PRACTICE POINTS - **2026 AWEI EMPLOYEE SURVEY**

- 98% of organisations that participated in 2026 have employees who have been exposed to bullying and harassment behaviours in the workplace.
- Post experiencing and reporting negative behaviours, there is low satisfaction with the outcome implemented by organisations, particularly when the reports are made to human resources vs. the respondent's manager
- One third of respondents do not believe their organisation has confidential reporting avenues regarding bullying and harassment.
- Organisations need to be proactive in their approach to increasing psychosocial safety in the workplace.

EDITION 6: Bullying & Harassment in the Workplace

Insights from the 2026 AWEI employee survey

There has been significant discussion over the past 18 months regarding the legal obligations employers have under Work Health and Safety (WHS) laws, "to provide a safe work environment that is, so far as is reasonably practicable, free from psychological and physical harm." The act also requires that when a report of bullying or harassment is received, an employer must act "immediately"[i].

In addition to this, positive duty shifts the responsibility to organisations and businesses, requiring them to actively eliminate work-related sexual harassment, sex discrimination, sexist behaviour and related victimisation - rather than waiting until after an incident occurs.

This year's report provides insight into the level of bullying and harassment behaviours being witnessed by employees and the actions taken when these behaviours occur. It also provides data on LGBTQ+ respondents who have been the target of bullying and harassment in their workplace within the past year, the level of reporting of such behaviours, and satisfaction with the reporting outcome.

Prevalence of negative behaviours

In 2026, among the 140 organisations with more than 20 responses, only 3 had no respondents report witnessing incivility or serious bullying[ii].

Of the organisations where behaviours had been witnessed;

- 98.5% had one or more respondents advise they had witnessed workplace incivility behaviours targeting LGBTQ+ employees,
- 88.3% had one or more respondents advise they had witnessed serious bullying behaviours targeting LGBTQ+ employees
- up to 28.6% of their employees witnessed workplace incivility,
- up to 11.9% of their employees witnessed serious bullying behaviours.

When considering only the most recent incident of behaviour witnessed;

- 24.7% of incivility behaviours were reported &
- 34.1% of serious bullying behaviours were reported.

In relation to the experiences of discrimination, bullying and harassment toward LGBTQ+ respondents, from organisations with over twenty respondents;

- 85.0% had one or more LGBTQ+ respondents who had been discriminated against in their workplace because they were LGBTQ+.
- 75.7% had one or more respondents of diverse sexuality who had been the target of incivility or serious bullying within the past year.
- 55.6% had one or more trans and gender-diverse respondents who had been the target of incivility or serious bullying within the past year.*(Note: this percentage is of 117 organisations; 23 of the 140 organisations had no trans and gender diverse respondents.)*

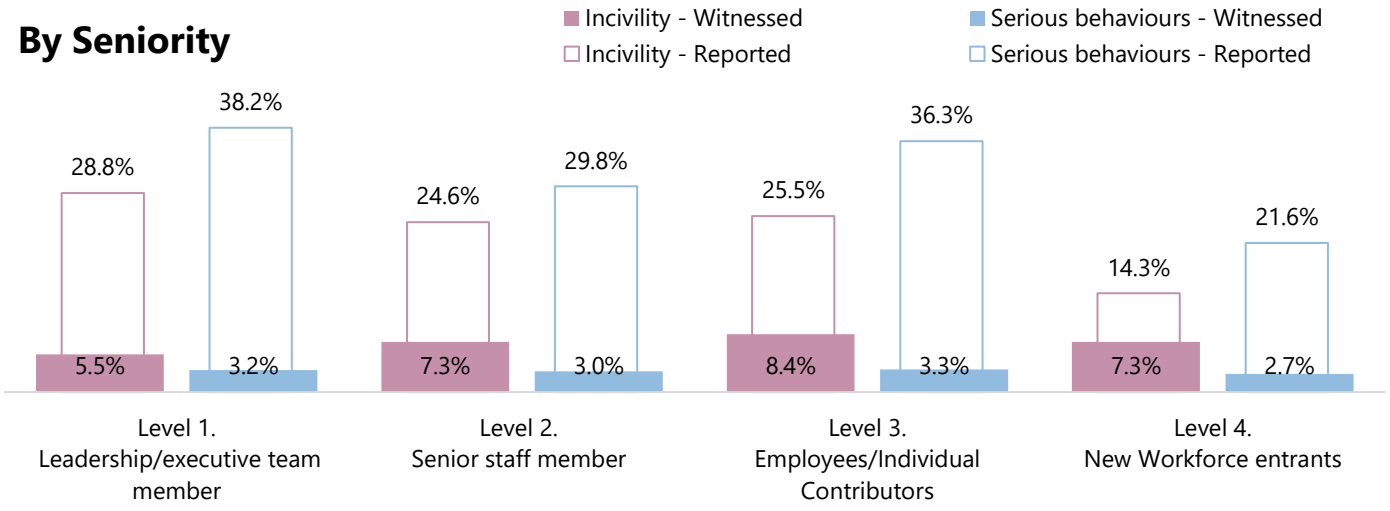
Overall, this is 1,555 individual respondents who have experienced some level of bullying and harassment in the workplace directly related to being LGBTQ+ and includes;

- 776 respondents who have experienced discrimination they know was due to being LGBTQ+,
- 1192 respondents who have experienced discrimination they suspect was due to being LGBTQ+,
- 806 respondents who have experienced workplace incivility targeting their diverse sexuality,
- 214 respondents who have experienced serious bullying behaviours targeting their diverse sexuality,
- 185 respondents who have experienced workplace incivility targeting their diverse gender, &
- 59 respondents who have experienced serious bullying behaviours targeting their diverse gender

Witnessing negative behaviours in the workplace

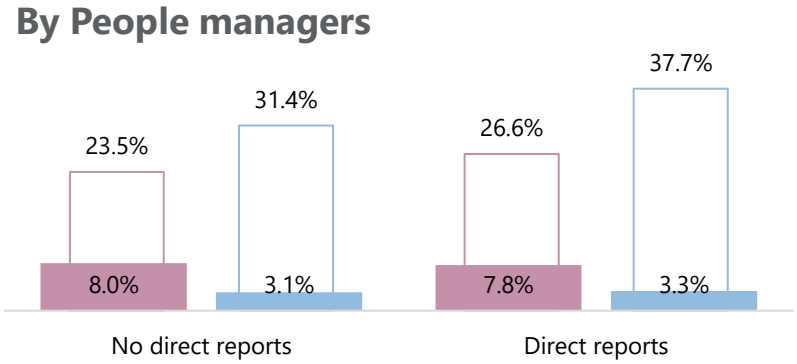
Negative behaviours have been witnessed by 2,908 (8.3%) of this year's respondents.

Respondents in leadership roles remain the *least* likely to have witnessed negative behaviours in the workplace, 24.7% less likely than level 2 or level 4 respondents, and 34.5% less likely than level 3 respondents.



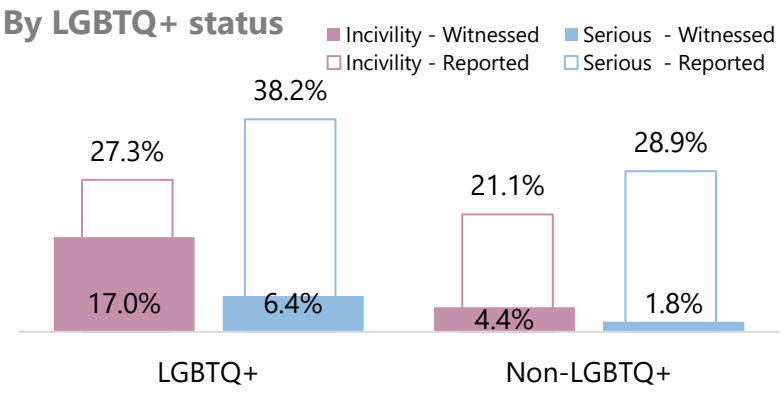
Fewer than 40% of respondents reported the most recent incident to their manager, grievance officer, or equivalent person, regardless of whether it involved incivility or serious behaviours they witnessed.

