
Survey of Downtown Seattle Hotel Housekeepers Reveals Frequent Sexual Harassment and Pain

Puget Sound Sage
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Summary

Downtown Seattle hotels can be an unsafe and hazardous workplace for housekeepers, the vast majority of whom are women.¹ A recent survey of housekeepers reveals that they experience frequent sexual harassment from guests and an alarmingly high rate of severe pain and injury from work. Hotels benefit from grueling physical work to keep their facilities clean and from the business of customers who don't have to face the consequences of their actions. Meanwhile, housekeepers pay with pain in, and violation to, their bodies.

Harassment and Assault

In a survey conducted of downtown Seattle hotel housekeepers, 52 respondents (53% percent of the total number of respondents) reported a total of 262 incidents of sexual harassment and assault. Surveyed housekeepers reported incidents of harassment and assault that occur in spaces where they are likely to be alone with a guest.

Surveyed housekeepers also reported that incidents are widespread and not just isolated experiences. Almost half of respondents (47%) said that they have also heard from friends or coworkers about being touched or groped, blocked from leaving the room, exposed to sexual content,

Out of the 99 housekeepers that were willing to answer,
52 reported a total of **262** incidents of sexual harassment by guests

- 8 incidents where housekeepers were **Cornered or blocked from exiting the room**
- 17 incidents where housekeepers were **Groped or otherwise physically harassed**
- 7 incidents where housekeepers were **Shown unwanted sexual content**
- 27 incidents where housekeepers **Received unwanted sexual comment or gesture**
- 12 incidents where housekeepers were **Pressured for a date or sexual favors**
- 175 incidents where housekeepers were **Flashed or exposed to nudity**
- 16 incidents where housekeepers **Received comments about their body, uniform, or appearance**

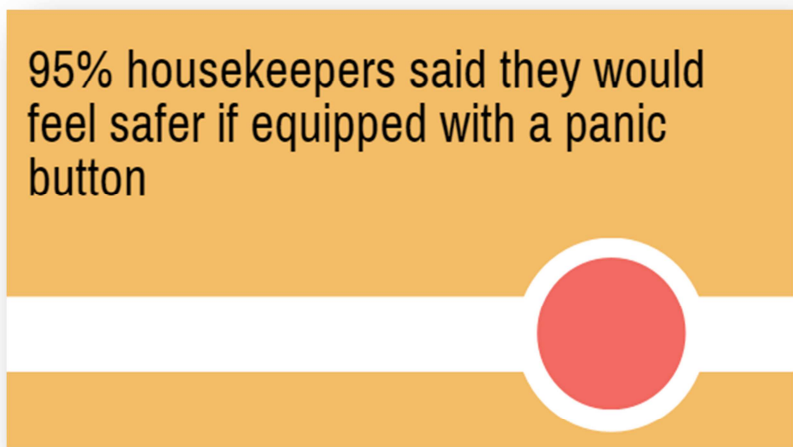


and harassed in other ways by guests.

Despite the obvious risk to housekeepers of working in isolation in guest rooms, hotel managers may not be providing a safe work environment where women feel empowered to report incidents of harassment or assault. According to the survey, most (51%) incidents described by respondents go unreported to their supervisors.



Housekeepers appear to be aware of the risks and the need for better safety measures. Nearly all respondents of the survey (95%) reported that they would feel safer if equipped with a panic button.*



* New York city hotels have provided panic buttons for housekeepers for several years. The devices are modeled after medical alert buttons for the elderly, “allowing housekeeping staff to quickly alert hotel security” and that can “summon help immediately in case of emergency.” Jordan Ossad, “Hotel workers in New York to get panic button,” *CNN* (Feb 9, 2012). Accessed on Sep 26, 2016 at <http://www.cnn.com/2012/02/09/us/new-york-hotel-workers/>.

