves defining and naming the themes. It is imperative to conduct a thorough and comprehensive analysis of the data to accurately label the themes. When using RTA, taking an interpretive approach to analyzing the data is essential (Byrne, 2022).

The names of the themes are among the first things a reader notices, making it crucial that they effectively reflect the research question (Byrne, 2022). Therefore, considerable time was dedicated to developing clear and self-explanatory themes. Mind mapping was employed to create a visual understanding of the data, and significant reflection was undertaken to gain a deeper insight into the data. Following this method, it became possible to finally name and define the data.

#### ***Phase 6: Producing the Report***

Phase six is about the production of the report (Byrne, 2022). The execution of this report has not been linear, as it has been essential for the quality of the task to move back and forth between the various stages of the report. The first part of the report, concerning the theory, was written before the data was collected. This was done to enter the project with the strongest theoretical foundation possible to understand and interpret the data. Subsequently, it was necessary to familiarize oneself with the relevant research method to extract the data under investigation. However, significant portions of the research method were developed after the data collection. The results and analysis section were prepared after dedicating much time to understanding the data at the deepest level possible. In this process, it was necessary to revisit the theory to keep the theoretical foundation well informed.

### **The Sample**

A purposive sample of 9 leaders in the Norwegian hotel industry were collected through 8 interviews. The sample consists of leaders or HR workers within the hotel industry. It quickly became apparent that different managers with very similar areas of responsibility could have completely different titles. It was, therefore, necessary to seek out a leader who had direct or indirect responsibility for preventing and dealing with SH in the workplace. Also aiming at a sample that could contribute meaningful perspectives or stories that could uncover the proposed research questions was important.

Participants were recruited through the snowball technique to reach a network of people who could recommend participants who would be suited partaking in this study (Felix & Smith, 2019, p. 100). This was very helpful as the research topic is sensitive, and it can, therefore, be hard to contact the right people (Felix & Smith, 2019, p. 100). For some leaders, it can be stressful to talk about SH as they might be scared of saying something wrong, which could reflect negatively on them. Besides, the topic could also be perceived as intrusive. The hospitality industry is known for being under a lot of pressure, meaning it can be hard to recruit participants because of time constraints. Therefore, using the snowball method proved helpful as it created a referral chain where candidates led to new candidates. However, there were some challenges with applying the snowball method.

### ***Sample Size***

Most qualitative studies done with in-depth interviews will have a relatively small sample (Wang & Park, 2016, p.119). For this study, the number of interview candidates was not specified in advance as it would depend on when the point of data saturation was reached (Felix & Smith, 2019, p. 100). This means that the number of participants was dependent on when there was no new information to gather from the interviews, as it was the same information that was being repeated in each interview; this is called saturation point (Felix & Smith, 2019, p. 100). It was important not to predetermine the sample size number, as there



was no way of knowing initially how detailed or rich data each interview would generate. It was also a possibility that there would be little to no differences in the information gathered. Reason two for not having a set number of interviews before starting was that this created a continuous focus on analyzing the information and keeping track of what was new. Instead of rushing to reach a certain number of interviews, the focus was kept on keeping track of how rich the data from each interview was compared to each other.

A lot of time was spent evaluating how to contact the informants. This was discussed in consultation with the supervisor, and the email sent out to respondents was also approved by the supervisor. SH is a broad topic that can seem frightening to some. Therefore, it was important to appear in a professional manner and specify how data would be stored and anonymized. This was already done in the first email, where the information letter approved by Sikt was attached.

### **Ethical Consideration**

The data collected must be stored in a secure way to protect participants privacy as they are sharing personal experiences (Felix & Smith, 2019, p. 104). An information sheet was sent to all respondents when they were invited to participate in the research project. The information from the form was also reiterated at the beginning of the interviews. The purpose for providing an information sheet, with detailed information was to ensure that they could make the informed decisions to participate. The information sheet specifically outlined the purpose of the project and provided information about why they were asked to participate. It was specified that their participation would be completely anonymized, making it impossible to identify the participant or their organization. Also informing that the participant had the right to withdraw at any time. The data collected was handled in accordance with data protection regulations provided by Sikt (Sikt, n.d). Finally, it was stated that all information would be deleted no later than 17.06.2025.

### **The Reason for Choosing a Semi-structured Interview Approach**

If the interview is not structured at all, you can encounter pitfalls such as trouble comparing the answers if all the interviews are different from each other (Johannessen et al., 2010, p. 138). An unstructured interview creates a more relaxed situation where the interview feels like a normal conversation, making it more comfortable to open up (Johannessen et al., 2010, p. 138). This can also create a pitfall as how much information gathered in the interviews can depend on the relationship that is or is not built between the interviewer and the candidate during the conversation. As there are no structured questions it can depend a lot on which direction the conversation takes. If the questions are too structured, it is hard to be flexible (Johannessen et al., 2010, p. 138). Being unable to be flexible can lead to situations where information is missed out on as it is not possible to ask follow-up questions. There is no possibility of tailoring the interview to suit each interview candidate (Johannessen et al., 2010, p. 138). It is easier to compare and analyze results with a structured interview as every interview is structured the same.

Semi-structured interviews are a combination of the unstructured interview and the structured interview. Talking about SH can be daunting for many individuals. Therefore, it is important to foster an environment where the interview feels more like a conversation, as this will lead candidates sharing more information (Johannessen et al., 2010, p. 138). It is also important to ask unplanned questions to gather more information, especially when the candidate can be holding back valuable information. Therefore, choosing a semi-structured interview was essential for this study.

### **Designing the Interview Guide**

The interview guide utilized in this study was inspired by Bråten and Øistad (2017) studying SH at work in the hotel and restaurant sector. Together with our supervisor, substantial revisions were made to ensure the interview guide aligned with the purpose of this master thesis. The interview guide was then sent to Sikt together with an information

letter. Researchers and students fill out Sikt's registration form, when they need to process personal data for a research project (Sikt, n.d). They make an assessment of the planned research on whether the plan will meet the requirements for privacy. Both the interview guide and information letter were approved on 21.02.2024. The interview guide contains general questions to familiarize oneself with the company before delving deeper into understanding the perceived scope of SH, whether it is a topic in the workplace, what reporting procedures are in place, and what specific incidents have occurred. The complete interview guide is attached in the appendix.

### **The process of The Interviews**

All candidates were given the option of doing the interview online, in a group room at the university, or the interviewers could come to their workplace. Two candidates wanted to do it online because of distance, and the rest wanted to be interviewed at their workplace. There can be some problems with doing the interviews at their workplace or online as they can be easily distracted by their surroundings (Johannessen et al., 2010, p. 142). Since all the interview candidates are leaders, they have a busy schedule, and it was therefore necessary to adapt to them. It was also important that the candidates felt comfortable and relaxed in the environment (Johannessen et al., 2010, p. 143). To avoid that the candidates got distracted during the interview, it was clearly stated that the interviewers were turning off their phones and started the voice recorder. Doing so the hope was to remind the candidates to do the same thing as leaders often are used to being available on the phone. Also, it is not recommended to do more than one interview in a day as it is important to be focused, and it can be cognitively demanding (Braun and Clarke, 2013, p.91). Therefore, it was decided before starting the interviews that there should be a maximum of one interview a day.

***Preparation***

Both researchers attended all the interviews, one was responsible for asking the questions while the other researcher took notes and contemplating on important follow up questions. The participants were informed of the different roles during the interview, and follow-up questions could be added during the conversation. Structuring by dividing the roles and knowing the responsibility of each interviewer was important to ensure that there was no overlapping. The supervisor gave tips on creating a good dialogue with the participants, such as guidance on which language to use and how to present the research. All participants received the interview guide the day before the interview. Before the interview, it was important to gather some information about the organization and participant to be prepared and organized (Myers, 2020, p. 161). At the same time being mindful of not making assumptions about the participant predominantly.

Another part of the preparation was taking a stance on which clothes to wear during the interview day. It was very important to dress appropriately for the interviews (Myers, 2020, p. 161). Hotel leaders often dress professionally as they are often around customers and therefore need to look representable. It is important not to dress too differently from the interview candidates (Johannessen et al., 2010, p. 143). Therefore, the interviewees also dressed professionally.