Further demographic data is provided at the end of this report.



Compared to non-LGBTQ+ respondents. LGBTQ+ respondents are;

- 287.2% *more* likely to have witnessed workplace incivility and 29.6% *more* likely to have reported the behaviour
- 247.8% *more* likely to have witnessed serious bullying behaviours, and 32.3% *more* likely to have reported the behaviour



This disparity, in part, can be attributed to LGBTQ+ people potentially being hypersensitive/hypervigilant due to assessment of the environment for safety

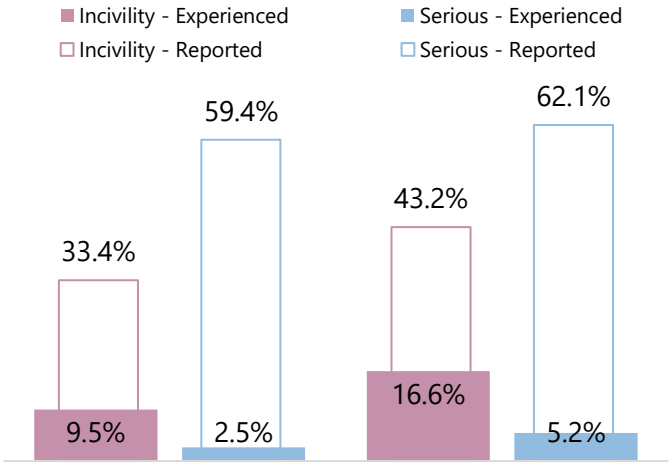
Experiencing negative behaviours in the workplace

10.6% of respondents of diverse sexuality and 22.1% of trans and gender diverse respondents have experienced workplace incivility and/or serious bullying behaviours within the past year.

Compared to negative behaviours targeting a respondent's diverse sexuality, behaviours targeting a respondent's diverse gender;

- Workplace incivility behaviours are 74.7% *more* likely &
- Serious bullying behaviours are 108.0% *more* likely.

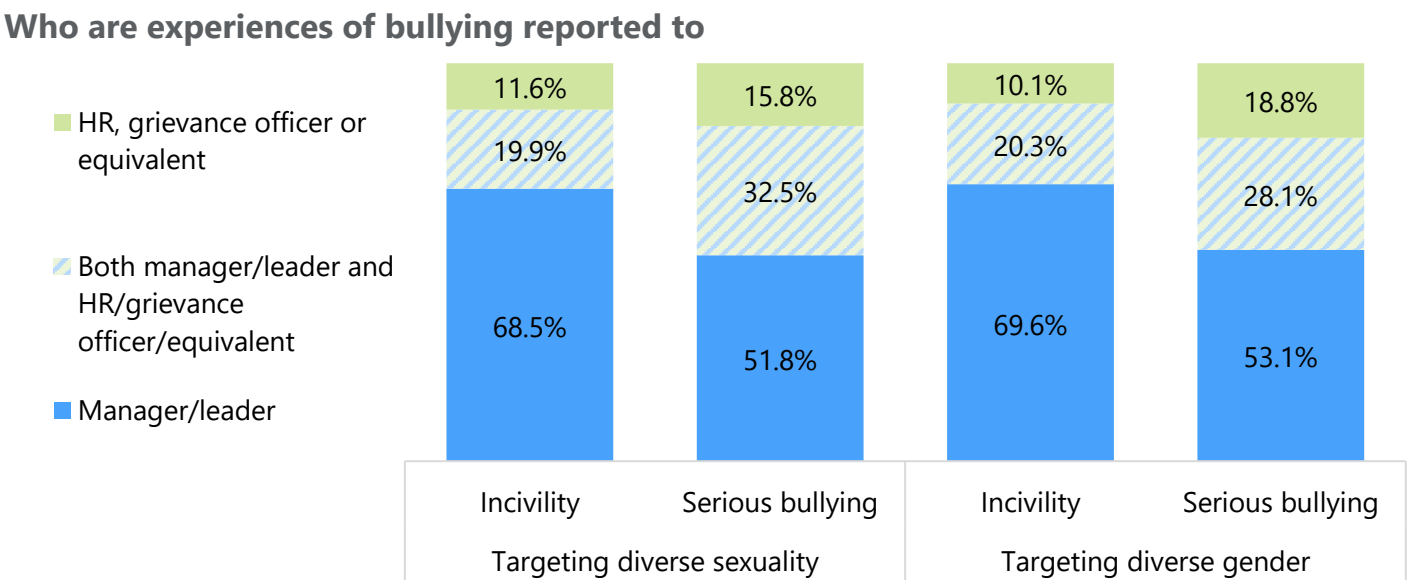
Reporting these behaviours is 29.3% more likely regarding incivility & 4.5% more likely when it comes to serious behaviours, resulting in significant under-reporting of LGBTQ+ targeted bullying & harassment.



Reporting bullying and harassment

Over 50% of instances of negative behaviour were reported only to the respondent's manager or leader.

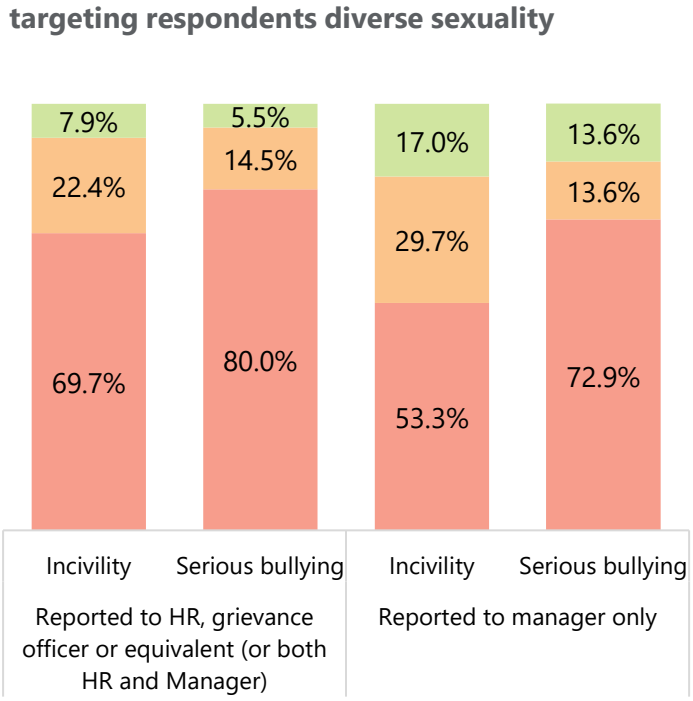
The remainder were reported only to the organisation's Human Resources team or equivalent, or to both HR and the respondent's manager.

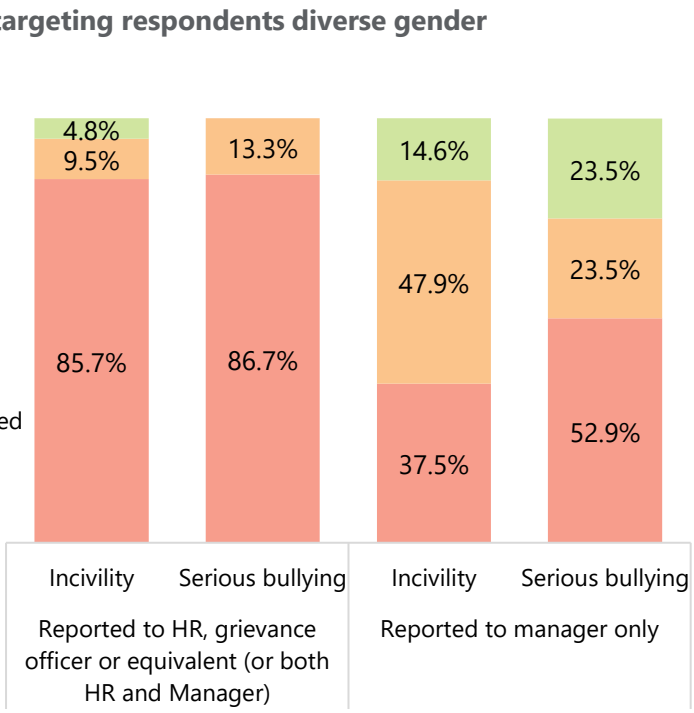


When we consider the effect of the reporting outcome, we can see that satisfaction is low. Of the 456 instances resolved at the time of the survey, only 12.5% of respondents were totally satisfied with the outcome, and a further 24.8% were partially satisfied.

