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Content note: this talk discusses sexual harassment.

UNIVERSITY OF EASTERN FINLAND

WORK IN PROGRESS

Sexual harassment in extended client relationships

Ski instructors' experiences and leadership-driven prevention

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Research gap: Ski instruction is different

PREVIOUS RESEARCH

Brief or group-based encounters

Harassment studied in hotels, restaurants and guiding

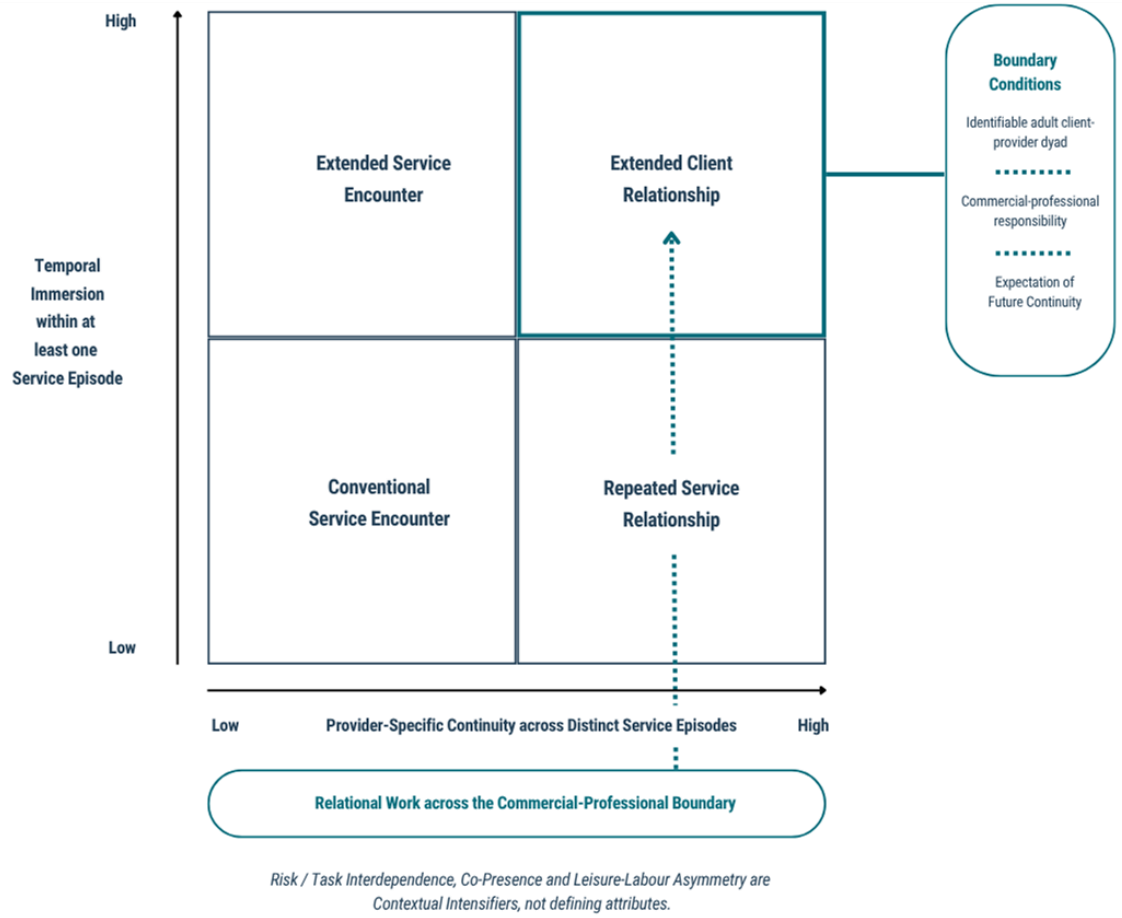
SKI INSTRUCTION

Days, sometimes weeks, with the same clients

- Sustained physical proximity
- Blurred professional–social boundaries
- Limited managerial oversight

Harassment **more likely to occur** and **harder to interrupt**.