As none of the researchers were trained in doing interviews, it was important to do a pilot interview. The pilot interview was done with a co-student. It was important to practice how the interaction between the two interviewers would work in practice. There was a complete review of the entire interview from start to finish, and an attempt was made to make the situation as realistic as possible. In this way, the dynamic between the two interviewers was tested while at the same time gaining a better understanding of how to get a good flow asking question. The pilot interview also showed that the order and some of the questions

could be confusing for the participant. Small adjustments were made to ensure that the interviews could go even better on the official day.

### ***Introduction of the Interview***

First impressions are always important, especially in a situation like an interview (Myers, 2020, p. 161). Building trust during the introduction was vital for the candidate to open up. Therefore, each interview started with random casual conversations, for example, about the weather, school, and similar topics, to create a comfortable atmosphere (Myers, 2020, p. 161). But also, actively avoiding certain topics that could interfere with the interview interaction. Not talking about relevant topics for the interview such as SH, employees, and customer relations. The researchers both presented themselves and their backgrounds at the start of the interview. Also providing relevant information such as purpose of the research, what the data would be used for, data storage process, and ensuring anonymity. This was important to show that the interviewers were credible and trustworthy (Myers, 2020, p. 161).

### ***Conversation During the Interview***

The conversations during the interview were often one-sided, with the candidates answering questions, which is how it should work (Myers, 2020, p. 161). With a focus on actively listening carefully during the conversation. As the topic could be perceived as sensitive, it was especially important to show respect and be mindful. During the interview process the researchers were constantly aware of minimizing subjective opinions that could interfere with the participants' answers. Especially in situations where vulnerable information was told, not interfering with researchers' personal opinions on the matter was important. It was essential to be aware of the body language of both researchers so that they would not affect the results in any way.

It is recommended to sit in the uncomfortable silence for a while before proceeding with an interview question (Braun and Clarke, 2013, p.96). When conducting the interviews, silence was used to an advantage. When the participant began to become silent after

answering a question, the researcher allowed a short silence before moving on to the next question. On several occasions, this led to the participant going deeper into the subject and continuing to talk more. In some cases, this even resulted in the participants saying things that contradicted what they had said before the silence.

### ***Concluding the Interview***

When ending the interviews, it is important to have a clear ending, so the candidate does not add relevant information after the tape recorder has been turned off (Braun and Clarke, 2013, p.97). It was a recurring problem that, despite being asked if they had shared all desired information, the participants often began to provide additional and relevant information after the tape recorder had been turned off. It became clear through all these interviews that the candidates were interested in discussing the topic. On the other hand, they were probably not entirely comfortable talking about this on a tape recorder. They spoke much more freely about the topic after the official interview concluded. Unfortunately, this information couldn't be utilized as it was shared after the tape recorders were turned off.

### **Transcribing the Interviews**

Each interview was conducted in Norwegian, as the participants were most comfortable speaking this language. It proved difficult deciding the best way of transcribing each interview. According to Braun and Clarke (2013), each step you put the data through, from audio record to transcript, will lead to lost information (p.162). Because the more you change and interfere, the more divergent the data get from its original and true state. Meaning some of the data could be lost in translation. As the candidates had different dialects, the decision was made to transcribe in Norwegian Bokmål to ease the process when later translating the data to English. Furthermore, since the process of transcribing the interviews were divided, transcription style and formatting were determined prior to the process. To ensure the same quality of data formatting.

### Audio Recording

For qualitative research, it is important to collect detailed responses from the participants that can be used for analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p.92). Therefore, it is essential to use an audio recording device instead of taking notes. In this study, two tape recorders were used for each interview to ensure that data was not lost. One was an analog audio recorder without internet access. The other was an application on the phone called "Diktafon " which is connected to a website called "Nettskjema.", made by the university in Oslo (University of Oslo, 2022). A platform where you can create, save, and administer surveys and data. This website has a high level of security, and it is therefore safe to save data like, for example, sensitive personal data and health data. Every participant was informed about the audio recording and why it was used before the interview started.

### Results

In the process of RTA, generating codes and building themes were not a linear process, at this stage there was a lot of going back and forth exploring different avenues. Somewhere along the way the task of gathering the results of the coding led to the construction of themes. From this process three themes with subcategories were identified. Table 1.2 displays participant information, Table 1.3 display the Thematic Map, and Table 1.4 displays themes and important associated results connected to the themes.

### Participant information

P1	Gender: Male Duration of the interview: 14.14 minutes Duration of the interview: General information: Working as the hotel director for 140 employees all together. Approximately 80 employees on full time contracts, remaining on . Catering to both leisure travelers and business conference attendees, with occasional visits from local guests.
P2	Gender: Female Duration of the interview: 37.22 minutes

	<p>General info: Department Manager for the café "Z" at Hotel X, overseeing most of the staff under Department Z. The café is primarily operational during the high season in summer, while throughout the rest of the year, participant P2 supports Hotel X with various tasks, including social media management.</p>
P3	<p>Gender: Male  Duration of the interview: approximately 28.00 minutes (did not stay for the whole interview, joined after the interview started and left near the end of it)  General info: Hotel manager for Hotel X working together with P2. Accommodating a mixture of business leisure and holiday leisure guests. Accommodating a mixture of business leisure and holiday leisure guests.</p>
P4	<p>Gender: Female  Duration of the interview: 32.34 minutes  General info: HR Director supporting over 10 hotels with approximately 650 employees. Roughly one-third of the workforce is on full-time contracts, another third on part-time contracts, and the remaining third on "call-in shifts" arrangements.</p>
P5	<p>Gender: Male  Duration of the interview: 22.49 minutes  General info: Quality Manager, overseeing 11 employees, with around 104 employees all together. 60 % on contracts with percentages and the rest on "call-in shifts". Predominantly conference guest, and independent business travelers, with the exception of the weekend and holidays, where it shifts to leisure travelers.</p>
P6	<p>Experience: director since the opening of the hotel  Gender: Male  Duration of the interview: 17.38 minutes  General info: Hotel director for a hotel of 22 employees, around 7 employees on full time contracts, the remaining employees are in part-time or on-call positions. Predominantly business guest, with the exception of the weekend and holidays, where it shifts to leisure travelers</p>
P7	<p>Experience: 25 years in the industry  Gender: Female  Duration of the interview: 30.20 minutes  General info: Hotel Manager on a ship. Approximately 48 employees working in the hotel department of the ship. 38 employees working 100% permanent position, the remaining are working substitutes on "call-in shifts". Predominantly leisure travel, with occasional travelers using a port-to-port setup resembling public transportation.</p>
P8	<p>Gender: Female  Duration of the interview: 36.28 minutes  General info: working as a Hotel Manager, distinct responsibility for employees working in the reception and room service. Around 98 employees working altogether. Full Time contracts around 40-50 employees, and part time position is estimated to be 20-30 employees. The number of employees on 'call-in shifts' varies significantly depending on the season, and some of them may be borrowed from other hotels within the chain. Accommodates various types of guests throughout the year. In the fall, there are more business travelers and conference guests, while during the holidays, there is an increase in leisure travelers.</p>



P9	<p>Experience:                  Duration of the interview: 51.43 minutes                  Gender: Female                  General info: Working as Safety Manager, with distinct responsibility for employee safety without direct employee supervision. There are around 157 employees working at the hotel. Approximately 33 employees working 100% permanent positions, the remaining are either permanent in smaller percentage positions or working “call-in shifts”. Primarily business, with some leisure travelers and some local customers using the facilities provided.</p>
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Table 1.2

