Sweeping Change
Building Survivor and Worker Leadership to Confront Sexual Harassment in the Janitorial Industry
Zoë West and Sanjay Pinto, co-authors with KC Wagner
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This report documents experiences of workplace sexual harassment in the California janitorial industry, as well as the conditions that hinder reporting and impose silence. It also examines a survivor- and worker-led peer education approach for confronting workplace sexual harassment. The research conducted for this report incorporated elements of a community-based participatory research model (CBPR) and included surveys of more than 700 janitorial workers; focus groups with 35 workers; a survey of 36 janitors who are promotoras and compadres (peer educators); and in-depth interviews with four worker leaders. In addition to showing that experiences of sexual harassment and assault are widespread among this workforce, analysis of the resulting data indicates that: 1) Sexual harassment has differential impact within this workforce. In particular, women janitors are more likely to experience unwanted sexual behavior than men; they are also much more likely to be targeted by supervisors and to switch jobs due to harassing behavior. 2) Silence around the issue is enforced by the behavior of supervisors, coworkers, and other actors, along with broader power dynamics and more diffuse elements of workplace culture. These conspire to create an environment in which those targeted report working in fear and grappling with trauma alone. 3) Many survivors do not trust existing channels for reporting and responding to sexual harassment. Building worker leadership and cultivating relationships of trust in confronting sexual harassment can help to break that silence and shift workplace practices and culture.

KEYWORDS: Workplace sexual harassment, gender-based violence, worker rights, peer education, California, janitorial industry

To our readers:

This report was scheduled to be released in March 2020. The launch event was canceled, however, as the country went into lockdown due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Though we have kept the report in its original form, we wanted to share some brief reflections on how the pandemic conditions underscore the relevance of the janitors’ promotora model.

During the pandemic, the gap between rhetoric around valuing frontline “essential” workers and the exploitation, abuse, and unsafe conditions they often confront has been laid bare. Janitors generally faced two possible fates during the pandemic—either abruptly losing their jobs and facing indefinite loss of income, or becoming an “essential worker” forced to continue working under dangerous conditions, often with inadequate personal protective equipment (PPE).

In this context, the promotoras (janitor peer educators) around whose work and experience this report is centered have been well positioned to serve as trusted sources of support and information to their fellow workers, also taking the lead in advocating for safer working conditions and accessible safety nets. This valuable peer support echoes the critical role played by mutual aid groups nationwide during the pandemic. Promotoras working with Maintenance Cooperation Trust Fund have been able to support janitors experiencing sexual harassment and other workplace safety issues related to the pandemic, providing referrals to resources and online know-your-rights workshops. Promotoras working with SEIU-USWW’s Ya Basta! Center have responded to union members needing general mental health support, information about healthcare access, and advice in navigating domestic violence and fears surrounding immigration status.

To challenge unfair and unsafe workplace practices in the pandemic era and beyond, approaches that amplify the voices and power of those most directly affected will be critical. The janitors’ promotora model stands as a significant example of how workers and survivors can take leadership in changing their conditions. We hope the lessons of this model will be carried far and wide.

Zoë West, Sanjay Pinto, and KC Wagner

i. For more on the broader implications of the promotora model, we invite you to read an accompanying article that we published in New Labor Forum, “Healing into Power: An Approach to Confronting Workplace Sexual Violence,” linked here: https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/10957960211007494/.
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Zoë West and Sanjay Pinto were equal co-authors on the report and led the research. KC Wagner was a contributing author, managed the project, and was an advisor on every phase of the research process. Several members of the Cornell extended team provided invaluable support: Ileen DeVault provided comments on the full report; Varsha Gandikota-Nellutla compiled a literature review, helped to code data from the “Survey of Promotoras and Compadres,” and drafted accompanying analysis; Yasamin Miller, managing director of Yasamin Miller Group, provided technical assistance on research design; Hunter Moskowitz compiled literature reviews and helped to code focus group data; Arianna Schindle helped to design and initiate a trauma-informed process of engaging worker-leaders in the research process; Phoebe Strom commented on portions of the report and helped to compile references; Jessica Velesaca helped to conduct interviews and to code data from interviews and focus groups; and Jerusha Saldana Yanez, Sarah Chowdhury, Cristian Heredia, and Tyler Rodriguez conducted data entry. Karen Oh, creative director of HOUSEOFCAKES, created the report design and cover, Norman Eng copy-edited the report, and Olvin Caba translated the research materials and full report into Spanish.

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Introduction

The recent surge of #MeToo activism has placed a spotlight on the problem of workplace sexual harassment and its often deep and lasting impact on those targeted. The stories of courageous survivors have underscored the many ways in which this problem is rooted in unequal relations of power—the power of those in positions of formal authority to abuse it;¹ the power of coworkers to harass other coworkers as a tool for maintaining social dominance;² the power of customers or clients to exploit the vulnerability of those providing goods and services;³ and, increasingly, given larger structural trends in the economy, the power of some to use blurred lines of accountability to target victims and evade responsibility.⁴

All of these problems converge with particular force in the low-wage economy. Many low-paid workers living paycheck to paycheck literally cannot afford to exit abusive situations, and their struggles are made less visible by the circumstances and status of their work.⁵ Low-paid workers are frequently the ones hit hardest by workplace “fissuring” and other departures from “standard” employment; they are more likely to find themselves in these arrangements and to suffer associated abuses ranging from wage theft and safety violations to harassment and bullying.⁶ They are also disproportionately female, black and brown, and from immigrant backgrounds, often experiencing intersecting forms of social marginalization and discrimination that limit their economic prospects and aggravate their exposure to abuse.⁷

With a marginalized and increasingly subcontracted workforce laboring in isolating conditions, the janitorial industry serves as a prime example of the ways in which power inequities enable exploitation and abuse in the low-wage economy.⁸ This report documents the prevalence and experiences of workplace sexual harassment in the California janitorial industry, as well as the conditions that hinder reporting and impose silence. Yet, out of this challenging context, an innovative response has emerged—this report also examines a model for confronting workplace sexual harassment that was developed in the California janitorial industry and may hold important lessons for addressing the problem in other low-wage environments.