When we break the data down by who the report was made to, we are seeing higher satisfaction rates when reported to their manager or leader for both incivility and serious bullying of people of diverse sexuality or gender, where up to 23.5% of respondents are totally satisfied with the outcome.

By comparison, fewer than 8% of respondents were totally satisfied with the outcome of instances reported to HR.



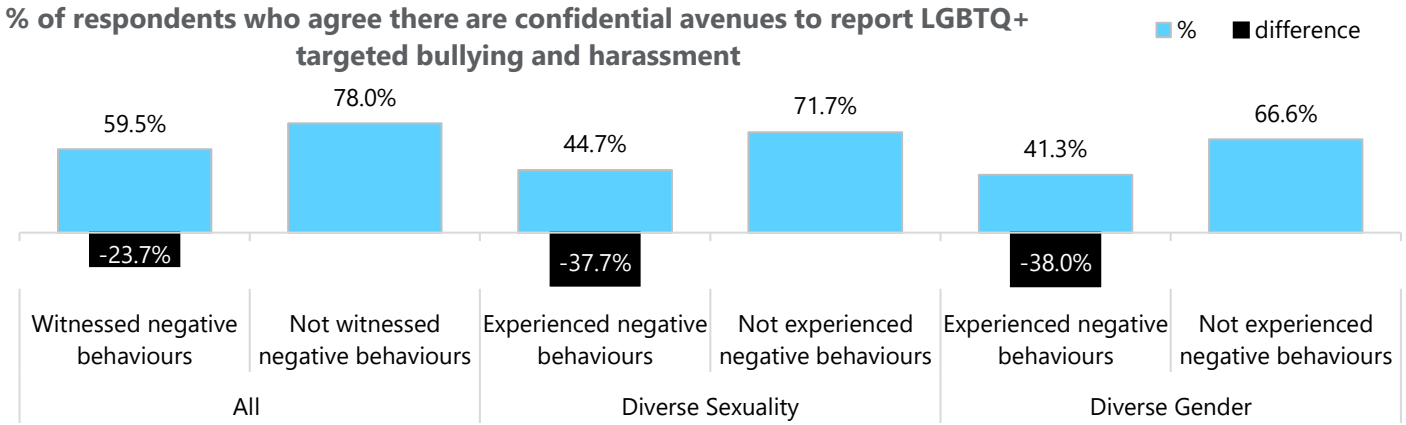


Perception of organisational culture

The organisation's management response to instances of bullying and harassment can be a significant indicator of its commitment to employees' psychosocial safety. The capacity for employees to confidentially report bullying and harassment is one area that may influence an employee's decision to report behaviour they have witnessed being directed toward another employee, or if they themselves have experienced negative behaviours targeting their diverse sexuality or gender.

Overall, 76.6% of respondents this year agreed their organisation had clearly communicated confidential avenues to safely report bullying and harassment related to a person's diverse sexuality or gender.

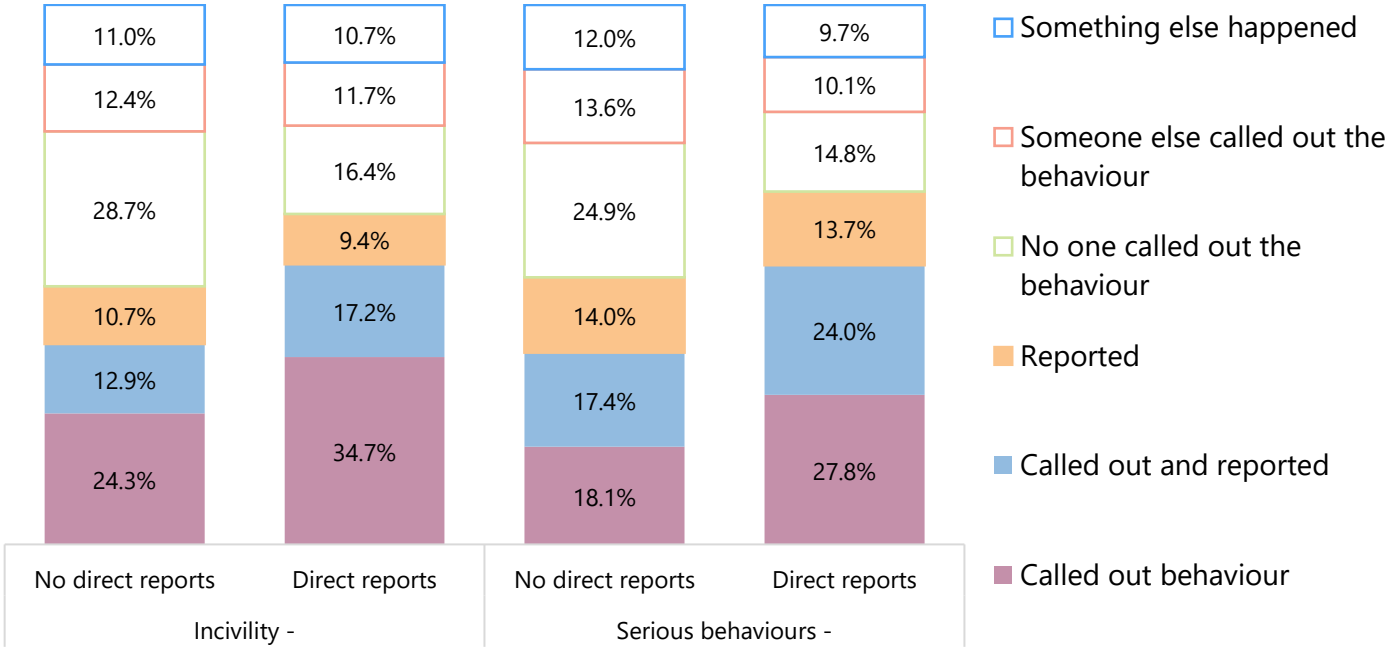
Respondents who have witnessed or experienced bullying and harassment behaviours in the workplace are up to 38% less likely to agree that there are confidential avenues for reporting available.



Previously, we reflected on the proportion of people managers who witnessed and reported negative behaviours. Still, other actions are also available that indicate managers and leaders are willing to address behaviours when they occur.

- When workplace incivility is witnessed, 61.27% of people managers called out and /or reported the behaviour, 28.2% more likely when compared to non-people managers (47.8%)
- When serious behaviours were witnessed, 65.4% of people managers called out and /or reported the behaviour, 32.2% more likely than non-people managers (49.5%).

