

**Sexual Harassment Awareness
Among Local and Foreign Workers
in Malaysia
Baseline Study**

SAHABAT WANITA

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Chapter 1: Background and Context

The purpose of this baseline study was to achieve a number of objectives, namely

Objective 1: Provide an information base to assess the current levels of awareness among local and foreign women workers in Malaysia on,

- sexual harassment as defined by the Malaysian Employment Act 1955 (“EA 1955”)
- the importance of reporting incidents
- laws that protect women
- avenues for help

Objective 2: Provide an information base to assess effectiveness of the sexual harassment awareness workshop in its current format.

Chapter 2: Methodology

2.1 Using a survey

A survey was selected as the most appropriate method of data gathering and processing. The benefits being:

- An electronic survey using Google Forms allowed for easy distribution via print and digital administration, with the added advantage of immediate data processing and chart generation
- Cost effectiveness
- Helped prevent geographical dependence, needing to ensure participants were in a particular time or place for interviews
- Allowed for visual descriptors to explain certain queries
- Allowed for quick amendments for updates where necessary
- Allowed for data collection from a large number of respondents

2.2 Survey location

Surveys were distributed at the Sahabat Wanita office, Association of Nationalist Overseas Filipino Workers In Malaysia (AMMPO) headquarters and through online distribution

2.3 Sampling Strategy

We used **convenience sampling** as this form of sampling is recommended for exploratory research¹ to garner information that provides an approximation of the truth through economical means. As the name implies, the sample is selected as it is convenient. It aims to get a gross estimate of the results, without incurring the cost or time required to select a random sample.

2.4 Sample Size

Sample size refers to the number of participants or observations included in a study. There was a total of **100 respondents, 10 respondents from the Philippines, 31 respondents from Cambodia, 13 respondents from Indonesia, and 46 respondents from Malaysia. See Chart 1 below.**

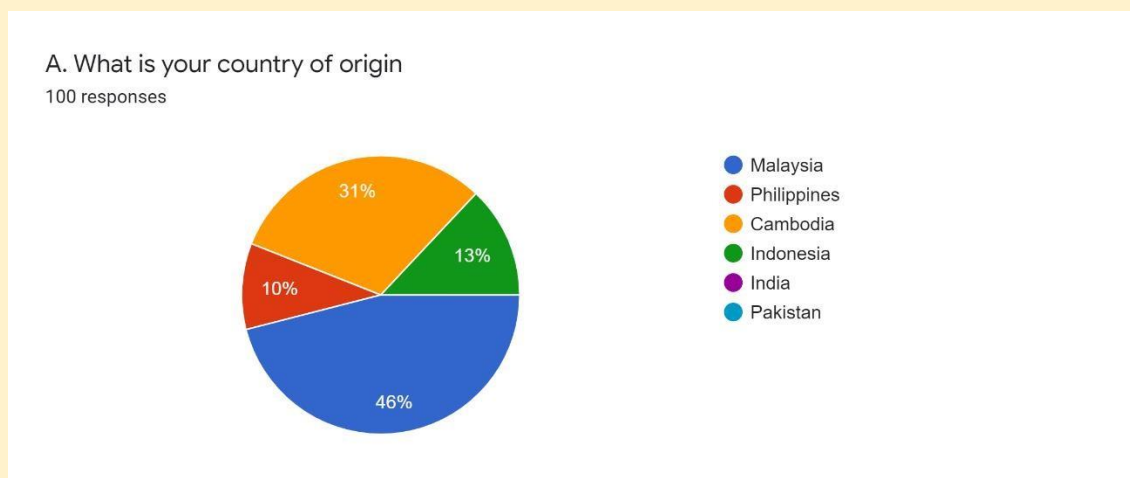


Chart 1: Breakdown of Survey Respondents

Chapter 3: Key Findings

1. **Of the 100 respondents, 60.0% or 60 respondents had indicated experiencing at least one form of sexual harassment** defined in the survey. **This is more than one in every two women surveyed.**
2. In the breakdown of respondents queried on the type or form of sexual harassment experienced, the majority, or 50.0% had been verbally harassed (50 of the 100 respondents). While 27.0% (27 of the 100 respondents) had experienced gestural harassment and 26.0% (26 of the 100 respondents) experienced visual harassment. **See Charts 2, 3 and 4 on pages 5 and 6.**