**Thematic Map**

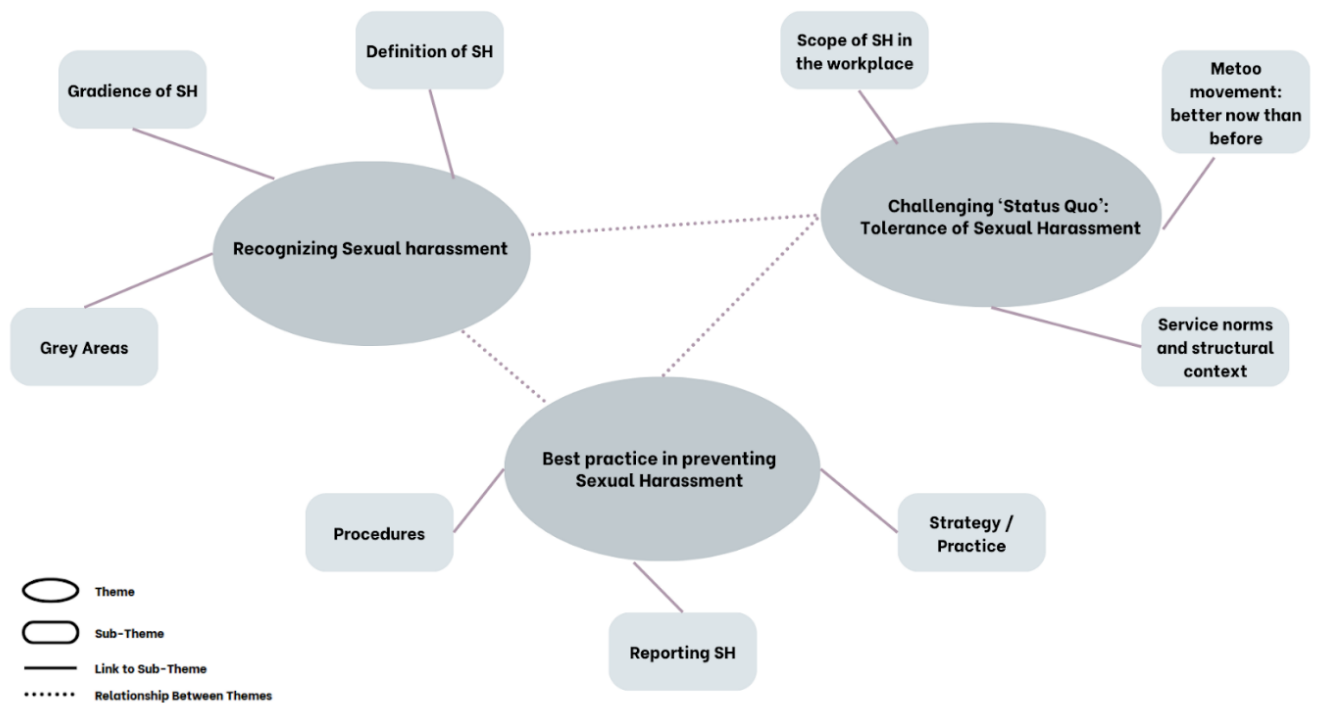


Table 1.3

Themes:	Results:	Examples of results:
Recognizing Sexual harassment	The participants definitions of SH in general were diverse in many ways. Shaped by several different determining factors, some mentioned experiences from previous employer having an influence or definitions based on personal experiences of SH in the service industry. Additionally reflecting upon the challenges related to determining to what extent customer misbehaviour could be classified as.	<p>P2: “It’s basically all unwanted behavior, whether it’s physical or verbal comments, or even spreading rumors and such. So, anything of a sexual nature, I would say”</p> <p>P4: Yeah, it’s all behavior that involves comments about gender, orientation, both positive and negative. And also physical touching.</p> <p>P6: There’s obviously a fine line between something that could be seen as banter by some, and what is meant as very derogatory</p>
Best practice in preventing Sexual Harassment	The respondents have different practices for detecting and preventing SH, and many use risk analysis, action plans, or climate investigations. Some actively work on keeping these updated regularly, while other respondents choose not to comment on this. However, there is variation in how much emphasis is placed on ensuring that employees are actually aware of these procedures within the company. What is emphasized regarding reporting and whistleblowing varies greatly from respondent to respondent. Many also refer to BHT as a support in the work against SH.	<p>P6 : “That’s indeed one point on the risk analysis, yes. And it’s revised annually, and the safety delegate is also involved in it. But so far, in our short lifespan at the hotel, we’ve been operating for six years, there hasn’t been any basis to change that risk analysis because there haven’t been any instances here of any serious nature.”</p> <p>P8: “Yes, we have risk assessments, indeed. We do them through and in collaboration with BHT”</p>
Challenging Status Quo: Tolerance of Sexual Harassment	The broader part of the participants says that the scope of SH in the workplace is relatively good compared to other hotels, from zero incidents to a moderate prevalence. Participant P9 stands out with clearly articulating SH as being of comprehensive work environment problem, not only at their hotel but in the service industry at large as well.	<p>P8: So I would say that it’s kind of a low to medium level here</p> <p>P2: The extent of sexual harassment at X Hotel is quite minimal.</p> <p>P9: We are unfortunately an industry that is particularly vulnerable to it, both in terms of sexual harassment and harassment in general.</p>

Table 1.4

## Discussion

Chapter 6 provides an in-depth discussion of the various themes at the same time describing different parts of the data collected. The preceding section briefly outlined the results to establish a starting point for the analysis of the data. This section delves deeply into the interpretation of the participants' experiences, contextualizing them within the theoretical and contextual framework presented earlier in the thesis. Providing a comprehensive understanding of the results from the RTA process in relation to the research questions.

The first theme presented explores reflections on how to recognize SH, which may initially seem like a straightforward process but proves to be more complex. The following theme is centered around on how to prevent SH by considering the six preventative measures recommended by The Equality and Anti-Discrimination Ombud (The Equality and Anti-Discrimination Ombud, n.d.-g). This theme was developed with the assumption that leaders realistically could benefit from this information, as it is linked to the “sette strek” campaign. Finally, the last theme addresses participants' reflections towards CSH, and whether they perceive it as a problem in the workplace. Additionally, the influence of norms is illuminated, and finally, future challenges and opportunities are discussed.

### Recognizing Sexual Harassment

Understanding how different leaders define CSH in the workplace is crucial in order to analyze preventative work in practice. As previously mentioned, knowledge concerning SH in the workplace is limited both in scope and knowledge (Svensson, 2020). A general observation about the research field in the Nordic countries, concerning SH is related to the normalization of unclear boundaries between what is seen as 'acceptable' customer behavior can have consequences for how organizations manage SH. An important consideration was connected to the participant's experiences compared to the ‘collective interpretive framework.’ However, the participants' individual perspectives are not sufficient to say something about how collective interpretations affect practices. The participants' definitions

of SH were recounted on a broad spectrum, and interpretations of how SH in the workplace constitutes were told in many different ways. However, there were also some common notions, most of the participants distinguished between physical and verbal harassment, and some also mentioned psychological harassment. Look at the following examples:

P2: "It's actually any unwanted behavior, whether it's physical or verbal comments, yes or spreading rumors and. So all those types of things of a sexual nature, I would say."

P7: "But then there's the issue of touching people, but also verbally actually. One should be careful both with what one says and one shouldn't always say everything one thinks. One should be aware of what is said to you in a way."

P5: "Yes, no, it's everything from comments about appearance, gender comments, and then of course physical, when it comes to touching when you shouldn't, and body language, in terms of what you do there. So it's kind of summarized as verbal and physical.... It's also the aspect of, well, you can do it online too, right? Harassment via messages or, yeah."

Participant P5 also mentioned cyber harassment, which is interesting. The more divergent answers were related to participants who defined SH in border terms, such as P8 who defined SH in terms of harassment in general.

P8: "Here, it includes everything from in a way comments and such things. But what we're trying to focus on with employees is that if you receive a comment that is related to your appearance or you personally or in a way in your role that has nothing to do with your role what you're there to have or that just makes you feel uncomfortable then it's in a way for us a form of harassment..."

Additionally, P9 defines SH in broader terms, constraining it to instances where someone crosses another person's boundaries.

P9: “[laughter] It's immediately when someone is crossing another person's personal boundary of what's okay. Whether it's verbal or physical or it can be as simple as just a glance. It doesn't matter as soon as one of our employees feels uncomfortable or sexually harassed, there's a reason to do something in a way.”