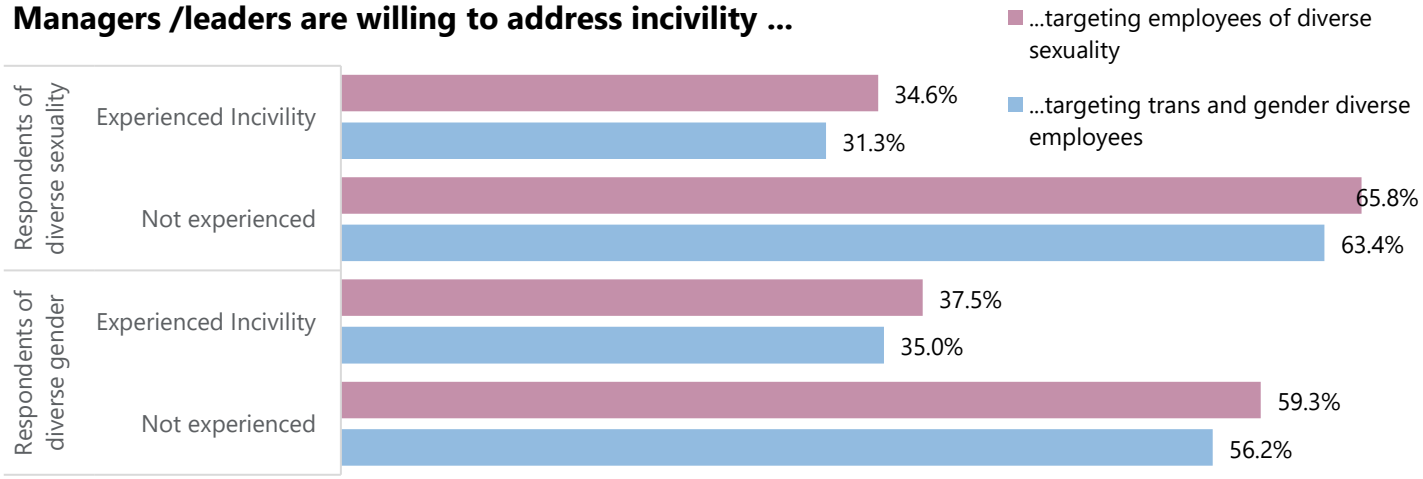
Action by People managers



However, when we analyse the perception of respondents, this year only 65.2% believe that managers and leaders are willing to address workplace incivility targeting people of diverse sexuality, and 60.0% believe that managers and leaders are willing to address workplace incivility targeting trans and gender diverse employees. This almost halves for LGBTQ+ people who have been the target of negative behaviours.

This significant difference indicates that, while an organisation may have policies and processes in place, there is a disconnect in their implementation.

Managers /leaders are willing to address incivility ...

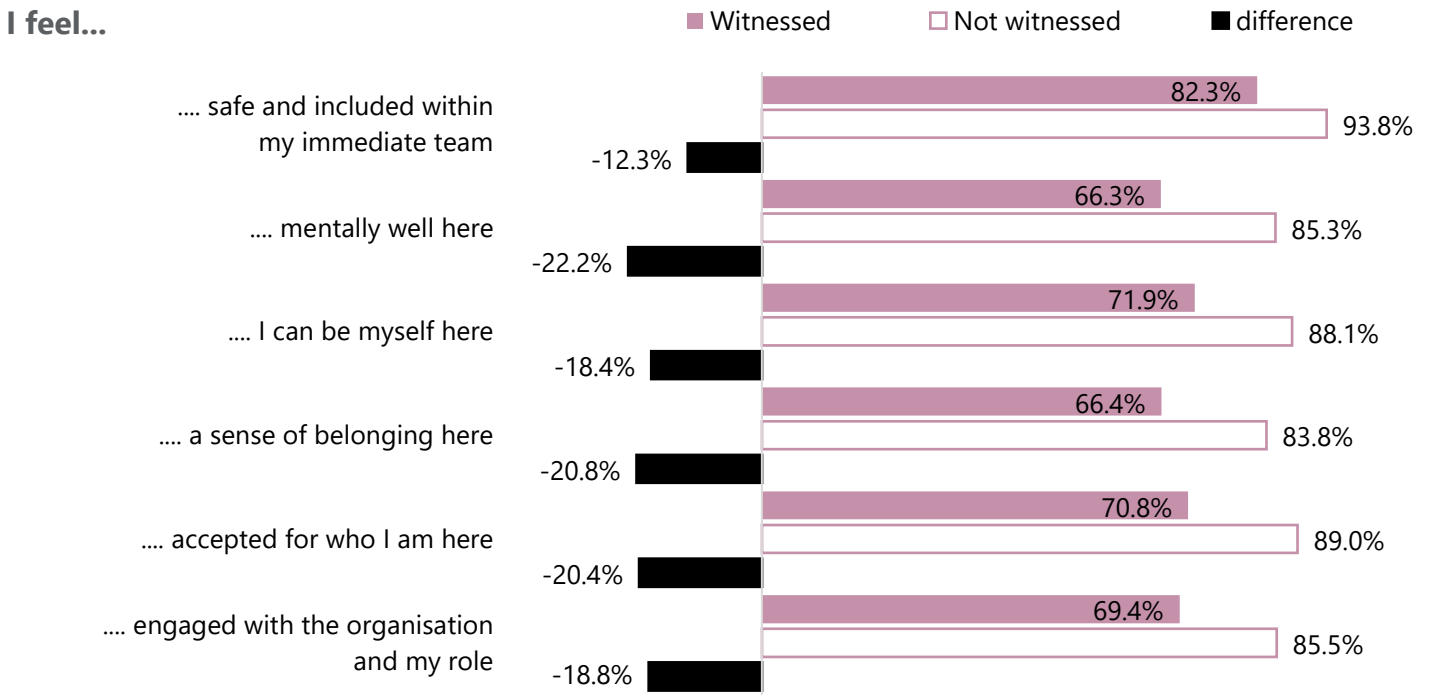


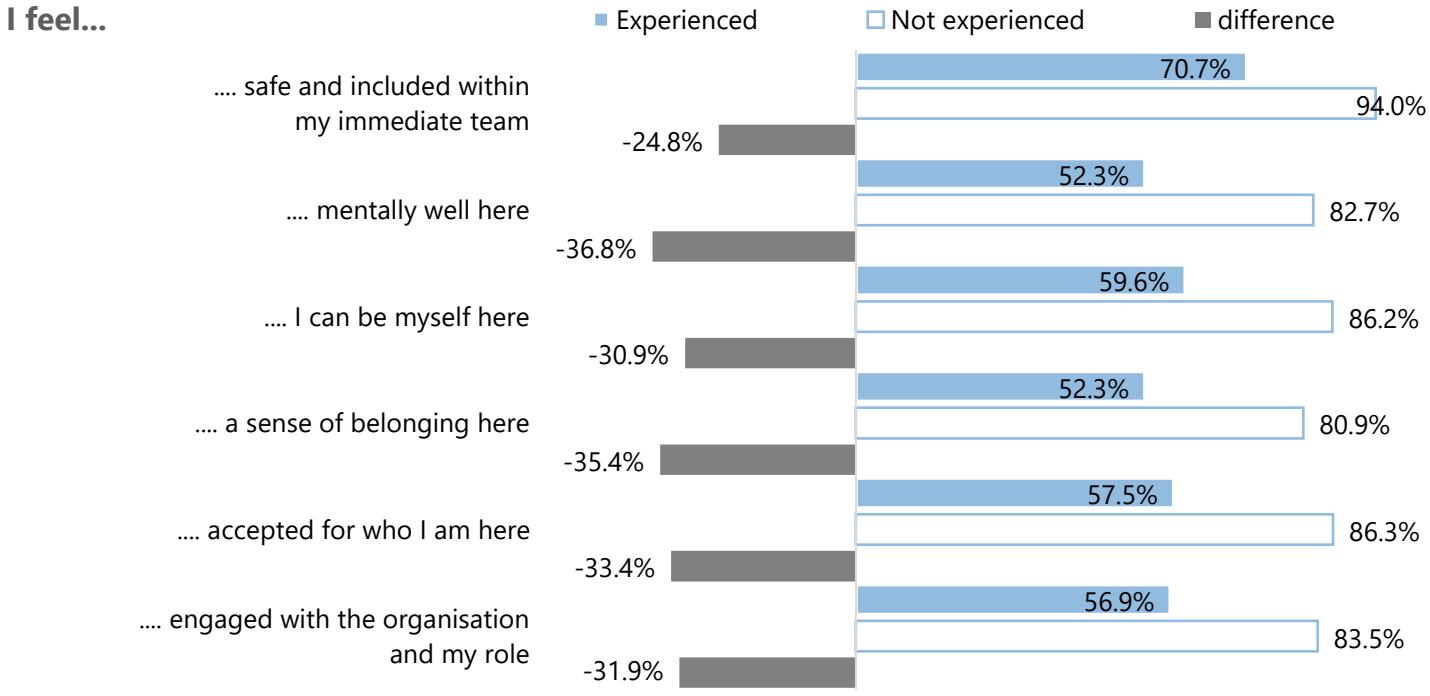
Impact of negative behaviours on LGBTQ+ employees

The health and wellbeing impacts of witnessing or experiencing these behaviours are evident, with Pride in Diversity relationship managers often hearing anecdotal evidence that employees leave roles after experiencing such behaviours and no longer feeling safe in their workplace.