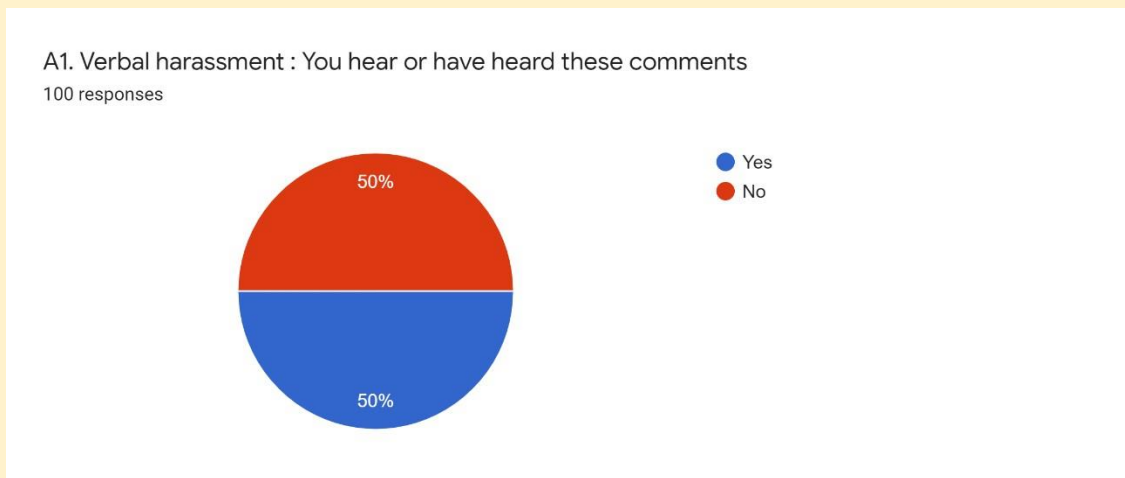


Chart 2: Breakdown of workers who had experienced verbal harassment

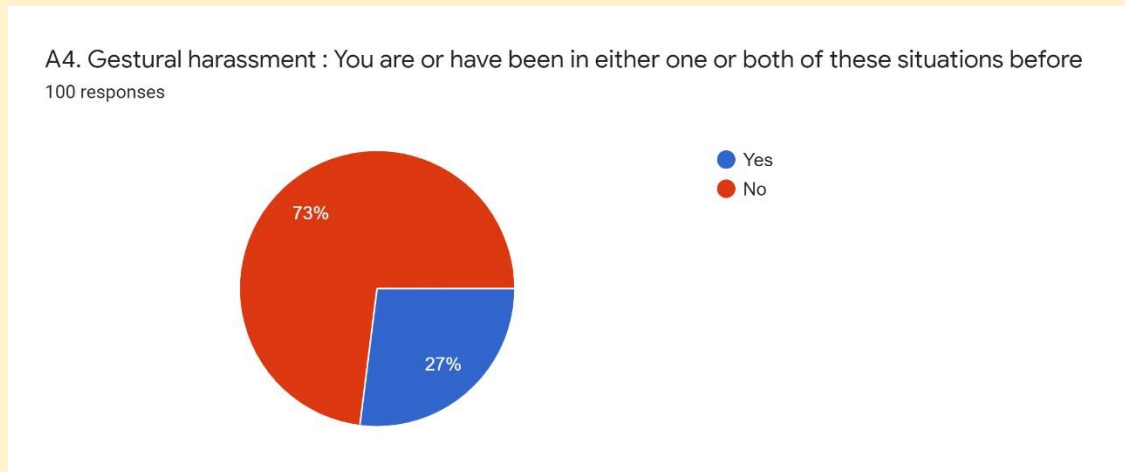


Chart 3: Breakdown of workers who had experienced gestural harassment

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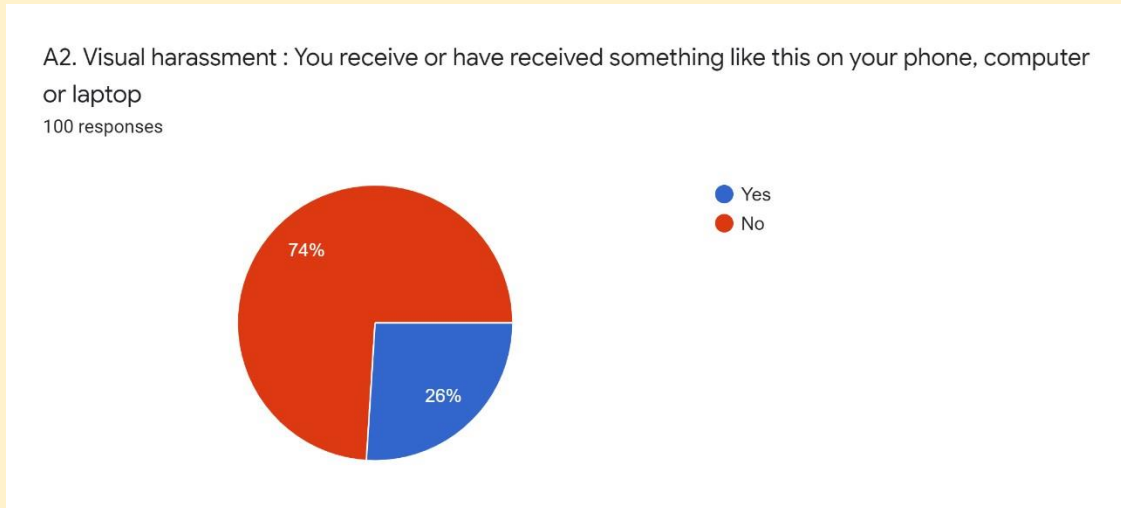


Chart 4: Breakdown of workers who had experienced visual harassment

3. **Also notable, one in almost every five women had experienced physical harassment.** Of the 100 respondents, 19 had experienced physical harassment or 19.0%. [See Chart 5 below.](#)