Many people may not realize that housekeeping is strenuous work that can result in repetitive injury and chronic pain. Data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics shows that the injury rate for housekeeping is actually higher than both coal mining and building construction.² Furthermore, the percentage of housekeepers that experience pain is more than three times the percentage of the general population that experience back pain.³

48% of housekeepers reported that they regularly take pain medicine



54% reported that the pain interferes with eating, walking, cooking, and other routine activities



52% reported that they are still in pain even after taking 2-3 days off to rest



55% reported that they have trouble sleeping because of the pain resulting from work



Based on a survey of 105 housekeepers in Downtown Seattle

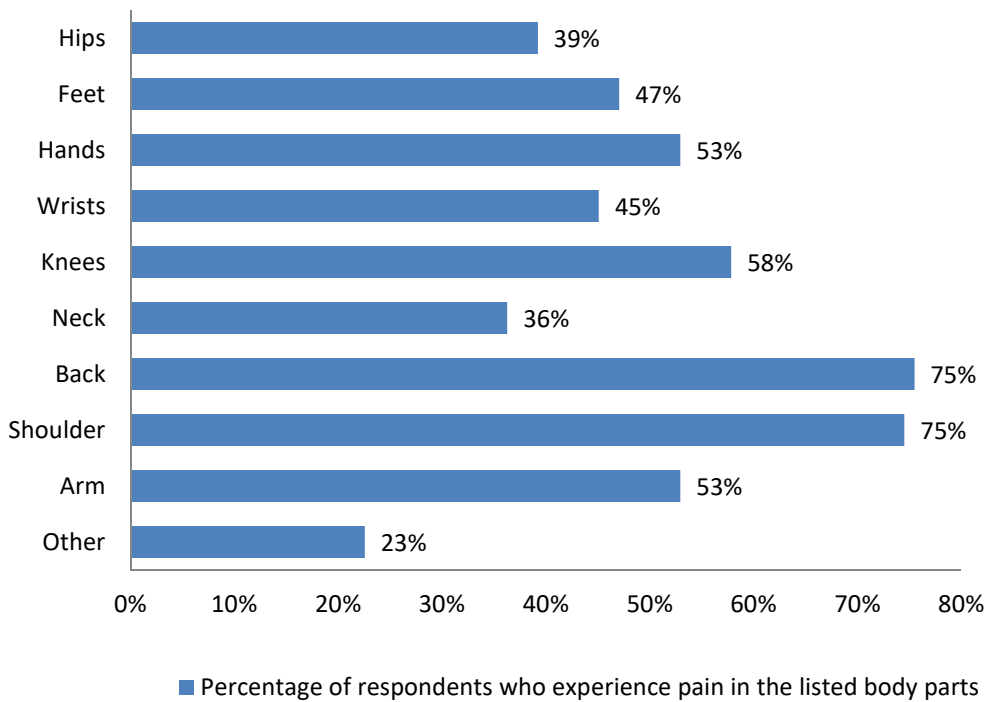
Nearly all (97%) of surveyed downtown housekeepers reported that they suffer from work-related pain. Most of these injuries are severe enough to cause long term hindrance and disruption to the workers' daily lives.



Half of respondents reported a variety of short- and longer-term consequences of housekeeping work. These include taking medicine, residual pain, and interference in everyday routines.

Surveyed housekeepers reported that that they felt pain in many parts of their bodies due to their work, including their shoulders, backs, knees, and hands (Figure 1). In addition, most respondents said that their workload had increased in the past five years. A high percentage of housekeepers (91%) reported that they skip breaks more than once a week.

Figure 1: Housekeepers Report a Wide Variety of Pain in their Bodies



Survey Methods

The survey was created and administered by Unite Here Local 8 members, staff and volunteers in hotel break rooms and at workers' homes, between June and July 2016. Respondents comprised entirely of Unite Here Local 8 members and surveys were conducted through a convenience sample method. The survey instruments were available in three languages – English, Cantonese and Spanish – and were administered by a trained surveyor in language when possible. A total of 105 surveys were collected from housekeepers at seven major hotels in downtown Seattle, with only a few incomplete. Puget Sound Sage researchers performed analysis of the survey results, wrote the findings, and created the graphical presentations in this brief.

¹ Howard Greenwich and David Mendoza, *Our Pain, Their Gain: The Hidden Costs of Profitability in Seattle Hotels*, Puget Sound Sage (April 2012). Accessed at:

<http://www.pugetsoundsage.org/downloads/Our%20Pain%20Their%20Gain%20-%20Final.pdf>.

² Ibid

³ Ibid