



# HANDS OFF PANTS ON

SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN  
CHICAGO'S HOSPITALITY  
INDUSTRY

*JULY 2016*

A REPORT BY UNITE HERE LOCAL 1



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## Sexual harassment in Chicago's hospitality industry

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A housekeeper in an upscale hotel in downtown Chicago pushes her heavy cart down the hall towards her first room of the day. She is the only housekeeper in that wing of the hotel floor. The hallway is quiet as most of the guests have left for the day. The carpeted hallway muffles the sounds of the last few guests leaving for their business meetings or to tour the city's attractions. She stops the cart near the hotel room door and knocks. "Housekeeping!" she says in a loud, clear voice. No answer. She knocks again. She is about to knock a third time when the door opens. The man is wearing a robe, but the robe is open. He is completely naked underneath.

This scenario is disturbingly common. In a first-of-its-kind survey of women working in the Chicago hospitality industry, **49% of housekeepers reported having had guest(s) answer the door naked, expose themselves, or flash them.**

**“I do not feel safe because of the things that I have encountered. One guest was masturbating. I felt very afraid.”**

*—Hotel housekeeper*

## Introduction

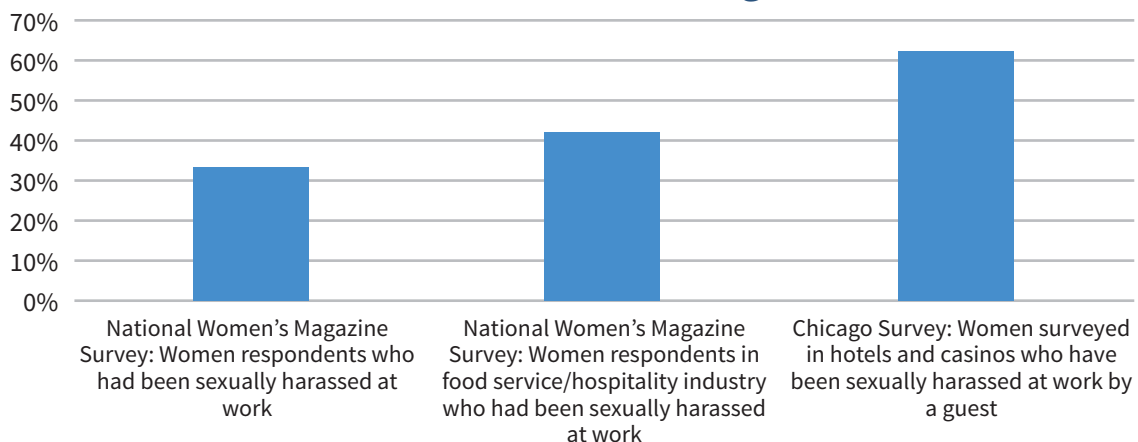
The leisure and hospitality industry employed over 7 million women in the United States in 2015. Women make up the majority of the hospitality workforce,<sup>1</sup> many of whom are women of color. The social and economic status of the male guests who frequent hotels, casinos and convention centers often contrasts sharply with that of the women who work there. This creates a power dynamic ripe for abuse.

Last year, a national women’s magazine surveyed 2,235 full-time and part-time female employees and found that one in three respondents had experienced sexual harassment at work.<sup>2</sup> The survey also found that 42% of women surveyed in the food service and hospitality industry reported sexual harassment, the highest of any field.

## Chicago

In order to better understand the experience of women working in Chicagoland hotels and casinos, UNITE HERE Local 1, Chicago’s hospitality workers union, pioneered a program to survey nearly 500 women. The study reveals that the women who work in Chicagoland hotels and casinos face a high level of sexual harassment, mainly from male guests: **58% of hotel workers and 77% of casino workers surveyed have been sexually harassed by a guest.** The details of the women’s individual stories are shocking but the frequency and widespread nature of indecent guest behavior is equally alarming. This report details the survey findings and outlines proposed changes in local and state laws to address the serious issue of sexual harassment in Chicago’s hospitality industry.

### Women in Chicago’s hospitality industry face high levels of sexual harassment, compared to survey results from national women’s magazine.