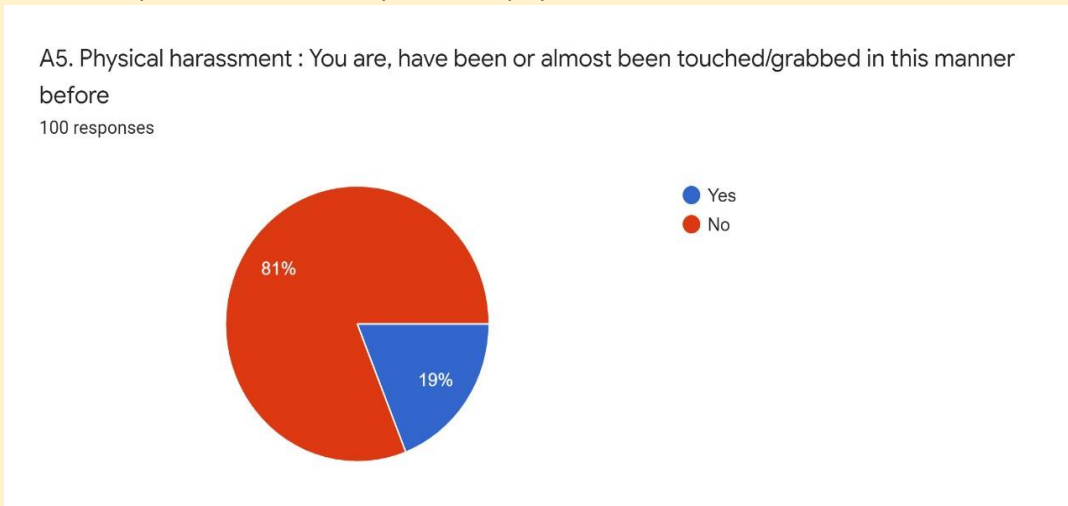


Chart 5: Breakdown of workers who had experienced physical harassment

These findings outline a need for,

- education among workers in general, of boundaries to be established in verbal and non-verbal communication with their co-workers.
 - policies or education around digital distribution of offensive material.
 - the necessity of educating women on their right to protect themselves in the workplace as well as how and where to get help.
4. Defining each form of harassment helped respondents recognise and understand when they were being sexually harassed. Studies indicate that when acts of harassment are specifically defined, more women report incidents.²
5. **Notably, in terms of reporting incidents, nearly half, 41.0% or 41 respondents, said they would be reluctant to report the incident.** [See Chart 6 below.](#)

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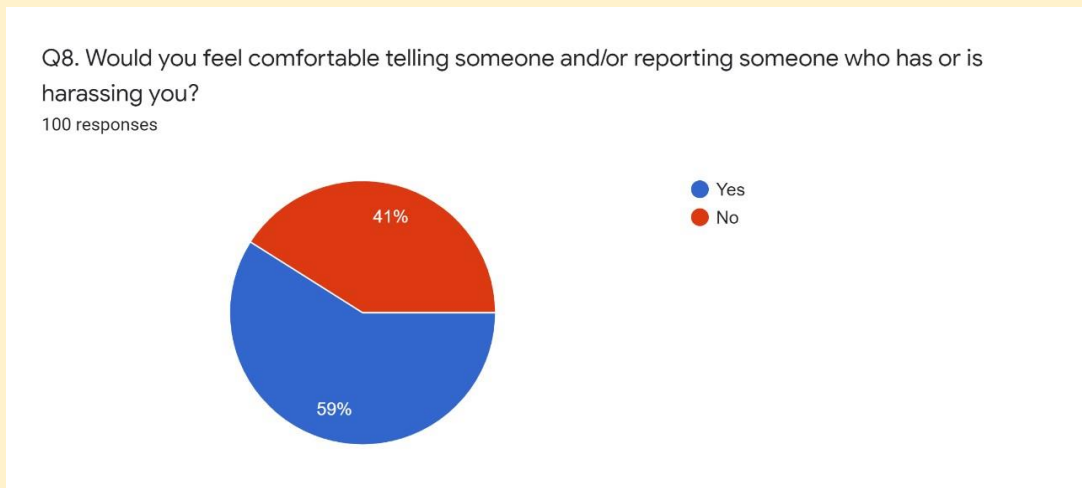


Chart 6: Breakdown of workers who would be comfortable reporting incidents of sexual harassment

This implies a need to address the various factors that contribute to this reluctance in reporting incidents.

- In drilling down to the factors contributing to the reluctance of reporting, the primary reasons listed were,
 - fear of being attacked again (35.0% or 35 respondents)
 - fear of family, friends and colleagues finding out and being embarrassed (22.0% or 22 respondents)
 - fear that the person receiving the report would not believe them (18.0% or 18 respondents)
 - fear of being accused of causing the incident (9.0% or 9 respondents)
- Despite a reluctance to report the incidents, the majority of workers (90.0% or 90 respondents) believed in the necessity and importance of reporting. This once again, implied both need and evidence to support education on how and where to get help should incidents occur, as well as addressing fears in reporting. See Chart 7 below.**