While there are many contributing factors to health and wellbeing, respondents who have *witnessed* behaviours in the workplace and LGBTQ+ respondents who have *experienced* bullying and harassment behaviours in the workplace are less likely to agree with statements around their health and wellbeing.

The most significant difference between the two cohorts is less agreement with feeling mentally well, 22.2% less likely for those who have witnessed negative behaviours, and 36.8% less likely for LGBTQ+ respondents who have experienced behaviours in the workplace.





Impact on employee attraction and retention

Workplace outcomes for respondents also differ. Of the 31,457 respondents who answered all four questions about witnessing negative behaviours, we can see that such witnessing changes workplace experiences for all employees.

Compared to respondents who have **not** witnessed negative behaviours in the workplace, those who have witnessed these behaviours are less likely by;

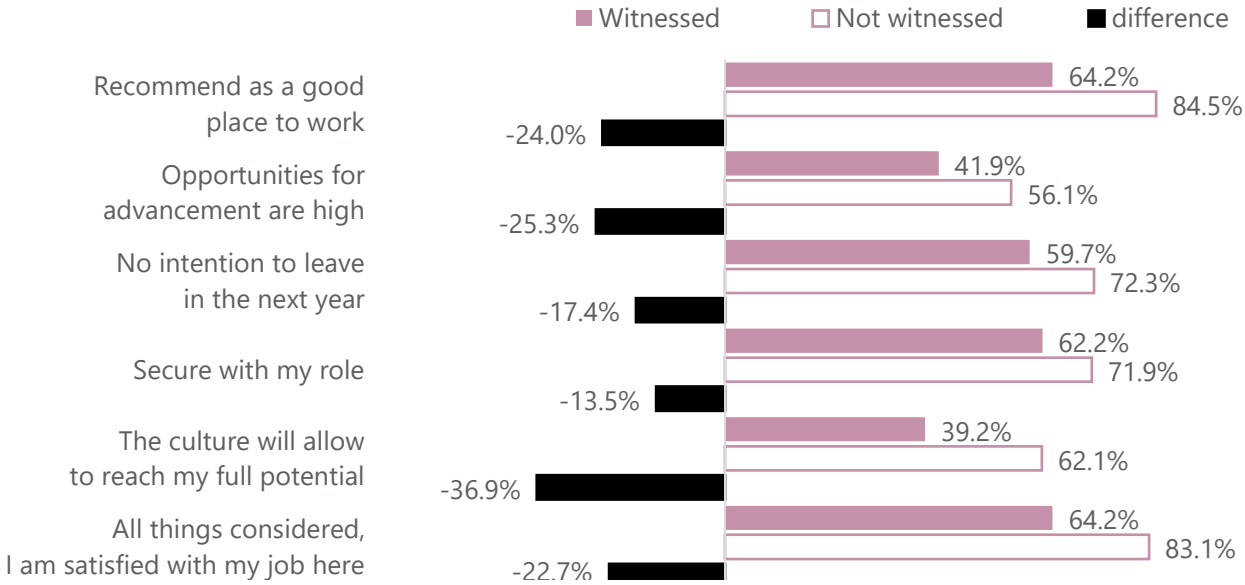
- 36.9% to be satisfied overall
- 27.7% to feel that the culture within the organisation will allow them to reach their full potential,
- 25.3% to feel their opportunities for advancement are high, &
- 24.0% to recommend the organisation as a good place to work.

And 343.2% more likely to consider leaving the organisation for one more LGBTQ+ inclusive

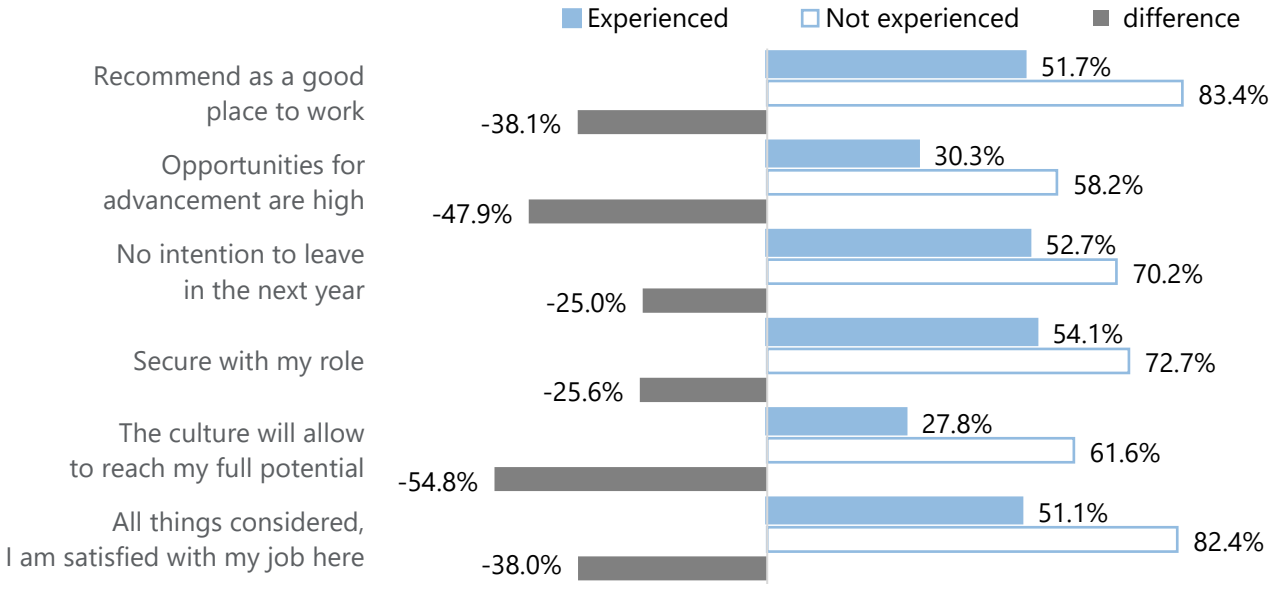
Compared to LGBTQ+ respondents who have not experienced bullying and harassment, LGBTQ+ respondents who have experienced bullying and harassment are less likely by;

- 54.8% to feel they will be able to reach their full potential,
- 47.9% to feel their advancement opportunities are high, &
- 38.0% to be satisfied overall with their role.