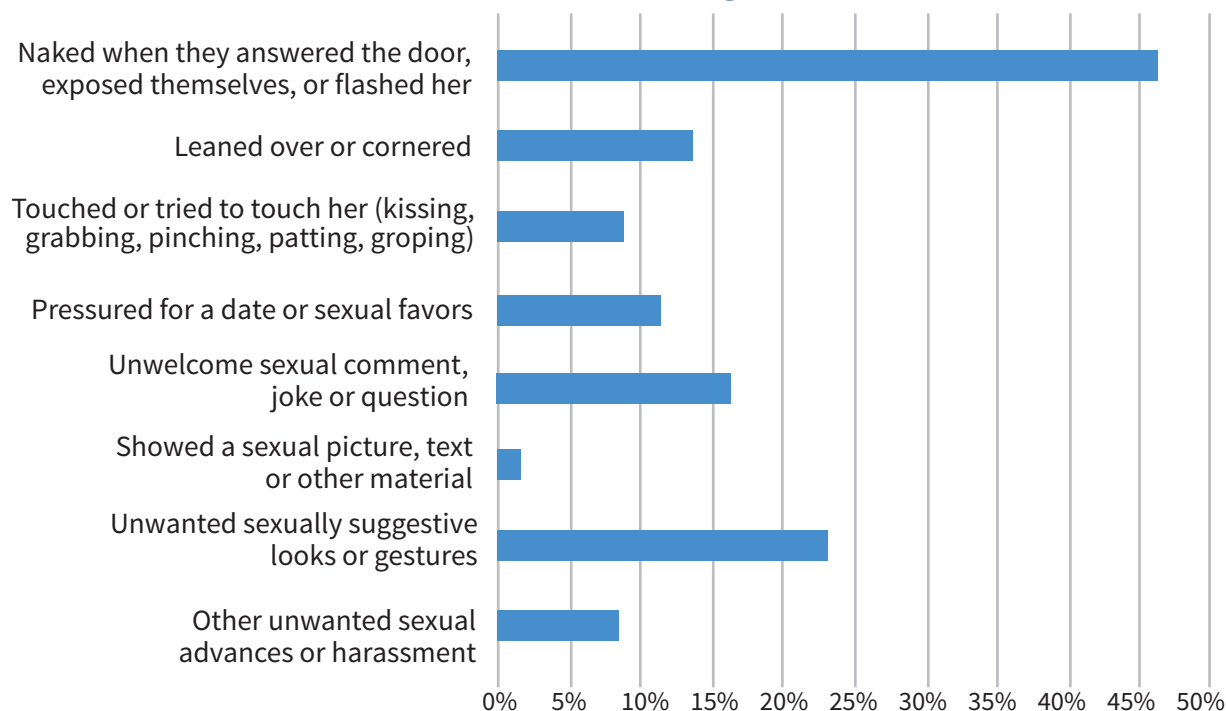
**“He was completely naked, standing between the bed and the desk. He asked me for shampoo. I had to jump over the beds in order to get to the door and leave the room.”** —Hotel housekeeper

## Chicago housekeepers report: No pants. No respect. Big problem.

The survey asked women about a variety of guest behaviors, all of which constitute sexual harassment. **58% of hotel workers surveyed experienced at least one of the following guest behaviors:**

- Guest was naked when they answered the door, exposed themselves, or flashed her
- Guest leaned over or cornered her in an unwelcome way
- Guest touched or tried to touch her in an unwelcome way (like kissing, grabbing, pinching, patting, groping for example)
- Guest pressured her for a date or sexual favors
- Guest showed a sexual picture, text or other material that she did not want to see
- Guest made an unwelcome sexual comment, joke or question to or about her
- Guest gave unwanted sexually suggestive looks or gestures
- Guest made other unwanted sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, or verbal or physical harassment of a sexual nature

### Women in Chicago hotels experience a range of indecent behaviors by guests



Based on survey of 381 hotel workers conducted in the Chicagoland area in April 2016



**Almost half of housekeepers surveyed (49%) have had a guest be naked when they answered the door, expose themselves, or flash them.** “I knocked on the guest door. I announced myself and the guest

answered, ‘Come in.’ I opened the door and he was naked. It was horrible,” said a housekeeper.

This statistic does not adequately capture the frightening nature of some of these encounters. A number of housekeepers have witnessed guests masturbating. One guest grabbed a housekeeper’s breasts and cornered her between the beds. Yet another blocked a housekeeper’s exit to the room with his naked body.

An experience of sexual harassment can be traumatic and have a lasting impact on a woman’s sense of security: **Among the hotel workers surveyed who had been harassed by a guest, over half (56%) of women said they did not feel safe returning to work after the incident.**

## **For Chicagoland casino workers, getting grabbed by guests is commonplace.**

Casinos can be a particularly toxic environment for the women working there. **77% of casino workers surveyed had been sexually harassed by a guest.**