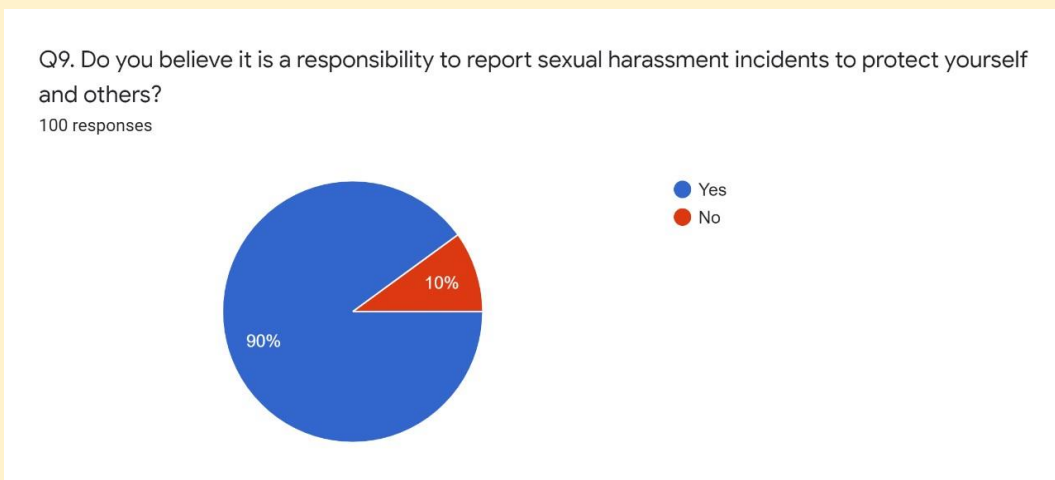


Chart 7: Breakdown of workers who believed they had a responsibility to report sexual harassment incidents

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8. In examining factors that motivated reporting, the primary reasons listed were,
- to avoid getting harmed again (44.0% or 44 respondents)
 - to ensure we create a safer society for the community (33.0% or 33 respondents)
 - to ensure others at my workplace don't experience the same harm (17.0% or 17 respondents)
 - to ensure the person harassing is brought to justice (9.0% or 9 respondents)
 - more than one of the above (13.0% or 13 respondents)
9. **However, one in nearly four workers (23.0% or 23 respondents) were not aware of their legal rights in terms of protection against sexual harassment, and 41% or 41 respondents were unaware of agencies that could offer advice and help.** Yet again, this implies a need to educate workers on their legal rights to protect themselves against sexual harassment, as well as how and where to get help should incidents occur. [See Charts 8 and 9 below.](#)

Q14. Are you aware that you have the right to report and take action if you are harassed as you are protected by various laws in Malaysia?

100 responses

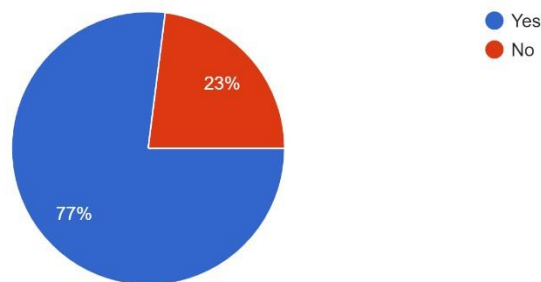


Chart 8: Breakdown of workers who are aware of their right to report and take action if they have experienced sexual harassment

Q15. Have you heard of either one or more of these organisations? All Women's Action Society (AWAM), Women's Aid Organisation, Talian Kasih...ry of Women, Family and Community Development.

100 responses

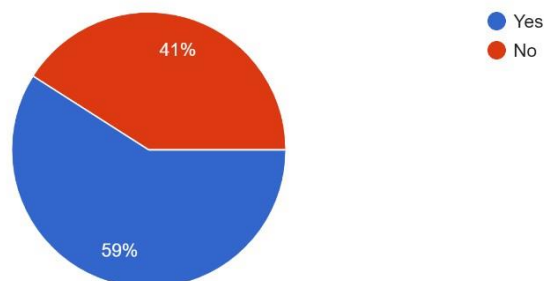


Chart 9: Breakdown of workers who are aware of agencies that offer help in cases of sexual harassment

Chapter 4: Conclusion

In terms of meeting Objective 1: Provide an information base to assess the current levels of awareness among local and foreign women workers in Malaysia on the definition of sexual harassment according to the Malaysian Employment Act 1955 (“EA 1955”), the importance of reporting incidents, laws that protect them and avenues for help.