***When you encounter the unidentifiable- Gradient of SH and the “Forgotten Grey Zone”***

The famous quote from Catharine MacKinnon (1979) “the unnamed should not be mistaken for non-existent” becomes highly relevant when you encounter the unidentifiable (Svensson, 2020, p.21). What happens when it is not easy to pinpoint whether it is SH or not? For instance, not all types of SH play out within clear boundaries, such as ‘cut out’ incidents where it is fairly easy defining overt SH (Saul, 2014). Problematic behavior that does not meet definitions and solely focusing on whether some behavior *is* SH, may distract from the broader picture. In practice, interactions between the subjective and objective definitions of SH creates limited space to identify and define behaviors and situations, also known as ‘the grey zone’ (Carstensen, 2016). Complexities concerning SH could be determined by several important factors, whereas contextual dependency and clarity is of great importance. A broad range of behaviors could linger in ‘the grey zone’. Furthermore, the subjective criteria for what is deemed as SH limit the ability to identify and also react to these types of behaviors. The ‘dark grey zone’ encompasses behaviors that individuals do not necessarily identify as SH, although they might legally/objectively be viewed as such. On the other hand, the ‘lighter grey zone’ entails behaviors that could be problematic from a gender perspective, but not objectively identified as SH. Carstensen (2016) argues that many problems that should be deemed as SH tend to be individualized, which at many levels hinders the problematization of organizational and social structures that enable SH. Over time problematic behavior from customers may pass as acceptable and “normal”. By reserving measures against the most serious of behaviors may result in legitimacy passing, less serious, but more common behaviors (Carstensen, 2016). Not all customer perpetrator SH against service providers plays

out within the clear boundaries that ensure a common understanding of SH in the workplace. This can create blind spots that may prevent individuals or organizations from identifying SH. CSH could be wrapped in many different forms and situations which are confounding. For example, the customer could be overly nice in the situation. At the same time the customer might not be aware of their own actions being deemed as SH. (Gettman & Gelfand, 2007; Good & Cooper, 2016).

Several participants clearly articulate thoughts concerning complex issues regarding gradience and challenging times in trying to identify situations of CSH and SH in general. Especially regarding the subjective matter of SH. Participant P3 brings forth that it is very challenging to determine what other people are hurt by. P3: "Also there's the aspect of educating young employees about what sexual harassment entails. It's very challenging, some are deeply hurt by just a single inappropriate word."

P3: "For there are people who argue and maybe try to be funny, but then there are some who receive this who don't find it so funny. While others don't care. So, it's difficult actually. But I feel that with jokes, people are so on edge now that it's a bit off the other way. Almost afraid to say anything to others, to try to be funny. Because you're afraid it will be misunderstood."

Another commonality interpreted from the interviews is that many of the participants, when explicitly asked to give examples of CSH. P1, P6 and P7 disclose various answers encompassing no former knowledge of examples of specific CSH experiences of employees for different reasons. Firstly, P1 has no knowledge of employees experiencing CSH, based on the short time span he has worked there, but he highlighted that there have been employees experiencing different forms of discrimination based on ethnicity. P1: "No, not from guests. We have experienced, like, discrimination based on ethnicity and those things. But not sexual harassment." Secondly P7 is aware of incidents of CSH but has not personally been involved

as a leader in these cases because of shared employee responsibility. P7: "Hmm. No... I've only heard about it, but I haven't experienced it." Thirdly P6 also answers that they do not know of any concrete situations where employees have been subjected to CSH. On the other hand, previously in the interview P6 reflected upon scope and different nuances of SH. According to Carstensen (2016), these experiences could fall under the "dark grey zone", where employees cope with CSH and do not recognize it as SH.

P6: "Otherwise, the closest we come to anything here is if there have been some intoxicated male guests in a certain age group who have perhaps made some sleazy comments. It's like the most serious thing we've had. And it's towards individuals who often, what should I say. It's towards individuals who are 'tough-minded'. And who have dealt with far worse things at previous workplaces and with previous employers, who haven't had any problem with this. But of course, we don't sweep this under the rug because of that. And we do ask if everything is okay and monitor how they've reacted. But it's been of such a relatively minor nature. There's obviously a fine line between something that could be seen as banter by some, and what is meant as very derogatory. And here, there are some who manage to distinguish that this might not be very malicious, but unnecessary, and then we don't spend any more time on it."

This could be interpreted as contradictory, by using the 'worst case scenario' to measure the gradience of CSH, may trivialize less severe incidents. It seems that P6 is signaling different views on CSH. Because he mentioned employees who are not affected by CSH, should still be followed up on. However, he also indicates a reluctance to dwell on incidents perceived as minor, then concludes by saying that they won't spend more time on it than necessary.

### **Best Practice of Preventing SH**

The second theme delves into the crucial concept of recognizing and understanding the overarching strategies essential for preventing and addressing SH in the workplace. These approaches affect the daily lives of those at work and can make a significant difference. How

does one of the most vulnerable industries systematically address the prevention of sexual harassment? This theme is developed to identify exactly that - to uncover what leaders think about preventive measures and their practices in this context. The data was interpreted based on the six measure steps provided by LDO, because they provide specific guidelines for preventing SH in Norwegian workplaces (The Equality and Anti-Discrimination Ombud, n.d.-g). Assuming this is relevant for hotel leaders and HR workers.

### ***Risk Analysis***

The first step in the LDOs six measurements is to assess risk (The Equality and Anti-Discrimination Ombud, n.d.-a). This is intended to uncover risks such as employees not reporting SH or leaders not assisting employees in such incidents. Most respondents mentioned risk analysis as one of the measures they use to assess SH. They repeated that risk analysis was used and that several different types of mapping were included in this analysis. P6 explains that SH has been a topic on their risk analysis:

P6: "That's indeed one point on the risk analysis, yes. And it's revised annually, and the safety delegate is also involved in it. But so far, in our short lifespan at the hotel, we've been operating for six years, there hasn't been any basis to change that risk analysis because there haven't been any instances here of any serious nature."

P6 explains that the risk analysis is revised yearly but also says there has been no need to change it in the six years the hotel has existed. It may seem a little surprising that P6 believes that society has not changed or developed in a way that requires updating these analyses. Still, it is difficult to say anything about the situation without having access to what their analysis consists of.

Bedriftshelsetjenesten (BHT) is an advisory service within preventive health and safety work (Arbeidstilsynet, n.d.-b). The service is intended to assist employers and employees in addressing their workplace health and safety needs. P3, P8, and P9 all mention that BHT is an active part in connection with the risk analysis. P3 says that the risk analysis



occurs when they meet with BHT. P3: "We do it in connection with our meetings with BHT. The assessment involves using deviation forms that we use in the company for everything." Also, P8 explains that they conduct risk assessments in collaboration with the BHT, "Yes, we have risk assessments, indeed. We do them through and in collaboration with BHT". P8 specifies that they have increased focus on risk analysis before the busy seasons, because this is when they identified that employees are more vulnerable for SH. P8: "So, we specifically go through it before the seasons and when it's busiest." According to P8, the risk analysis is thus used regularly throughout the year. It is clearly an advantage that these three participants developed risk analysis in collaboration with BHT rather than alone. Since BHT is involved in multiple hotels, they are more familiar with SH at a more overarching level.

### ***Action Plan***

Developing an action plan could be advantageous for structuring specific goals aimed at preventing SH. The action plan aligns with LDO's third measurement, which is to have good procedures for handling situations (The Equality and Anti-Discrimination Ombud, n.d.-c). The absence of well-defined procedures could create uncertain workplaces for employees. That is one of the reasons why it is important to make deliberate goals for preventing CSH. All respondents were asked if they had an action plan with set goals for preventing CSH in the workplace. There was a significant variation in the answers that were given. It varied from some not having an action plan to those who did and some who had it included in the risk analysis. For instance, P1 answered that they don't have a specific action plan and asked during the interview what an action plan is concerned with. P1: "No... we don't really have an action plan. What exactly constitutes an action plan? I feel like it fits somewhat under the other thing we were talking about." Also, P3 and P7 is among those who do not have an action plan. P3 mentions that they do not have any other procedures apart from one deviation form, which they worked on together with BHT. Instead of having a plan P3, mention that

the employees have a duty to report if something happens. P3“Nothing more than... we have what I told you. That they have an obligation to report if things happen.”