The Extended Client Relationship



DEFINITION

A recurring commercial relationship with the same instructor or guide, where at least one episode is immersive.

Immersion: sustained interaction within one episode.

- **Constrained interaction withdrawal** is also a factor – how readily either the instructor / guide or client can obtain temporary interpersonal distance while the encounter continues
    - *Limited by spatial, logistical, safety, or activity constraints*

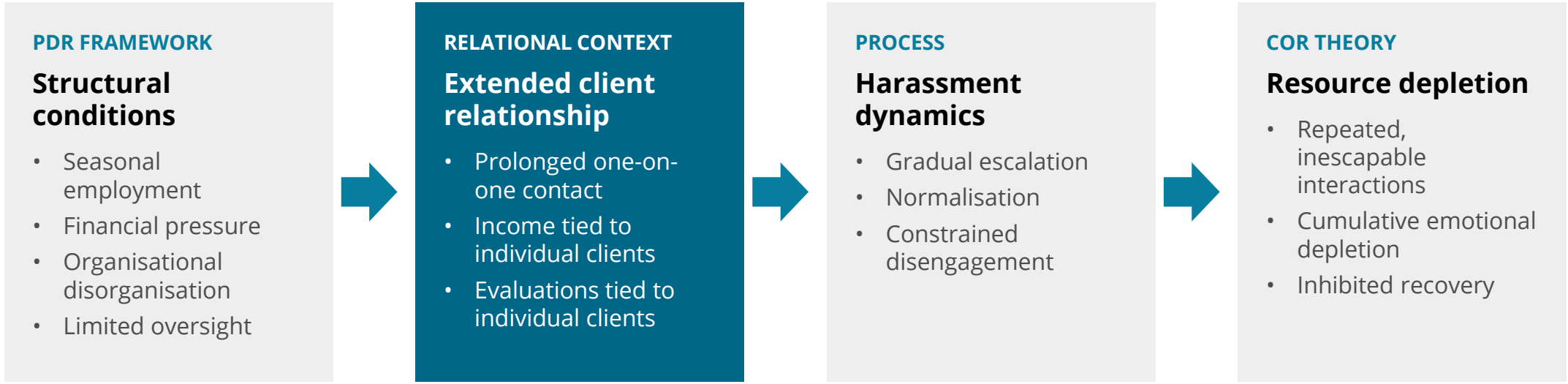
Continuity: returning to the same professional.

Can develop in **beneficial, ambivalent or harmful directions**.

- **Harassment is one harmful trajectory.**

Note. Figure by Johansen and Heiskanen (in preparation), drawing on Arnould and Price (1993), Baym (2015), Gremler and Gwinner (2000), Gutek et al. (1999), Hochschild (1983), Price and Arnould (1999), Price et al. (1995), and Zelizer (2012).

Theoretical framework



Linking structural workplace conditions, organisational culture, relational dynamics and lived emotional experience.

PDR = Pressure–Disorganisation–Regulatory Failure (Knox & Bohle, 2024) · **COR** = Conservation of Resources (Hobfoll, 1989)

Research questions and method

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1 Development
How harassment develops under prolonged one-on-one contact

2 Vulnerability
Which features of ski instruction invite, increase and sustain vulnerability

3 Responses
How organisational practices shape instructors' responses

4 Interventions
Which policies and leadership-driven interventions disrupt these dynamics

METHOD · SEQUENTIAL DESIGN

Phase 1 · In progress

Anonymous online narratives

Webropol · target n = 50–100 · current and former ski instructors

Phase 2: Estimated start 2027.01

Follow-up interviews

Semi-structured, via Teams · n = 25 · voluntary opt-in

Analysis: thematic narrative analysis and composite narratives, to protect anonymity in a small community

Preliminary findings: Quantitative

[13]

As of 2026.10.02

A small sample: early impressions, not generalisable results.