Workplace outcomes (all respondents)

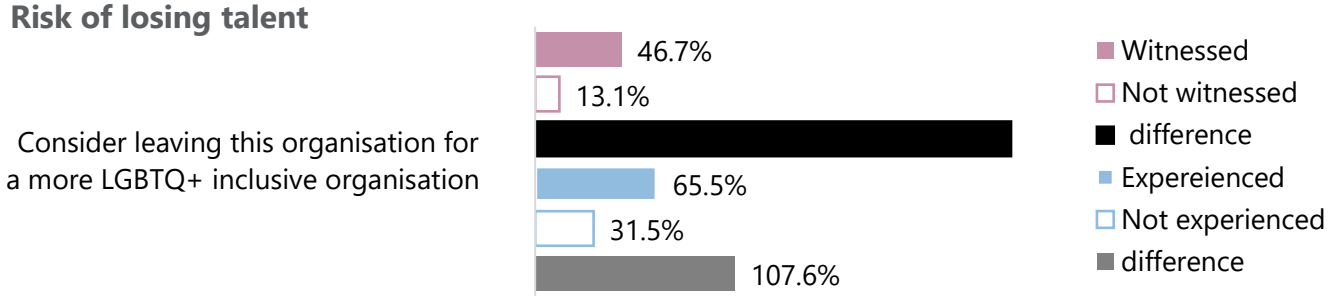


Workplace outcomes (LGTBQ+ respondents)



The cohorts who have witnessed or experienced negative behaviours are more likely to consider leaving for a more LGBTQ+ inclusive organisation, 256.8% more likely for those who have witnessed, and 107.6% more likely for those who have experienced negative behaviours.

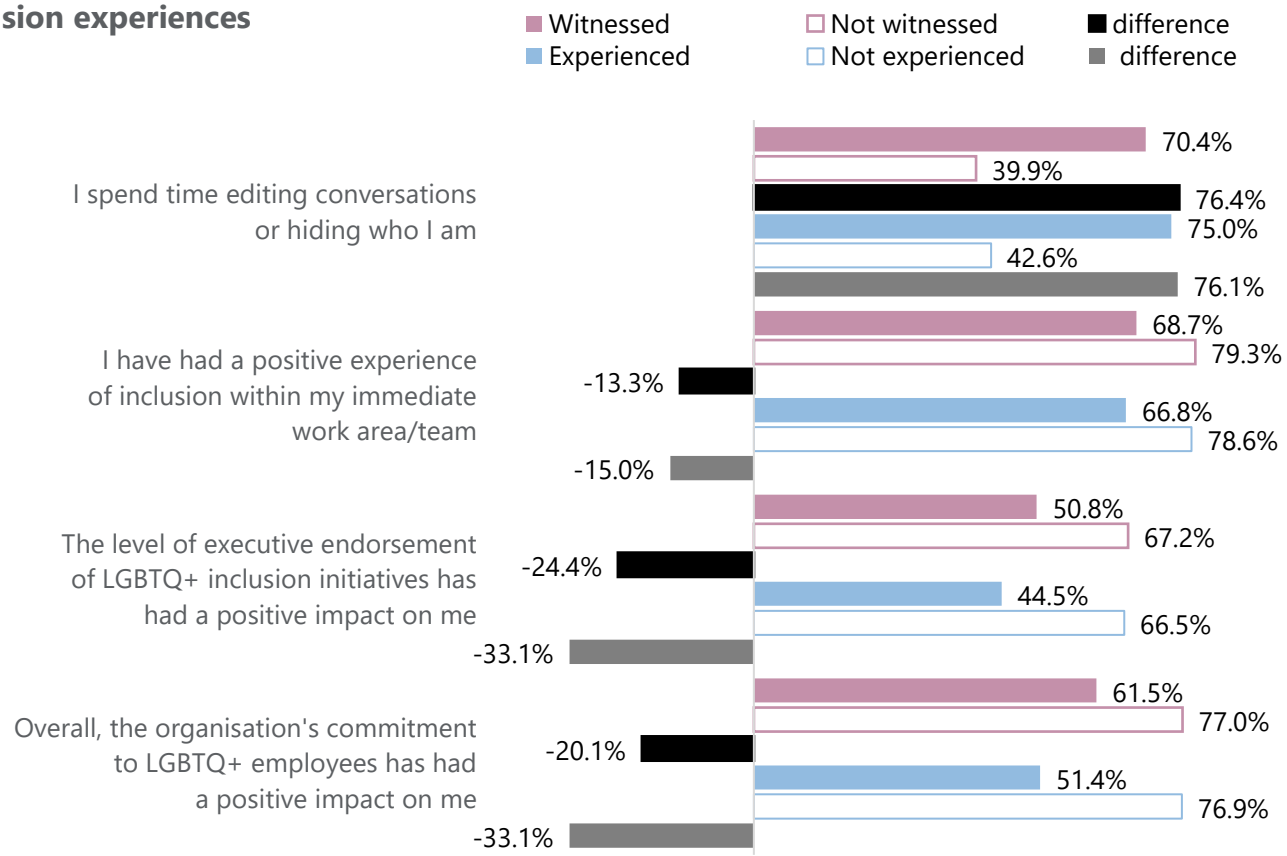
Risk of losing talent



These impacts continue within the feeling of inclusion and safety for LGBTQ+ respondents who have witnessed or experienced negative behaviours.

Respondents are over 76.1% more likely to spend time editing conversations or hiding who they are, and between 13.3% and 33.1% **less** likely to have had positive experiences of inclusion within their team or, more broadly, their organisation.

Inclusion experiences



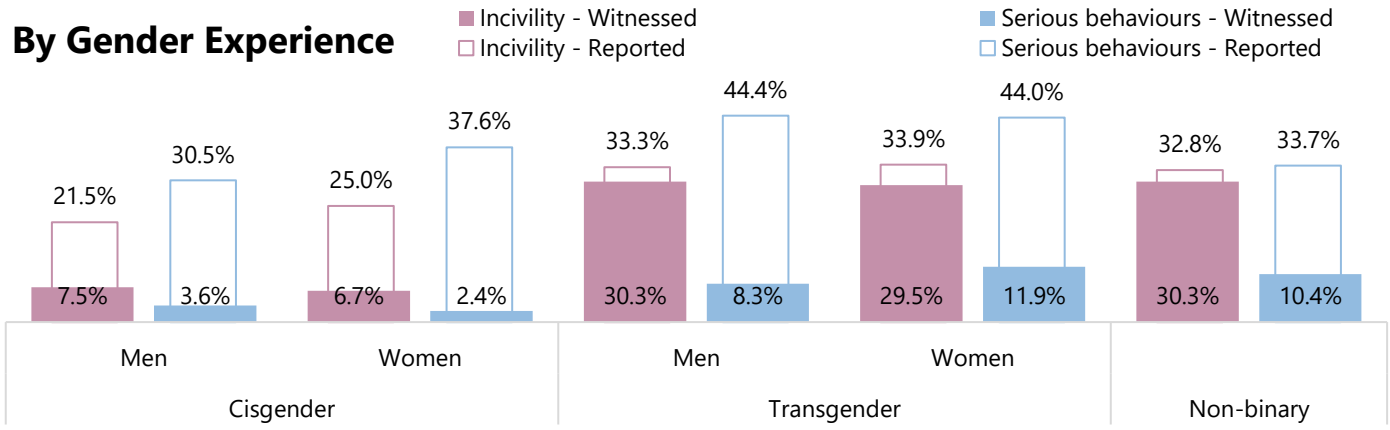
Demographic data relating to witnessing & reporting negative behaviours