The remaining participants have an action plan. P6 mentions that the action plan is concerned with both physical and psychological harassment, “ It's divided into both physical and psychological within that, harassment.” None of the other participants responded with distinguishing between physical and psychological harassment in the action plan. P8 also stands out in the way the hotel utilizes the action plan:

P8: “Yes, we have that too. We have an action plan for the hotel again through the AMU that is followed up every three months, and there it's especially about sending it out to companies, setting clear rules that they must sign directly that they have understood the rules on how their employees should treat employees here. And in a way, a bit about what the consequences will be, so they must sign individually on that, not just on the contract.”

P8 provides an example of what a specific goal aimed at preventing CSH at work could look like in an action plan. Sending out codes of conduct to customers that they need to sign before an event with a company, could be a good measure for preventing unwanted incidents. This sends out a clear signal of what is expected from customers when they visit this hotel. That the action plan is used not only for internal work but also to inform customers of the consequences they will face if they harass employees at the hotel. When the respondents talked about thoughts around an action plan it was not clear if they talked about SH, harassment or CSH in general. Overall, it seemed like most of the respondents were not deliberate with building action plans even though they mentioned them, based on some of the vague answers.

### ***Work Environment Mapping***

A good work environment can be a significant resource for employees, making them better equipped to handle demands like SH (Schaufeli, 2017). When there are high demands,

resources such as a good work environment will have a positive impact on the workload experienced by employees. Organizations with at least 30 employees are obligated to establish a working environment committee (AMU) (Arbeidstilsynet, n.d-a). New from 2024 is that the Labour Inspection Authority can also demand that businesses with fewer than 30 employees must have AMU. It's interesting to note that there is variation in the emphasis placed on assessing the work environment, but it seems that most participants at least have some form of measures in place. P2 and P5 pointed out that they have a safety representative in place who contributes to ensuring the work environment. P6 mentions that they also have safety representatives who are responsible for the working environment:

P6: "Of course, there's a legally mandated safety representative who welcomes all employees and conducts safety rounds. Then, we have department managers whom we hope employees will talk to if they have anything to say. If not, then the safety delegate is the next point of contact, and if they don't want to speak to either of those, then they can come to me. And after that, the BHT is available."

P5, P7 and P8 mentioned that they have AMU representatives. P7 mentions that they have organized welfare arrangements on the ship, as well as AMU representatives to improve the work environment: "We have welfare on board, and we have AMU on board. And we have a very high focus on trying to make it enjoyable and social at work when we have time for it."

P1, P3, P4 and P7 explained that they have an available HR department that is supporting them to make a good work environment. P1 mentions that department managers have personnel responsibility and that there's a head office associated with the hotel where they have an HR director: "P1: At the head office, we have our own HR director, .... and then it's the department managers who have personnel responsibility in their respective departments."

The JDR model can be used to measure demand against resources to analyze if there is an imbalance on either side (Schaufeli, 2017). Although the results show that several of the participants use various procedures to assess SH, it could be more effective if a model were used that actually analyzes how much demand the employees experience. Most of the participants respond quite vaguely to questions about the work environment mapping, suggesting a lack of clarity in articulating their views and strategies for systematic workplace improvement.

### ***Reporting SH***

Reporting procedures fall under LDO's fourth measure, which deals with ensuring that violations have consequences (The Equality and Anti-Discrimination Ombud, n.d.-d). It emphasizes the importance that companies have specific procedures to use when employees experience CSH at work. Here, the respondents had varying answers. Some of the participants mentioned that if the employee is not comfortable discussing the matter with anyone at the organization, they can contact BHT. Unfortunately, there were also some leaders who had imprecise reporting procedures with few options, and it seemed like there was little understanding of how challenging it can be to be a whistleblower.

All participants were asked about their procedures for when employees report CSH. P1, P3, P5, P6 and P8 all mentioned that the first step in a reporting procedure is to report to the immediate supervisor.

P5: "So, it's the immediate supervisor, if you don't, let's say it's the immediate supervisor who is the problem, that can happen, that's very typical too, then there's the safety representative, yes, who becomes the employee's representative. If you're organized, you can take it to the union. Or you bypass your manager and go directly to the top leader. You are free to do so."

There may be many different reasons to why reporting CSH is difficult, it's not a straightforward process. P5 emphasizes the importance of being prepared for the possibility

that the employee may not feel comfortable sharing their experiences with their immediate supervisor. Additionally, P4 emphasizes that it doesn't matter how you report:

P4: "It's not like you have to go to the director, because we also understand that sometimes it can be embarrassing or uncomfortable. So, how the report comes in, it doesn't matter at all. This is brought up at all meetings, if there's anything that's not as it should be, let us know. This is also in our template, it can be things about well-being, so if there's anything that's not quite right, speak up."

P4 is the only respondent who mentions that they adhere to the Whistleblower Protection Act when handling a report: "And if there is a report, it is handled in accordance with the Whistleblower Protection Act and, thus, the reporting procedures. It is received and assessed, and then actions are taken according to the case." The Whistleblower Protection Act, which falls under the Norwegian Work Environment Act, aims to safeguard employees who report conditions worthy of criticism (Arbeidstilsynet, n.d-a). Moreover, P7 outlines an alternative approach to reporting CSH, involving additional parties in the process. This could potentially shift the responsibility of handling reports to HR.

P7: "Yes, regardless of what it concerns, we should address it with HR. And when it comes to guests, the captain is also involved. So, we have to look at it differently because when it comes to guests, it's not directly HR who is responsible, but HR is often involved because of the crew then."

P7 also explains that she has not been involved in the reporting process at her current company. This may have influenced their response to the question. Nonetheless, it is expected that leaders ensure well-defined reporting procedures and structures are in place.

### ***Perception of What is Important When Preventing SH***

In this section, we explore the perceptions and priorities of leaders regarding SH preventative efforts in the workplace. LDO's recommendation to regularly discuss SH in the workplace sets the stage for understanding what measures leaders deem important in

preventing such incidents (The Equality and Anti-Discrimination Ombud, n.d.-f). Near the end of the interview all respondents were asked about which measures they thought were important to implement to protect employees from CSH. Many of the participants mentioned the importance of creating a good culture for reporting incidents that occur. While others mentioned the importance of conveying good values and similar aspects, none of the participants specifically stated that discussing SH itself could have a preventative effect.

Firstly, P4 and P6 believed it was important to clearly communicate that they have zero tolerance for such behavior. P6: "We have zero tolerance for sexual harassment, and it starts with the values we, as leaders of the organization, prioritize and communicate downwards." This is an important point in the campaign "sett strek" which was mentioned earlier, which was developed to actively prevent and reduce SH in the service industry (NHO, 2024). Although this point aligns well with the campaign, participants do not necessarily act in accordance with the campaign on other points.

P4 signals that it's essential to be aware that not everyone feels comfortable sharing their experiences. P7 also believes that one cannot expect the employee to have the capacity to report SH on their own:

P7: "But it's about paying attention and being aware of what's going on. And stopping it as soon as possible. And then there's the person who's being harassed, it may be very difficult for them to come forward and report it. So, one must have a keen eye to try to catch what's happening. And if someone else has heard or seen something, it's not about gossiping, it's about coming forward and giving a serious message that I have seen this. Or they can go and fetch the person and help them to report it. Because it can be quite uncomfortable for the person experiencing it."

In response to the question about actions or measures to safeguard employees from CSH. P1 and P8 answers the question by talking about what to do when CSH has already potentially

happened, but not entirely concerned with proactive protection of the employees. For instance, P1 mentioned earlier in the interview that they had no incidents of CSH at the hotel. That is why he explains that if CSH occurs, not when, it is important to seek out the involving party.

P1: "No, it's important that if it happens, it gets addressed, I was about to say. That we will talk to the relevant group where it happens. Ideally before they leave the hotel. And inform them, and it tends to be tidy. And then it's important that all the employees know how to proceed if it happens, who they should talk to, and know that they will be taken seriously."