Demographics of Current Sample

13 responses reported; 16 received to date

Gender

Female (58%), Male (33%), Agender (8%), Prefer Not to Say (8%)

Age

18 – 24 (25%), 25 – 34 (8%), 35 – 44 (25%), 45 – 54 (17%), 65+ (25%)

Region of Origin

Northern Europe (17%), Eastern Europe (8%), Western Europe (8%), North American (67%)

Current Status in the Ski Industry

Current Ski Instructor (67%), Former Ski Instructor (33%)

Employment Type

Full-Time Instructor (50%), Part-Time Instructor (42%), Independent / Freelance (8%)

Seasonality of Employment

Seasonal – 1 Season Per Year (50%), Seasonal – Back-to-Back Winters (42%), Other (8%)

Years of Experience

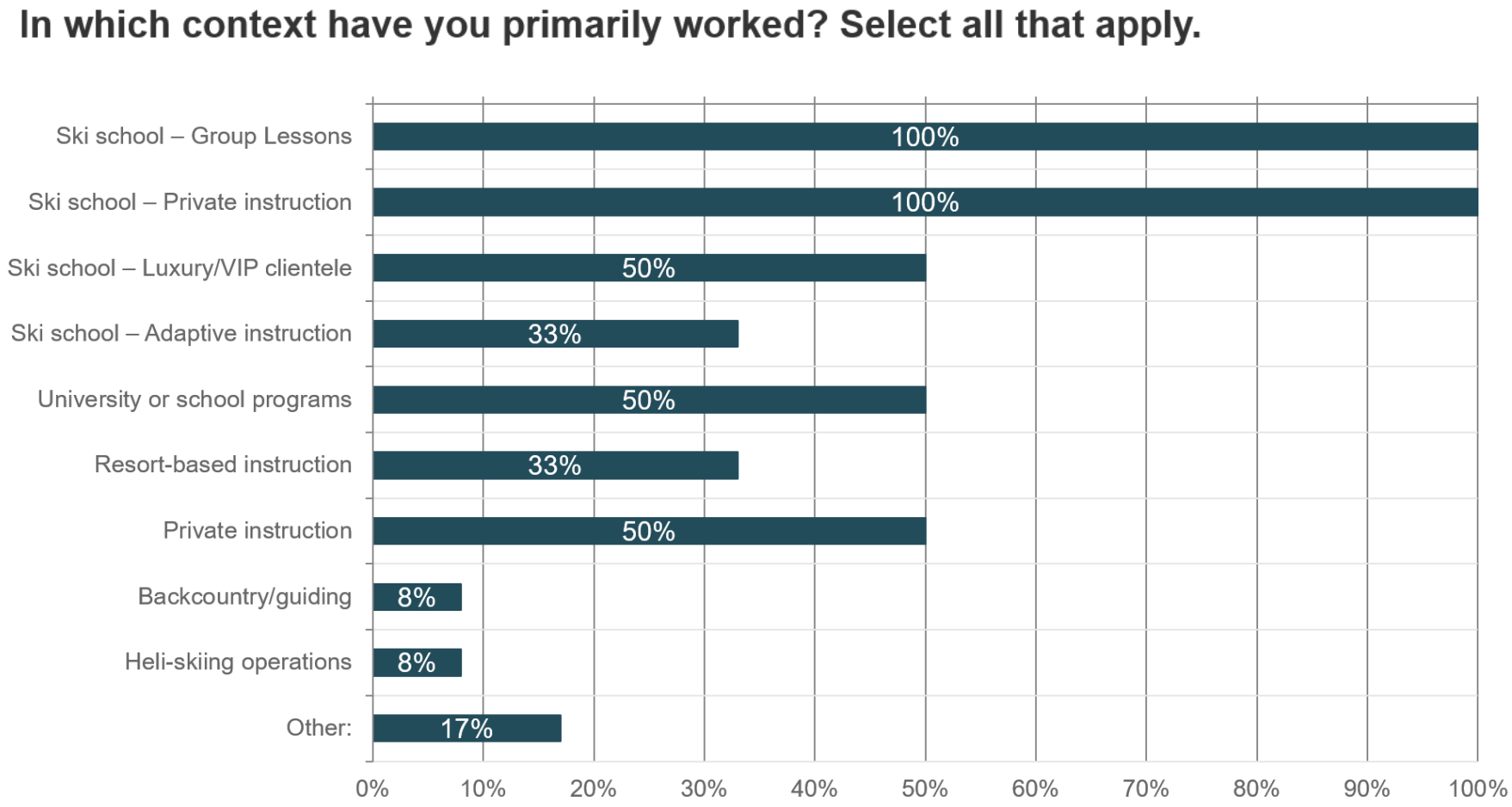
1-3 years (17%), 4 – 6 years (17%), 7-10 years (17%), 10 – 15 years (17%), 16 – 20 years (8%), 20+ years (25%)