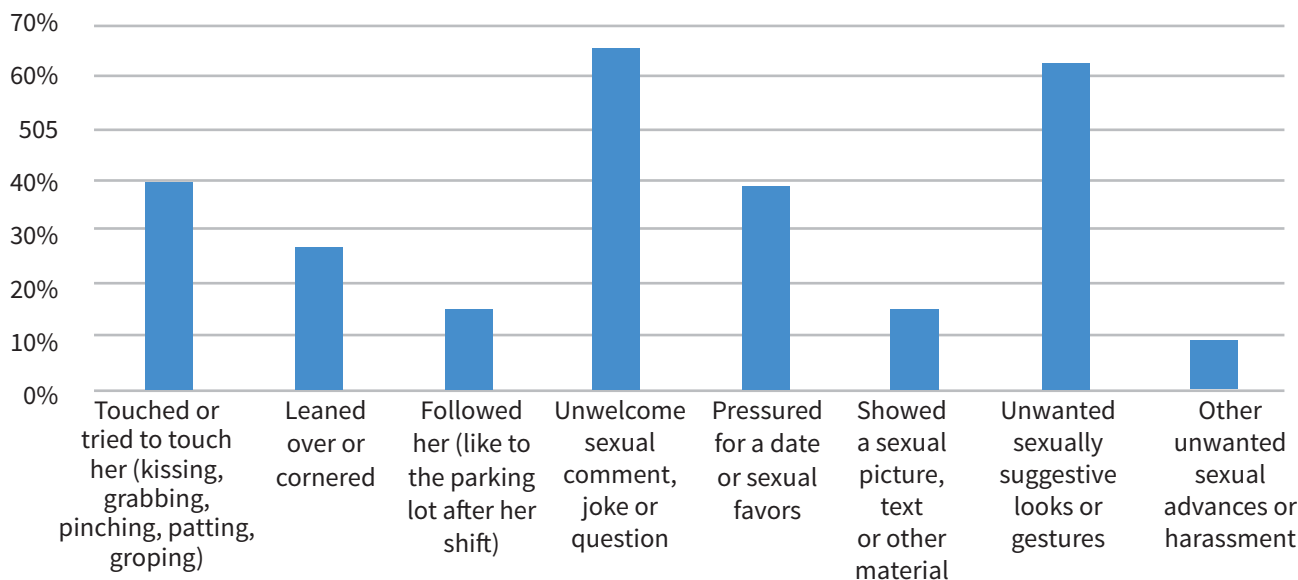
Casino cocktail servers are much more likely to have a guest touch or grab them while they work. **65% of casino cocktail servers surveyed have had a guest touch them or try to touch them in an unwelcome way.** They are particularly vulnerable as they are required to walk the casino floor amongst the guests, often hidden between rows of slot machines, as they take orders and deliver drinks. Women described

being grabbed or patted as they walk by. One woman said a guest tried to put a chip between her breasts.

Among hospitality workers surveyed, women who work as casino waitresses, cocktail servers, bartenders, and hostesses were most likely to have experienced verbal sexual harassment from guests. **78% of women surveyed who serve guests in food and beverage outlets at casinos have had a guest make an unwelcome sexual comment, joke or question to or about them.** One cocktail server who had only been at the casino for a few months described the following

**“A guest wrapped his arm around my waist and across my buttocks and said, ‘You know I would be cheating on my wife for you, but I think you will be worth it.’”**  
*—Casino cocktail server*

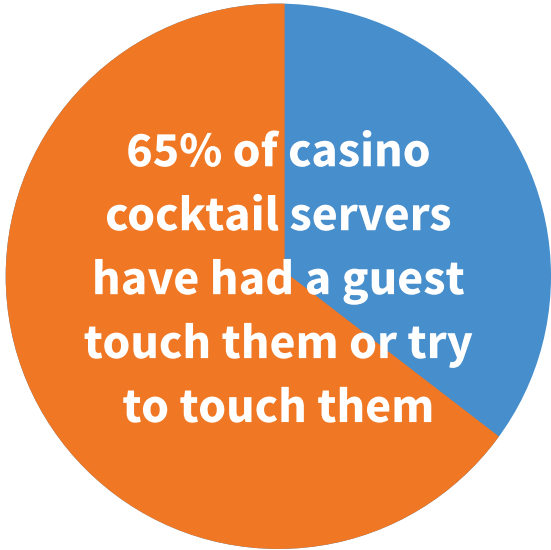
### Women working in Chicagoland casinos have been grabbed, followed and cornered by guests



*Based on survey of 78 casino workers conducted in Chicagoland in April 2016*

experience: “He kept asking for my number. I kept telling him I had a boyfriend and he didn’t care. He kept following me from floor to floor.”

For some women, this happens more frequently: **38% of casino cocktail servers surveyed said they have been verbally harassed by guests 10 times or more.** One bartender recalled a number of a guest comments- a guest asked if her hair, which was red at the time, was “the same as the hair down there.” Another guest asked her, “If I give you a tip, what will you do for me?”