P8 further elaborates with acknowledging the challenge of completely preventing CSH, particularly during large events where control over external companies' employees is limited. P8 highlights the necessity of following up with these companies to ensure they take appropriate action and hold their own employees accountable. She further explains that it is important that the companies who are hosting events at the hotel are informed.

P8: "Large events... to completely stop it is extremely difficult because there are large events, you don't have control over what employees of other companies do. But what has had the greatest impact is ensuring that regardless of the scale, each individual company receives information and that we sort of demand to know what follow-up they have had."

P5 and P9 believe providing employees with the tools to handle and prevent CSH is important. P5 mentions that employees must be able to step out of their service role.

P5: "Yes, if it's the reception, that can be an example, it's clear that some guests can go too far. And then, at one point, you sort of have the right to say. Now I'm talking to you as a person, and this is not okay, the way you're talking to me right now. It's

giving them the, what do you call it, empowerment, what's the Norwegian word for it again?"

P9 believes that the only measure to combat SH is to provide employees with information and training. P9: "Information and training. That's the only thing. Information and training." Further, P9 emphasizes the importance of empowering employees with confidence to be better prepared to handle such situations. This echoes what P5 mentioned about empowering employees.

Without a doubt it is important to address what leaders think is of importance when addressing CSH in the workplace. While some prioritize zero tolerance and prompt action, others emphasize vigilance and employee empowerment through training. These diverse views highlight the complexity of SH prevention.

### **Challenging Status Quo: Tolerance of Sexual Harassment**

The final theme in this thesis is centered around challenging the status quo, reflecting on the participants' observations regarding the scope of SH in the workplace, service norms and considering what measures need to be taken to ensure a safer future for employees in the hotel industry. Further reflecting upon common courtesy, essentially what service providers should consider when interacting with customers and setting boundaries for customer misbehavior. An important question to ask is whether are we doing something about the problem right here and now or are we working towards long term goals? In many ways a more narrow approach could be an important first step to this quest, moving towards a common understanding of SH in the hotel industry (Snickare & Holter, 2022, p.85).

A notable finding from the participants responses is the perception that CSH is not pervasive or severe within the workplace, compared to other hotels. From P1 and P6 citing zero incidents of CSH in their workplace. Also P4, P5, P7 and P8 have similar formulations about



the relatively low scope, P5: "Extent-wise, well not so much fortunately.". Many of the participants argue that SH in the workplace has improved over time. P3 reflects upon this from a time perspective where they tell us that it has gotten much better over time. They suggest that the situation was far worse in the past compared to present day. P3: "The guests seen from a time perspective, have improved in our case, is my opinion." Also, P2 and P3 discussed together before the interview that there had not been many incidents at the hotel.

P2: "Yes, we touched upon that. It's not so prevalent, I mean I haven't encountered much of it here. It's mostly related to alcohol, the Christmas party season, and summer gatherings and such."

On the contrary, P9's perspective stands out from the others regarding the extent of the issue, clearly stating that CSH is a significant problem in the work environment.

P9: We are unfortunately an industry that is particularly vulnerable to it, both in terms of SH and harassment in general. It often involves, well, it's mostly related to alcohol, when I say substance abuse, it's mostly alcohol that's common. There are often late nights, events that make you particularly vulnerable to it, but we see that over the past few years, it has improved. It has gotten much better. It's not that it happens less, but the consequences are less severe.

Despite variations of perceptions of the extent of CSH, participants still recognized the importance of addressing and preventing customers who misbehave. There is no way of knowing the scope of SH in the workplace based on the data collected from the interviews. It is worth mentioning that there is a possibility that organizations struggle to precisely estimate scope of SH incidents, both when it comes to employee perpetrator SH and CSH (Snickare & Holter, 2022, p.85).

Many of the participants reflected on the perception that conditions have improved over time, the shift in perception suggest a positive trend towards a safer work environment.

P6 brings forth remembering that the #Metoo movement had a substantial impact on work environment in Norway. P6: "And we opened in 2018, and I just remember a very significant divide before and after #metoo". The #Metoo movement has contributed an increased focus on institutional factors that has contributed to people taking advantage of positions of power, such as weak or lacking routines for reporting, this alone does not ensure transformative changes (Fjørtoft, 2020). Everyone has the collective responsibility of counteracting epistemic injustice and the effect of implicit bias. The #Metoo movement is acknowledged for its substantial impact on raising awareness about SH, but it has not led to a complete norm change against SH (Sletteland, 2018).

The changes of the work environment act and the promise of the comprehensive white paper currently being worked on by the Norwegian government are clear indicators of how important it is still to talk about SH in the workplace. Bråten published a paper in 2015 called "sexual harassment - a quiet work environment problem", and in many ways this still remains true. An important question this paper seeks clarification on is the differentiation of CSH and employee perpetrator SH, which is a common comparison in the service sector. One argument for distinguishing between customer and employee perpetrator SH, is because there is a tendency for employees being harassed by colleagues, supervisors or subordinates experiencing higher mean levels of depressive symptoms compared to employees harassed by clients or customers (Friborg et al., 2017). There are several assumptions based on this statement such as; it is plausible that employee perpetrator SH may have longer duration compared to CSH. They also argue that the power imbalance is significantly different when SH is conducted by a supervisor. However, the same argument could hold for CSH as well (Friborg et al., 2017). The rationale power customers hold could restrict how SH is defined (Good & Cooper, 2016). The employment relationship in the service sector is negotiated between manager and employees, but customers could also exert a great deal of influence

over employees working conditions (Belanger & Edwards, 2013 as cited in Good & Cooper, 2016). Self-regulated responses to SH or 'collective communities of coping', is when employees manage themselves in situations where they are being harassed (Good & Cooper, 2016). The management of response then falls on the employees themselves, and inevitably dissolutions workers lived experiences from key stakeholders such as employers, leaders, safety representatives and working unions (Good & Cooper, 2016). The service norms make it difficult for employees as well as leaders/managers to define SH and impose personal boundaries with customers and employees often sacrifice their own boundaries to fulfill guest expectations, desires, and needs (Good & Cooper, 2016).

Sexual attention could be interpreted as a compliment and also as a threat or a punishment (Sletteland, 2018). Sanctions could be perceived as unjust and unfair or insufficient solving the problem. Henceforth it is detrimental sustaining conversations concerning norms in the wider public. Harassment could lead to further conflicts without a mutual understanding of how words and actions should be interpreted (Sletteland, 2018). A critical conceptual apparatus to make us better able to recognize for instance that certain events are actually about exertion of power and not innocent flirting (Fjørtoft, 2020).

P9: "And it's challenging to change attitudes where it's always been like 'but you just have to tolerate it,' it's always been like that. And they just say 'well, I'm used to it, but oh my god, that's just how this job is'. And changing attitudes towards the guests, the employees, because that's what's difficult, changing the attitude of the employees who work here whether they're department heads or waiters or whatever they are. Changing the attitude that it's not okay. It doesn't matter if it's always been like that, it shouldn't be like that. And it's difficult to speak up about it for many."

Most of the participants were not aware of the changes in the law concerning SH except P6 and P9, who either planned to revise it or already had some knowledge. One of our

initial research assumptions was that leaders would incorporate the changes in the Work Environment Act into their business practices. However, it is possible it was too early in the year at the time of interviews, and some of them were planning to review the changes at a later stage. On the contrary P4 and P8 argue that the law should not be the primary driver of business practices. They believe that SH prevention is inherently important, making the law less relevant. P4: “Yes, I think this is equally important for us regardless of how or what the law says. It's not acceptable regardless, right? So, it's a topic we focus on and will continue to focus on in the industry we're in.”

Taking a proactive stance and critically assessing the degree of tolerance towards CSH within businesses is very important. Urgent attention must be directed towards treating preventive measures with due diligence, as the consequences of inadequate prevention strategies for CSH in the workplace are significant. CSH represents a profound challenge within the work environment, demanding heightened vigilance and concerted action from organizational leaders. Determining the boundaries of CSH continues to be a work in progress, requiring input from a wider range of voices. Organizations must understand that handling customer misbehavior should not be seen as an inherent part of the job, nor should such behavior be accepted or incentivized.