Preliminary findings: Quantitative

[13]

As of 2026.10.02

A small sample: early impressions, not generalisable results.



Preliminary findings: Quantitative

[13]

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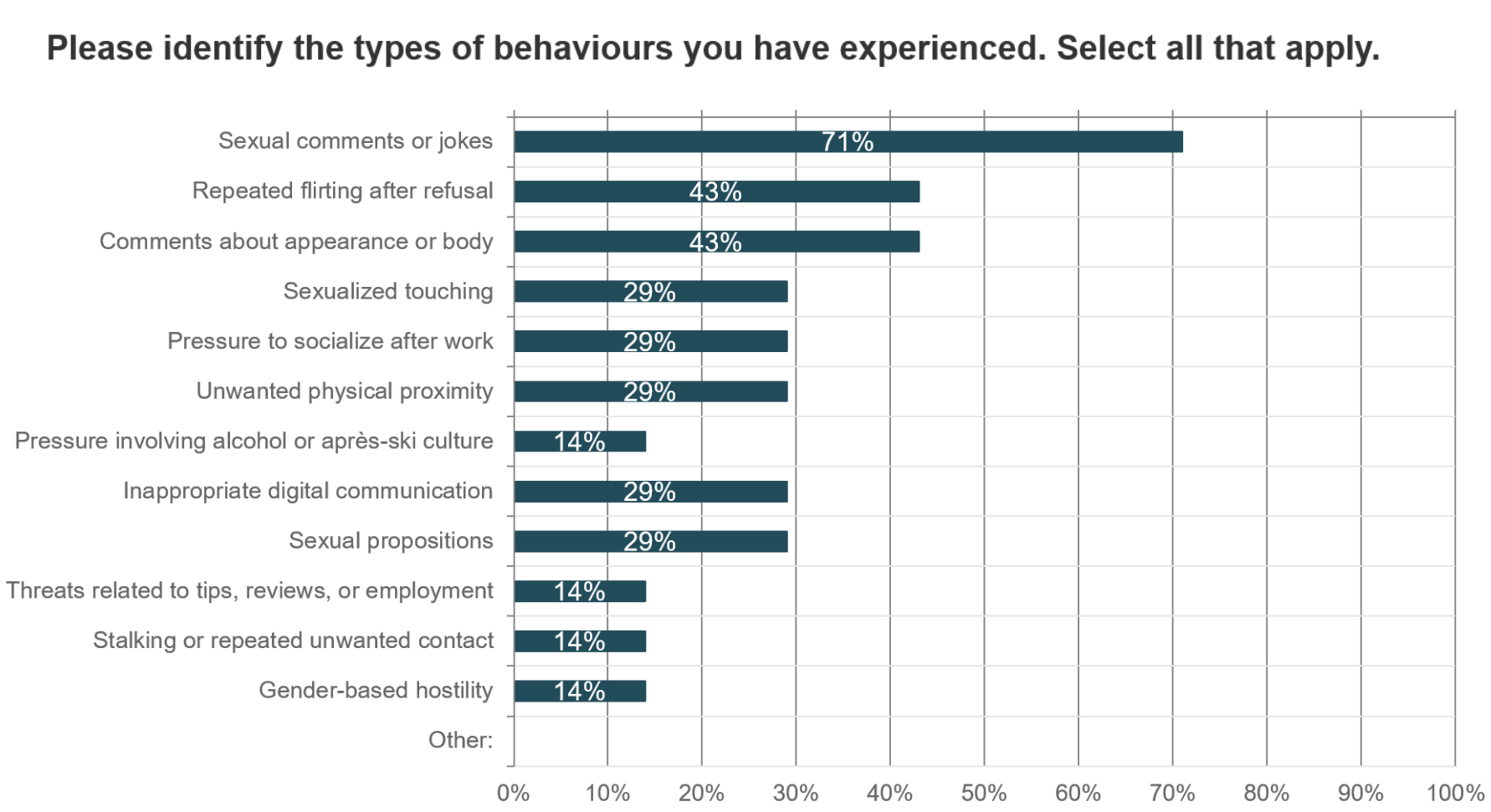