**“I told my supervisor two days later because I was embarrassed and afraid they were going to tell me it was my fault.”** —*Hotel housekeeper*

## When hospitality workers are sexually harassed by guests, it often goes unreported.

A significant number of women who experience sexual harassment do not come forward to report it. Of the hospitality workers surveyed, **only 33% said they told their supervisor or manager when a guest sexually harassed them.** The most common reasons given for not reporting related to a belief that little can be done to address indecent guest behavior.

Of the hotel workers surveyed who said they never or sometimes report a guest’s harassment, **43% said they knew someone who reported sexual harassment and nothing changed.**

Of the casino workers surveyed who said they never or sometimes report a guest’s harassment, **24% said they thought there is nothing they or anyone can do about it.**

A casino cocktail server described this situation:

“A guest placed a tip on the counter then stated he wanted to ‘put the tip on my ass.’ I refused and he took the tip back. I was going to tell management but I didn’t because if he was going to be able to come back, what would stop him from aggressive acts in the future? He looked like he didn’t care about life.”

One hotel worker who was harassed said, “I told my supervisor two days later because I was embarrassed and afraid they were going to tell me it was my fault.”

Some women explained that they chose not to report some sexual harassment because inappropriate guest behavior is so frequent and widespread, it “feels normal” or they had become “immune” to it. The sense among some women that this behavior is commonplace does not mean that they are unaffected by it: **51% of hospitality workers surveyed reported feeling uncomfortable because of something a guest did or said.**

A reticence to come forward may be related to scarcity of training on the subject. **Just 19% of hospitality workers surveyed said they had received training from their employer on how to deal with sexual harassment by guests.**

For hospitality workers who did report sexual harassment by a guest to their manager or supervisor, **only 38% of women surveyed said they always felt satisfied with their response.**



## Proposed changes in local and state laws

The following proposed changes in law should be adopted at both the state and local level: A state law to protect casino workers and a city ordinance to protect hotel workers.

### HANDS OFF

**Employers shall be required to ban guests who have sexually harassed an employee.** The existence of real consequences for inappropriate guests may change some women's belief that "there is nothing I or anyone can do" about sexual harassment from guests. This may help empower more women to come forward to report incidences of harassment. **90% of hospitality workers surveyed said they would feel more comfortable reporting a guest's sexual harassment if their employer was required to ban guests who sexually harass employees.**

### PANTS ON

**Employers shall be required to provide panic buttons** to any employee who works alone in rooms without other employees present (like guest rooms or bathrooms). For example, a housekeeper who is being harassed by a guest inside the room could use the panic button to immediately summon security personnel.

**96% of housekeepers surveyed said they would feel safer if they were equipped with a panic button.** Even women who had not been harassed by a guest said they would feel safer with a panic button. Many had heard stories of co-workers being harassed and were very aware of the risk that their job poses.

## About the Survey

UNITE HERE Local 1 embarked on this survey project after a young waitress experienced grotesque sexual harassment by a male guest at Neil Bluhm's Rivers Casino ("Rivers"). As a response to the incident at Rivers, the union began the #ComeForward campaign to challenge the culture that silences women exposed to sexual harassment, to encourage women to tell their own stories, and shed light on the inherent risks for women working in the hospitality industry.

While national statistics indicate that the hospitality industry has the highest incidence of sexual harassment, UNITE HERE Local 1 sought to understand the experience of its women members. A survey tool was developed to gain a broader understanding of the extent to which women in Chicago's hospitality industry experience sexual harassment from guests. The union also wanted to learn from women themselves what might make them feel safer on the job.

The union surveyed 487 women at thirteen Chicagoland hotels, three casinos and one convention center. At the time of the survey, all the women were hospitality employees, working as housekeepers, bartenders, waitresses, cocktail servers, among other job classifications. The surveys were conducted by a team of five UNITE HERE Local 1 women leaders, all of whom work in Chicago hotels and casinos.

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## Endnotes

- 1 Bureau of Labor Statistics, Household Data Annual Averages, “Employed persons by detailed industry, sex, race, and Hispanic or Latino ethnicity,” 10 Feb 2016. <http://www.bls.gov/cps/cpsaat18.htm>
- 2 Vagianos, Alanna. “1 In 3 Women Has Been Sexually Harassed At Work, According To Survey.” The Huffington Post. TheHuffingtonPost.com, 19 Feb. 2015. Web. 26 May 2016. [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/02/19/1-in-3-women-sexually-harassed-work-cosmopolitan\\_n\\_6713814.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/02/19/1-in-3-women-sexually-harassed-work-cosmopolitan_n_6713814.html)



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