### **Strengths and Limitations**

Our master's thesis on leaders' preventative efforts against CSH exhibits several notable strengths. We dedicated considerable time to reflection and scrutiny, displaying originality and dedication to addressing research gaps. Furthermore, the research question is highly relevant in today's society. We critically examined the data with a focus on the analytical process being theoretical embedded (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 9). Also, our own previous experiences have helped shape this master thesis, enabling a deeper understanding of the subject at hand. According to Braun and Clarke, using your own subjective interpretation

is vital while conducting reflexive research (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 303). “Reflexive research is, broadly speaking, research in which the researcher acknowledges and reflects on this role.”(Braun & Clarke, 2013, 303). Relevant research positioning may affect shaping the research in three ways, firstly, having access to the field, respondents may feel more secure in sharing information with whom they perceive as sympathetic to their situation (Berger, 2013). Secondly, the nature of the researcher-researched relationship may be affected, leading to the participants being willing to share valuable information. Lastly, worldview and background affect how the researchers interpret the world around them, and may therefore shape their findings (Berger, 2013). Meaning disclosing our personal positioning will be of importance, Soland has worked as a server for over 6 years in the hotel industry, which has shaped the understanding of CSH, and the philosophical sensibilities of the service industry. Kaland has a background working in an HR department in the service industry.

While there are various sectors within the service industry involving close customer interaction, narrowing the scope to the hotel industry allows for a more focused analysis and scrutinization. Moreover, customer relations in hotels may differ considerably from those in other settings, such as restaurants or other service establishments.

How can we produce trustworthy research? Lincoln and Guba (1985), introduced original and widely accepted flexible markers of quality in qualitative research: credibility, transferability, confirmability, and dependability (Nowell et al., 2017). Assessing what constitutes good practice, one of the requirements of doing a good paper is knowing the practice of TA, going beyond the surface, and finding out that TA in qualitative research is more like a family of methods than one sturdy method. Braun and Clarke state that one core assumption of RTA is knowing that the researcher is a person who strives towards “owning” their perspectives, and being deliberate in their decision-making, which is based on reflections by Elliot et al. (1999) (Braun & Clarke, 2022). One notable suggestion is to write the findings

and discussion together (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 308), also writing the discussion/analysis in first person to encourage self-reflexivity. However, this diverges from the “classic” traditional conventions of report writing (Byrne, 2022). Henceforth, it was important to prioritize traditional report conventions for this master thesis.

It became increasingly clear that reflexive thematic analysis was the most suitable approach for this study. This method allows us to be flexible in selecting the theoretical framework. Additionally, it places emphasis on the researchers' own ability for critical thinking and interpretation. CSH in the workplace has long-standing traditions for justifying why the customer is always right. Since both of us have experience in the industry, it was important to challenge previous assumptions about how the employee-customer relationship should be, thereby dismantling the skewed power balance.

Another important aspect in developing this thesis was keeping records of reflections and being conscious of them. A journal was used throughout the process to reflect on research methods, design, questions, ideas, thoughts, and opinions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985 as cited in Nowell et al., 2017). Along the way, challenges emerged and brought forth complex questions. The reflective journal has become a record of the entire journey through this master thesis. It has been a crucial tool to ensure that we were conscious of being self-critical throughout the process.

The notion of validity can inform whether a measure reflects “reality”, this could be contradictory to qualitative research (Braun and Clarke, 2013, p.280). On the other hand, it can be important to consider “ecological validity” which entails staying close to real-life situations when collecting the data. It is worth mentioning that the interviews conducted in this thesis is not a replication of how the participants act in everyday life (Braun and Clarke, 2013, p.280).

Since this is our first experience with this type of research, it can be challenging to determine what qualifies as sufficiently rich data. Braun and Clarke (2019) have a perspective that diverges from the norm, asserting that "meaning is not inherent or self-evident," but rather that "meaning requires interpretation." (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Due to time constraints and the need to limit the scope of data, we found it useful to consider the saturation point. The point of saturation was not reached as this proved to be more difficult than expected. Organizing each interview required more time than anticipated. It got even more difficult as some people answered that they were happy to participate, but they did not answer when we tried to organize the interview. If it had been a fact from the start that they would stop answering, then there would have been a greater focus on getting more respondents from the start. Several emails were sent to try to contact those who stopped responding. Some of them then replied that they had forgotten to answer and apologized, but then they stopped answering again. Therefore, a lot of time was wasted since these candidates did not end up participating in the research. At the same time, the data collected from the interview provided sufficient detailed data. Nonetheless, several intriguing aspects were deliberately left unexplored. When receiving recommendations on future participants, it was commonly insinuated that the person they referred us to was passionate about the topic of SH. We cannot know if this may have led us astray and kept us from reaching beyond 'the usual suspects' (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p.55). Meaning the participants who predominate samples of western psychology studies such as; white, middle class, heterosexual and able bodied (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p.328). There is also a need for intersectional perspectives in the Nordic research field of SH in the workplace (Svensson, 2020, p.18). The research resources and the time scope shaped the sample for this master thesis.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, addressing CSH in the hotel industry has proved to be a multifaceted and complex challenge. Firstly, the difficulty in defining CSH stems from generally accepted service norms identified in the industry. This ambiguity contributes to a workplace environment where CSH is seen as something 'normal' and may go unnoticed and unaddressed. Varying standards for prevention may be influenced by personal experiences, perceptions of threat in the workplace, and the perceived value of customer interactions versus employee well-being. Despite being illegal according to Norwegian law, CSH is often trivialized or overshadowed by concerns about employee-to-employee harassment. While individuals can take steps to mitigate risks, lasting change requires systemic reforms and collective action. Just as it is not up to individuals to determine what CSH is, the responsibility for transforming workplace dynamics rests on higher-level systemic changes. The majority of those we interviewed do not recognize CSH as a current challenge in the workplace, with a sentiment of "it's not that bad" and "others have it worse." This complicates our ability to answer the research questions this study poses. Initially, our primary aim was to determine what it entails to work preventively against sexual harassment in Norwegian hotels. This leads us to wonder how one can work to prevent sexual harassment if it is not identified as a problem? It turns out that it is not so clear how to systematically work to prevent CSH, which makes it even more unclear to assess the extent of the problem. Also based on the findings it is apparent that the participants workplaces have different standards for preventing SH in general. However, these implications cannot tell something about the service industry at large, as the results are not generalizable. They do, however, offer an in-depth exploration of the complexities surrounding the problem, suggesting that other leaders may encounter similar challenges within the social framework that constructs this issue.



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## Appendix

### Appendix A. The Interview Guide

#### Intervjuguide

Deler av denne intervjuguiden er bygget på fra Båten og Øistad (2017) sin undersøkelse blant fellesforbundets medlemmer i hotell og restaurant og Fagforbundets medlemmer i helse og omsorg.

1. Kort om virksomheten:
  - Hvor mange ansatte har dere?
  - Hvor mange er du leder for i din bedrift?
  - Hvilke yrkesgrupper har dere?
  - Hvor mange ansatte jobber i en heltidsstilling, deltids-, eller tilkallingsvakt?
  - Omfatter dette også arbeid på natt etter 21.00?
2. Vi er interessert i ulike former for seksuell trakassering; det kan være fysisk trakassering slik som uønsket berøring, klemming og kyssing. Det kan være verbal trakassering slik som kommentarer om kropp, klær og utseende. Og det kan være ikke-verbal trakassering slik som plystring, kroppsbevegelser samt ryktespredning og digital mobbing. I jobbsammenheng kan ansatte oppleve seksuell trakassering i møte med kunder.
  - a. Hva anses som seksuell trakassering i din bedrift?
  - b. Hva er dine overordnede vurderinger av omfanget av seksuell trakassering av ansatte i virksomheten?
  - c. Skiller dere mellom trakassering fra ansatte og kunder ?
3. Har du som leder gjennomgått opplæring for å håndtere seksuell trakassering?
4. Hvordan er arbeidet organisert i deres virksomhet for å forbedre arbeidsmiljøet?
  - a. Hvilke roller er representert?