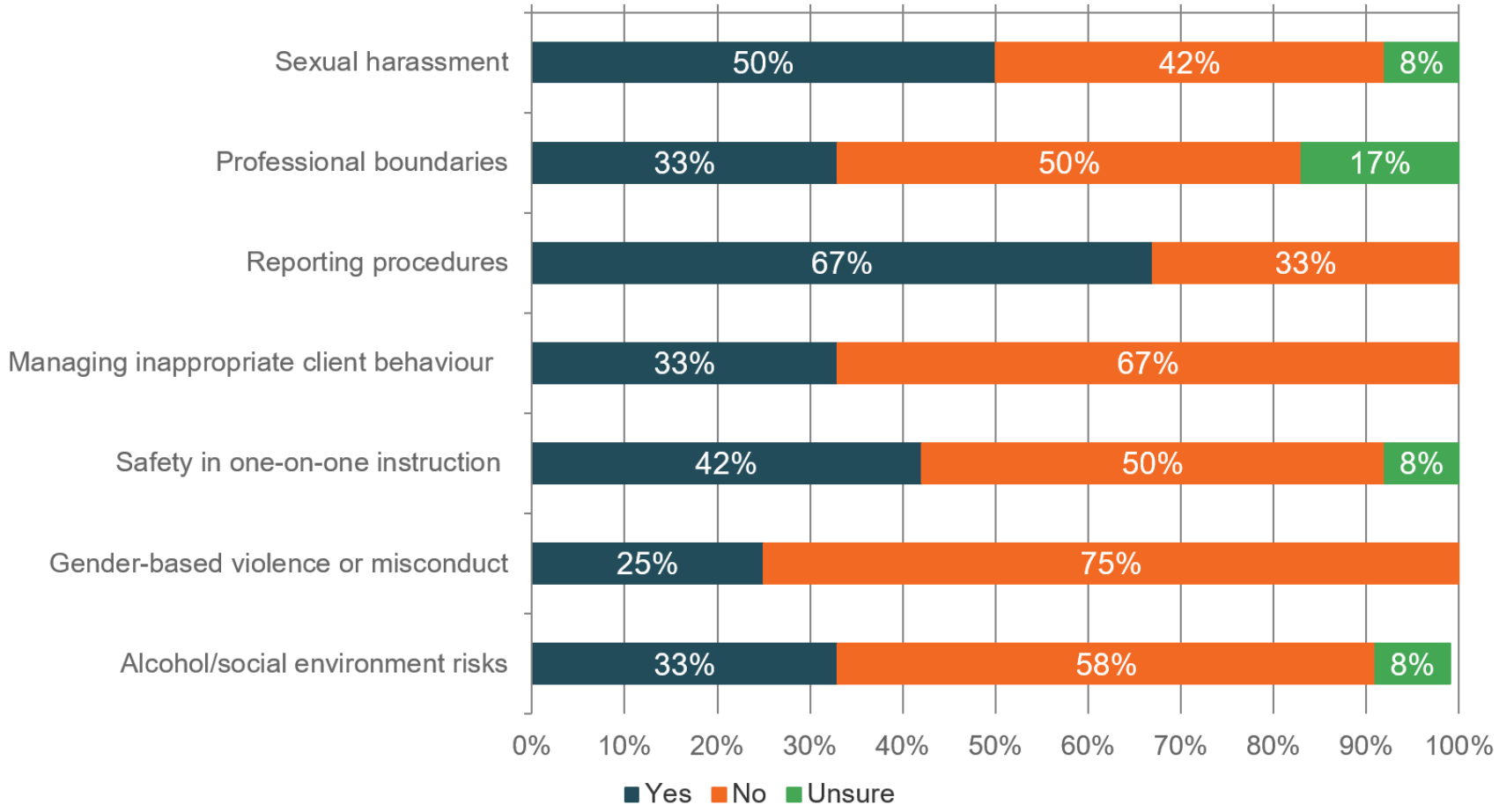
Preliminary findings: Quantitative

[13]

As of 2026.10.02

A small sample: early impressions, not generalisable results.

Using the table below, please indicate whether you received any formal training or onboarding on the indicated topics.



Preliminary findings: Qualitative

[13]

As of 2026.10.02

A small sample: early impressions, not generalisable results.

"It is required [training], but actions to change the culture are limited when colleagues protect or tolerate inappropriate actions … Should be backed by no tolerance accountability which is lacking. Women leave, men are promoted" (Female, 65+, former ski instructor, North America).

"A guy once stalked me at work and followed me around the resort, it was creepy and I felt anxious all the time" (Female, 35 – 44, current ski instructor, Western Europe).

"I only have a couple of female coworkers but we have all dealt with inappropriate behaviour and comments towards us … It's always male colleagues/customers towards female instructors." (Female, 18-24, current ski instructor, Northern Europe).

"From my experience, the US is a lot more progressive when it comes to sexual harassment - it's part of employee training, there's a trusted person you can go to or a help line. In the Alps sexist behavior is still common and socially accepted … I also do believe that alcohol and après ski is a bigger thing in Europe, which naturally creates problems for client-instructor relationships - but some schools have rules in place to protect their staff better than others" (Female, 35 – 44,current ski instructor, Western Europe).

"One instructor refused to ski with a harassing client and the client changed his name to rebook- she refused to work with him" (Female, 65+, current ski instructor, North America).