- 1. The questions and responses provide sufficient basis to assess levels of awareness on the definition of sexual harassment among workers.**

This is clear from the volume of responses to queries on each form of sexual harassment.

Findings

- a. Of the 100 respondents, 60% or 60 respondents had indicated experiencing at least one form of sexual harassment defined in the survey. This is more than one in every two women surveyed.**
 - b. In the breakdown of respondents queried on the type or form of sexual harassment experienced, the majority, or 50% had been verbally harassed (50 of the 100 respondents). While 27.0% (27 of the 100 respondents) had experienced gestural harassment and 26.0% (26 of the 100 respondents) experienced visual harassment.**
 - c. Of the 100 respondents, 19% or 19 respondents had experienced physical harassment. This is one in almost every five women surveyed.**
- 2. The questions and responses also provide sufficient basis to assess levels of awareness on the importance of reporting incidents, as well as laws that protect women when these incidents occur and avenues for help.**

This is once again clear from the volume of responses to queries on the need to report incidents, as well as laws that protect women and avenues for help.

Furthermore, the survey helped with identifying attitudes around reporting of incidents; factors that motivated reporting and factors contributing to the reluctance in reporting, which can help inform the structure of sexual harassment awareness workshops in areas that require focus.

Findings

- a. The majority of workers surveyed (90.0% or 90 respondents) believed in the necessity and importance of reporting. However, 41% or 41 respondents were unaware of agencies that could offer advice and help.**
- b. Additionally, despite the high percentage or 90.0% of respondents who believed in the importance of reporting, 41.0% or 41 respondents, said they**

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would be reluctant to report the incident. In examining factors contributing to the reluctance in reporting incidents, primary reasons listed were,

- i. fear of being attacked again (35% or 35 respondents)
 - ii. fear of family, friends and colleagues finding out and being embarrassed (22% or 22 respondents)
 - iii. fear that the person receiving the report would not believe them (18% or 18 respondents)
 - iv. fear of being accused of causing the incident (9% or 9 respondents)
- c. In terms of motivators to report an incident, nearly half or 44.0% (44 respondents), cited fear of being attacked. The second leading motivator was ensuring a safer society for the community (33.0% or 33 respondents).
- d. In terms of laws protecting them in cases of sexual harassment, one in nearly four workers (23% or 23 respondents) were not aware of their legal rights.

In terms of meeting Objective 2: Provide an information base to assess the effectiveness of the sexual harassment awareness workshop in its current format.

1. **There were constraints in meeting Objective 2 due to Covid-19 restrictions on travel. Only about two-thirds of participants were able to attend the physical workshop. The workshop also had to be shortened in duration.**
2. **However, the survey questions covering Elements 1, 2 and 3 can be used as indicators to determine effectiveness of the workshop in the Year 2 study.**
 - **Element 1 (A1-A5, Q6, Q7):** These questions will provide data to indicate levels of awareness and understanding of sexual harassment in its various forms.
 - **Element 2 (Q8-Q13):** These questions will provide data to assess levels of awareness on the importance of reporting sexual harassment incidents, attitudes around reporting, factors that would motivate or obstruct reporting.
 - **Element 3 (Q14-Q15):** These questions will provide data to indicate levels of awareness on laws that protect workers from sexual harassment & avenues for help.
3. **Recommendation:** Distributing the survey before and after the workshop is held in the Year 2 study with a few additional queries to enhance context and clarity, and the help of facilitators to improve respondent comprehension, will help determine if there is,
 - i. an increase in the percentage of workers who identified with the different forms of sexual harassment
 - ii. an increase in the percentage of workers who recognised the importance of reporting sexual harassment incidents
 - iii. an increase in the percentage of workers who were willing to report incidents
 - iv. an increase in the percentage of workers who were aware of regulation and laws that protect them and avenues for help

References

1. <https://www.statpac.com/surveys/sampling.htm>
2. <https://www.vox.com/identities/2017/10/15/16438750/weinstein-sexual-harassment-facts>