#### Kunder som trakasserer ansatte

5. Har dere gjennomført en kartlegging hvor seksuell trakassering har vært tema (for eksempel som del av en arbeidsmiljøkartlegging eller risikovurdering) i virksomheten?
  - a. Hvordan ble kartleggingen gjennomført?
  - b. Hva var innholdet i kartleggingen?
  - c. Etterfulgte det tiltak som et resultat av kartleggingen?
6. Har dere en handlingsplan med konkrete mål om å forhindre uønsket seksuell oppmerksomhet/trakassering mot ansatte?
  - a. Hva er innholdet i den?

- b. Hvem har utarbeidet den?
  - c. Når blir handlingsplanen tatt i bruk? (trakassering fra ansatte mot kunder/ eller fra ansatte)
- 7. Har dere retningslinjer/varslingsrutiner for hva som skal gjøres dersom ansatte utsettes for uønsket seksuell oppmerksomhet/trakassering fra kunder?
  - a. Hvis ja; hva er innholdet i disse?
- 8. Kjenner du til (konkrete) tilfeller i virksomheten hvor ansatte har blitt utsatt for seksuell trakassering fra kunder?
  - a. Hvis ja; kan du kort beskrive hva slags hendelser det var snakk om?
- 9. Hvordan ble sakene fulgt opp?
- 10. Er uønsket seksuell oppmerksomhet i jobbsammenheng et tema dere diskuterer på arbeidsplassen?
- 11. Hvilke konkrete tiltak mener du kan implementeres for å beskytte ansatte mot seksuell trakassering fra kunder.
  - a. Hva mener du som leder er viktig for at ansatte skal være bedre rustet i møte med kunder som trakasserer seksuelt.
- 12. Kjenner dere til lovendringen i arbeidsmiljøloven angående seksuell trakassering og har dette noen konsekvenser for hvordan dere forholder dere til temaet?
- 13. Hva er din overordnede vurdering av bedriftens strategiske arbeid mot seksuell trakassering?
  - a. Er det noe dere er flinke på?
  - b. Er det noe dere ønsker å forbedre
- 14. Noe du ønsker å legge til når det gjelder seksuell trakassering på arbeidsplassen?

**Referanse**

Bråten, M., & Øistad, B. S. (2017). Seksuell trakassering i arbeidslivet. *Undersøkelse blant fellesforbundets medlemmer i hotell og restaurant og Fagforbundets medlemmer i helse og omsorg. Rapport, 9.*

**Appendix B. The Information Letter/ Consent Form**

# Vil du delta i forskningsprosjektet

## Forebygging av Seksuell Trakassering på Hoteller i Norge

**Formålet med prosjektet**

Vil du delta i et forskningsprosjekt om hvordan ledere innen hotellbransjen arbeider med forebygging seksuell trakassering fra kunder rettet mot ansatte? Endringer av arbeidsmiljølovens §4-3-3 med virkingen fra 2024 skjerper krav til bedre beskyttelse av arbeidstakere mot seksuell trakassering. Vi ønsker i den forbindelse å få bedre innsikt i hvordan hotellbransjen jobber med og forbereder seg til å håndtere disse skjerpede kravene, og da særlig i forhold til seksuell trakassering fra kunder/gjester. Kunnskap fra dette prosjektet vil gi viktig informasjon om eventuelle opplæringsbehov.

Forskningsprosjektet inngår som en del av vår avsluttende masteroppgave ved Norsk Hotellhøgskolen ved UiS. All informasjon innhentet vil primært bli brukt i masteroppgaven. Anonymiserte resultater kan også presenteres ved konferanser, i fagblad og vitenskapelige tidsskrift.

**Hvorfor får du spørsmål om å delta?**

Du får denne forespørselen fordi du som leder i hotellbransjen er i målgruppen for de vi ønsker å innhente informasjon fra. Deltakerne vil bli rekruttert ved hjelp av den såkalte «snøballmetoden», ved at vi kontakter noen kandidater som videre kan referere oss til andre kandidater. Denne henvendelsen vil bli sendt til totalt 20 potensielle deltakere i håp om å ende opp med 10 til 15 intervju kandidater.

**Hvem er ansvarlig for forskningsprosjektet?**

Universitetet i Stavanger er ansvarlig for personopplysningene som behandles i prosjektet ved veileder professor Gro Ellen Mathisen.

**Det er frivillig å delta**

Det er frivillig å delta i prosjektet. Det vil ikke ha noen negative konsekvenser for deg hvis du ikke vil delta eller senere velger å trekke deg.

**Hva innebærer det for deg å delta?**

Hvis du velger å delta på dette prosjektet vil du bli invitert til et intervju. Innholdet i intervjuet vil handle om virksomhetens forebyggende arbeid som kartlegging, handlingsplan, retningslinjer/varsling, tanker om lovendringene, samt konkrete tilfeller. Intervjuet vil vare i cirka 30 minutter. Opplysningene innhentet fra intervjuet vil bli registrert med lydopptak og transkriberes, deretter lagres på to ulike digitale enheter. Det vil ikke bli spurt om navn eller andre identifiserbare personopplysninger.

**Personvern**

Vi vil bare bruke opplysningene om deg til formålene vi har fortalt om i dette skrivet. Vi behandler personopplysningene konfidensielt og i samsvar med personvernregelverket. Det er

kun oss to masterstudenter Stine Soland og Stine Kaland og veileder professor Gro Ellen Mathisen som har tilgang til data. Videre for å sørge for deltakers anonymitet vil navn og kontaktopplysningene erstattes med en kode som lagres på egen navneliste adskilt fra øvrige data. Deltaker vil ikke være gjenkjennelig ved publikasjon.

### **Hva gir oss rett til å behandle personopplysninger om deg?**

Vi behandler opplysninger om deg basert på ditt samtykke.

På oppdrag fra Universitetet i Stavanger har personverntjenestene ved Sikt – Kunnskapssektorens tjenesteleverandør, vurdert at behandlingen av personopplysninger i dette prosjektet er i samsvar med personvernregelverket.

### **Dine rettigheter**

Så lenge du kan identifiseres i datamaterialet, har du rett til:

- å be om innsyn i hvilke opplysninger vi behandler om deg, og få utlevert en kopi av opplysningene,
- å få rettet opplysninger om deg som er feil eller misvisende,
- å få slettet personopplysninger om deg,
- å sende klage til Datatilsynet om behandlingen av dine personopplysninger.

Vi vil gi deg en begrunnelse hvis vi mener at du ikke kan identifiseres, eller at rettighetene ikke kan utøves.

### **Hva skjer med personopplysningene dine når forskningsprosjektet avsluttes?**

Prosjektet vil etter planen avsluttes 17.06.2025 Opplysningene fra prosjektet vil da bli slettet.

### **Spørsmål**

Hvis du har spørsmål eller vil utøve dine rettigheter, ta kontakt med:

- Studentene: Stine Kaland [271869@uis.no](mailto:271869@uis.no) , Stine Soland [255475@uis.no](mailto:255475@uis.no)
- Veileder: Gro Ellen Mathisen [gro.e.mathisen@uis.no](mailto:gro.e.mathisen@uis.no)
- Vårt personvernombud: Marianne Gjerlaugsen [marianne.gjerlaugsen@uis.no](mailto:marianne.gjerlaugsen@uis.no)
- Hvis du har spørsmål knyttet til Sikts vurdering av prosjektet, kan du ta kontakt på e-post: [personverntjenester@sikt.no](mailto:personverntjenester@sikt.no), eller på telefon: 73 98 40 40.

Med vennlig hilsen

Gro Ellen Mathisen  
(Veileder)

Stine Soland, Stine Kaland  
(Studenter)

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### **Samtykkeerklæring**

Jeg har mottatt og forstått informasjon om prosjektet «Forebygging av Seksuell Trakassering på Hoteller i Norge», og har fått anledning til å stille spørsmål. Jeg samtykker til:

- å delta i intervju

Jeg samtykker til at mine opplysninger behandles frem til prosjektet er avsluttet.

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Intervjudeltaker med dato