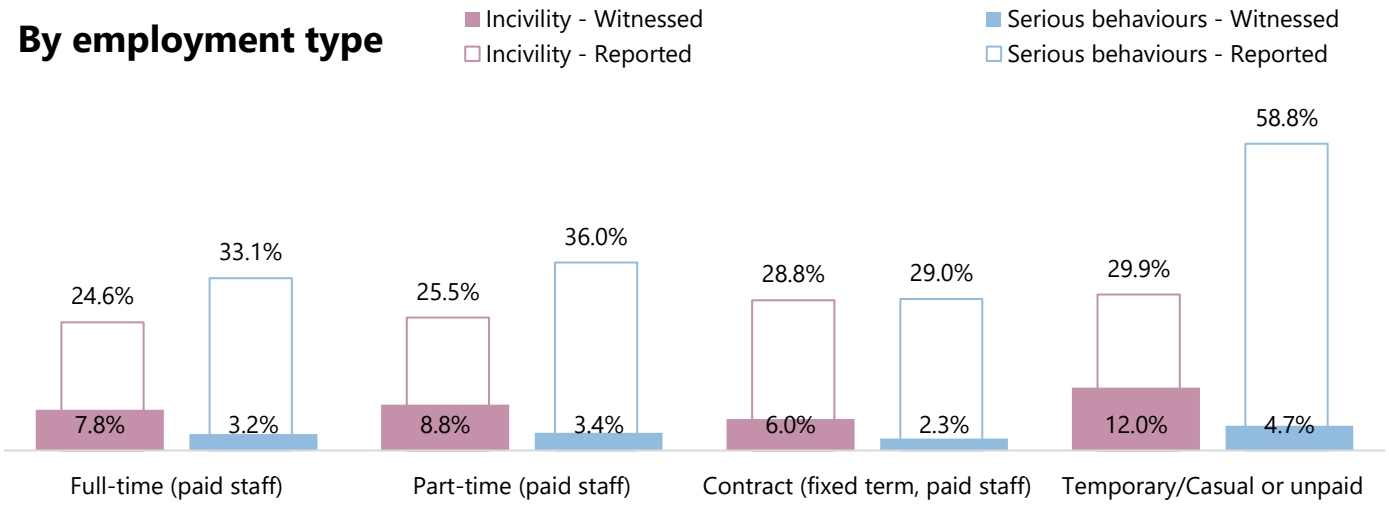
The following breakdowns are provided for organisation comparison. This data provides insight into respondents' exposure to bullying and harassment behaviours and the rates at which they report these behaviours.

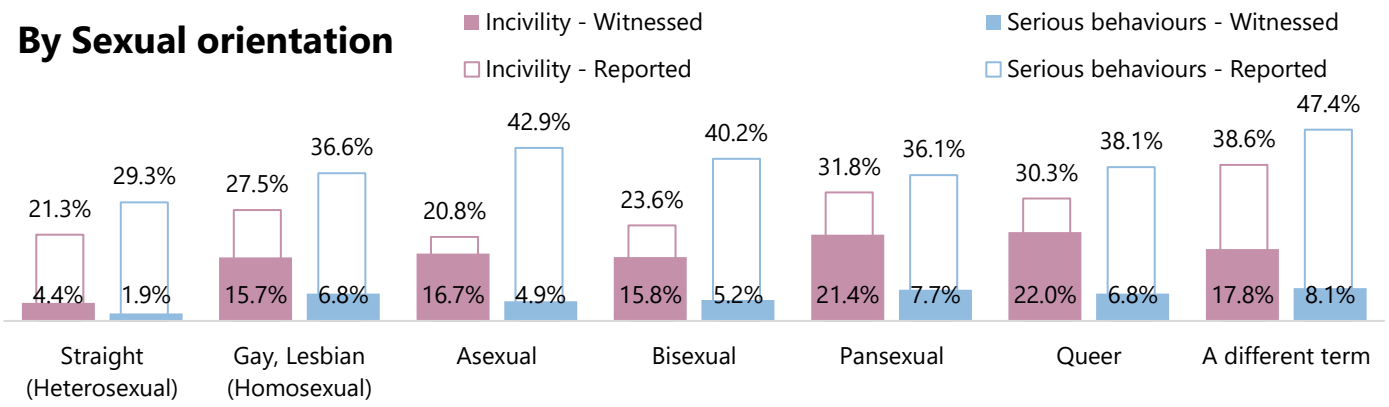
On page 2 of this report, we consider these rates in relation to respondents' seniority and whether they are in a position with direct reports (people-management roles).

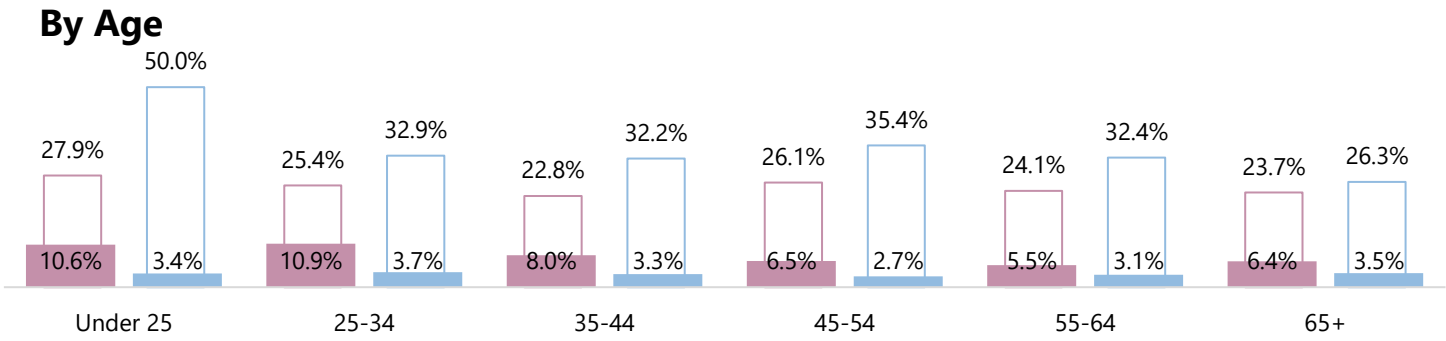
In addition to this, the data shows that;

- transgender men and women respondents are up to 395.8% more likely than cisgender respondents to have witnessed negative behaviours in the workplace, but only up to 55.2% more likely to report the behaviours
- Non-binary respondents are up to 351.0% more likely to witness behaviours than cisgender respondents, and 10.5% less likely than cisgender women to report the behaviour.
- Respondents of diverse sexuality are up to 395.7% more likely to witness negative behaviours, but only 81.2% more likely than straight respondents to report the behaviours.
- Temporary, casual and unpaid respondents are the most likely to have witnessed behaviours. They are also the most likely to report serious behaviours when they are witnessed, 77.9% more likely than full-timers and 63.2% more likely than part-time respondents.
- Respondents under 35 years are most likely to witness behaviours, while those under 25 are most likely to report incivility or serious bullying.





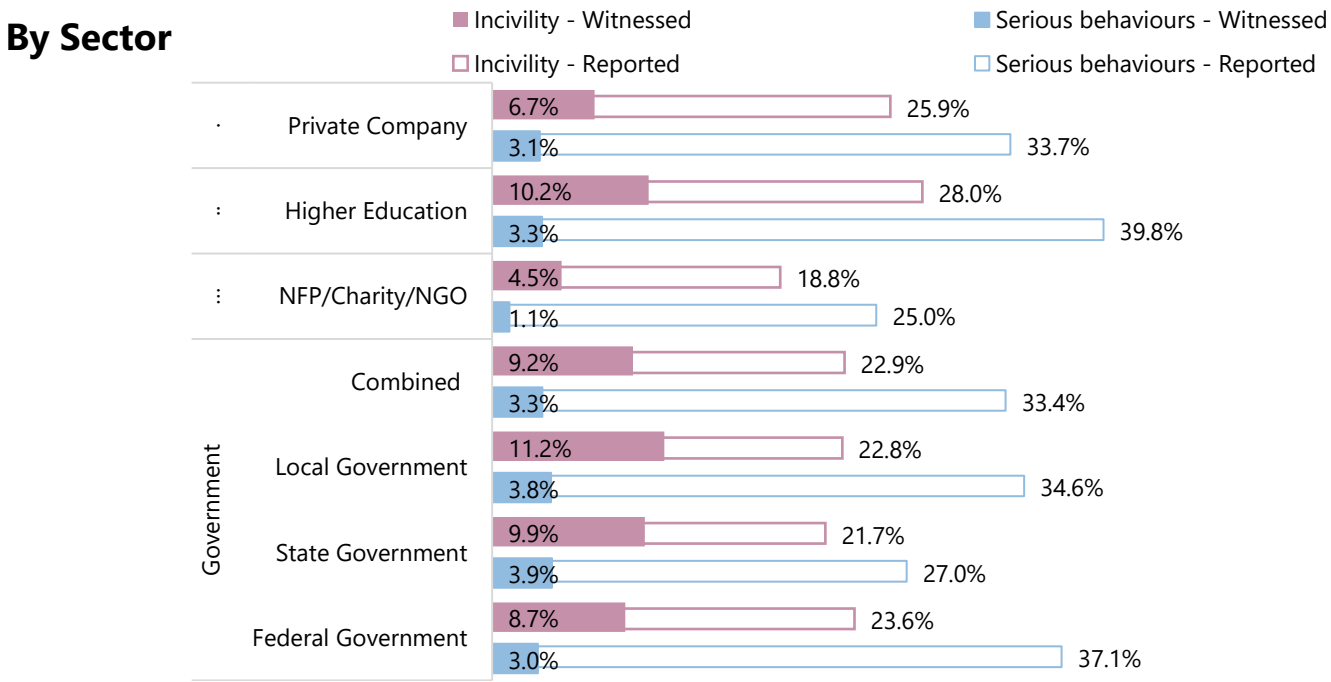




Sector and Industry

Within sector cohorts;