"The heli ski industry has blurred lines. Employees and guests are together for a week or 2 at a time. They share the same living quarters and are expected to apres with them. A lot of drinking going on there, which leads to some unsafe situations. Typically, heli ski clients have a lot of money and expect a lot more from the employees. Employees typically go along with some of the behaviour because of the pressures of tip culture. The fact that these clients are paying a lot of money, doesn't help employees when they report behaviour because it's a 'the customer is always right' culture" (Female, 25 – 34, Former ski instructor, North America).

"No one in upper management really cares as long as the budget is hit" (Male, 45–54 years old, former ski instructor, North America).

"This interaction made dislike the Snowsports industry a lot. Made me realize people cannot have a good experience as new instructors in this industry without being harassed. Unless there is procedures and rules in place to protect employees I would not work there for a long time" (Male, 18-24, former ski instructor, North America).

Contributions and next steps

EXPECTED CONTRIBUTIONS

Theory
Extends harassment research beyond brief encounters to sustained one-on-one client relationships

Field
Adds to research on emotional labour and workplace safety in outdoor recreation and seasonal tourism

Method
Advances anonymous narrative elicitation and composite narratives in sensitive research

NEXT STEPS

1. **Phase 1:** continue collecting narratives until no new themes emerge from narratives
2. **Phase 2:** follow-up interviews with volunteers to commence in early 2027
3. **Analysis:** thematic narrative analysis and composite narratives generation
4. **Recommendations for ski schools:** boundary-setting protocols, structured client pairing, and support systems for low-oversight environments

Our questions to you

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1. When does a relationship like this begin? Are two bookings enough?
2. Is it clearly different from existing concepts, such as extended service encounters or commercial friendship?
3. Do you recognise this kind of relationship in other professions or other areas of the tourism, outdoor recreation, hospitality industry?

Are you, or do you know, a ski instructor?

Share your experience anonymously, or pass on our survey.

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