- Respondents from the non-profit/ non-government sector were least likely to have witnessed negative behaviours, and least likely to have reported them when they were witnessed,
- Respondents from the higher education sector were the second most likely to witness behaviours and the most likely to report behaviours when witnessed,
- Within the government sector, respondents from local government organisations were most likely to have witnessed incivility; state government respondents were slightly more likely to witness serious behaviours. In contrast, federal government respondents were the least likely to witness behaviours and the most likely to report them.

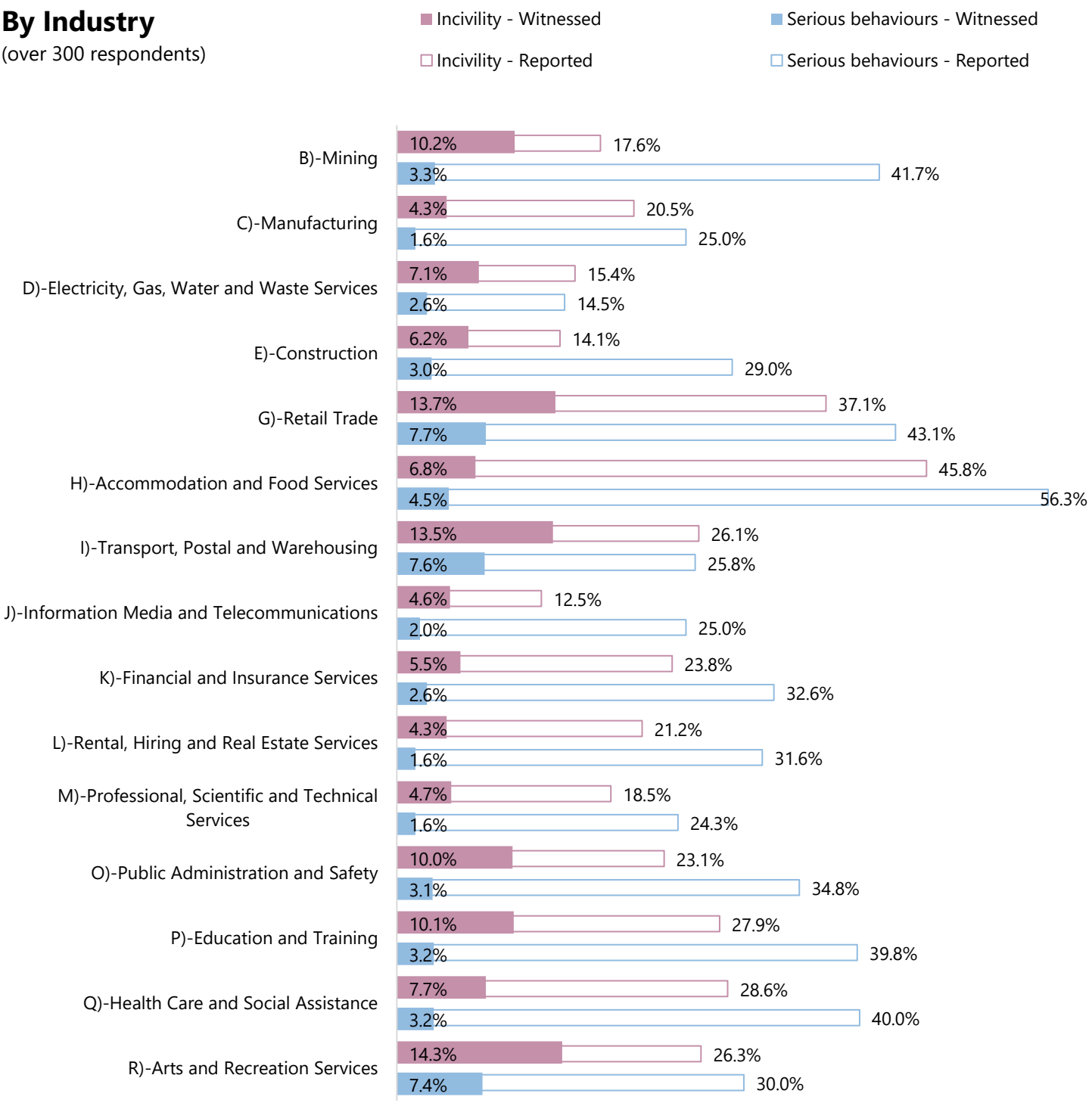


Within Industry cohorts;

- Workplace incivility was witnessed by between 4.3% and 14.3% of respondents
- Serious bullying was witnessed by between 1.6% and 7.7% of respondents
- The top 5 industries where negative behaviours were most likely to have been witnessed are;
    - Arts and recreation
    - Retail trade
    - Transport, postal and warehousing
    - Mining &
    - Education and Training.
- Respondents from the accommodation and food services industry were the most likely to report both workplace incivility and serious bullying when witnessed

By Industry

(over 300 respondents)



ACTIONS

1. Get advice to ensure your organisation is meeting its obligations relating to Respect@Work, positive duty and psychosocial safety, acknowledging that LGBTQ+ and other marginalised populations are most at risk of experiencing negative behaviours.
2. Embed psychosocial safety into KPIs for all leaders, so that they are held accountable
3. Tie leadership performance reviews and bonuses to inclusive culture metrics for all leaders across the organisation
4. Ensure there are formal processes to extract and report on LGBTQ+ related incidents of bullying and harassment for the leadership team to increase recognition and action.
5. Provide training to leaders to increase awareness of subtle forms of workplace incivility and methods to intervene early.
6. Embed training into your onboarding process for all employees, ensuring that LGBTQ+ examples are included alongside other marginalised groups to increase understanding of specific barriers that can be faced
7. Create a strategy to increase participation in LGBTQ+ awareness /ally training by actively promoting opportunities. Increasing the awareness of why inclusion is important and understanding the challenges faced by employees are the drivers for an inclusive culture within workplaces.

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[i] https://www.legalaid.nsw.gov.au/my-problem-is-about/my-job/bullying-and-sexual-harassment

[ii] The AWEI separates negative behaviours into two categories.

1**. Workplace incivility** is a low-key, low-intensity act of negative treatment that includes, but is not limited to: jokes, innuendo, insults, rude comments, use of inappropriate language, etc.

2**. Serious bullying and harassment** captures serious negative treatment, including, but not limited to: direct verbal attacks, psychological behaviours (e.g.,threats, manipulation or stalking), social behaviours (e.g.,spreading rumours etc that are deliberately mean, humiliating or exclusionary), physical behaviours (e.g.,pushing, tripping or hitting), cyber behaviours (e.g.,using email, mobile phones, chat rooms and social networking to abuse, humiliate or threaten).

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Pride in Diversity (2026). Australian Workplace Equality Index (AWEI) Employee Survey. ACON's Pride Inclusion Programs