Rooted in an approach first developed in the field of community health, the promotora model is premised on a simple but potentially transformative idea—that those who have experienced social marginalization and discrimination, and the resulting challenges, are often best positioned to educate, support, and help empower others in similar circumstances.⁹ By training janitors as promotoras—peer educators in the struggle to end sexual harassment and violence—the model seeks to address a set of underlying power dynamics that give rise to the problem, enabling workers and survivors to take leadership in changing workplace
culture and strengthening systems of prevention and recourse.

The “Background” section of this report provides context for understanding the emergence of the janitors’ promotoras model. It discusses structural changes that undercut janitorial industry labor standards starting in the 1970s, and traces, in broad strokes, the history of efforts to re-unionize parts of the industry while strengthening protections for non-union janitors. From here, it tells the story of how sexual harassment recently came to be prioritized as an issue and contextualizes the janitors’ promotoras model, describing its origins and reviewing the literature on the efficacy of peer education across different social and geographic settings.

“Methodology” provides an overview of the research conducted for this report, which included surveys of more than 700 janitorial workers, focus groups with 35 workers, a survey of 36 janitors who are promotoras and compadres (male janitors who are engaging in efforts to confront sexual harassment), and in-depth interviews with four promotoras/compadres. It articulates the goals of the research, which sought to understand experiences of sexual harassment, responses and barriers to reporting, views on training and education, and leadership development outcomes for janitors as promotoras. It also describes the participatory approach of the research, which sought to further develop the leadership capacities of workers and staff from partner organizations by training them as Institutional Review Board–certified investigators, imparting skills that may be valuable beyond the context of this project.

“Findings” reports widespread sexual harassment in the California janitorial industry. The research also shows that, while many janitors do respond in some manner, there are often several factors that prevent survivors from reporting experiences of harassment or lead to adverse outcomes if they do. It indicates that most women who have experienced sexual harassment in their work as a janitor do not feel comfortable talking about it with a company supervisor or human resources representative and would prefer speaking with a trained advocate or peer educator. Promotoras report that the program has fostered personal healing and empowerment, which they connect to their ability to serve as critical resources for their peers.

“Discussion” underscores key storylines from the data. First, sexual harassment has differential impact. In particular, women janitors are more likely to experience unwanted sexual behavior than men; they are also much more likely to be targeted by supervisors and to switch jobs due to harassing behavior. Second, silence around the issue is enforced by the behavior of supervisors, coworkers, and other actors, along with broader power dynamics and more diffuse elements of workplace culture. Third, building worker leadership and cultivating relationships of trust in confronting sexual harassment can help to break that silence and shift workplace practices and culture.
“Implications” draws on the data reported here and other relevant research to offer practical takeaways on addressing the problem of sexual harassment in the California janitorial industry, with potential lessons for other settings:

- **Develop interventions that are trusted and shaped by workers and survivors.** Trained peers and advocates should have more of a role in training and reporting systems, while the involvement of supervisors and human resources representatives should be designed not to undermine efforts to confront sexual harassment.

- **Create systems that foster survivor and worker leadership.** There are multiple forces pressuring marginalized workers to remain silent about sexual harassment and violence. For these survivors to take leadership on the issue of sexual harassment, it is important to create leadership development pathways that are healing-centered and trauma-informed.

- **Treat sexual harassment as a core workplace issue.** Workplace sexual harassment and violence are often left out of conversations about “job quality.” It is critical to address sexual harassment as a central workplace concern, recognizing its multiple impacts and the ways in which it is intertwined with other kinds of workplace abuses.

- **Build partnerships across silos.** The coalition effort documented in this report is an instructive example of a multi-pronged approach that integrates worker and survivor leadership development, peer education, and strategic collaboration among labor organizations, legal advocacy groups, and anti-violence organizations.

- **Address harassment and discrimination along multiple dimensions.** Janitors and other marginalized workers frequently face harassment and discrimination along multiple axes, including gender, gender identity, sexuality, citizenship, and race. Addressing these abuses is squarely within the mandate of organizations working within these populations.

- **Engage men as allies.** Men experience workplace sexual harassment; they also tend to play a disproportionate role in perpetuating toxic workplace cultures. Building on efforts by SEIU-USWW to develop a compadre program, men should be engaged as allies in the struggle to confront and prevent sexual harassment.

- **Create pathways for more representative and accountable leadership.** In this industry and others, managers and supervisors frequently engage in sexual harassment and tacitly or openly support toxic workplace cultures. Changing these dynamics requires addressing gender imbalances in leadership and curbing unchecked managerial authority.
The shifting demographics of California's janitorial workforce have also helped to fuel sexual harassment in the industry. More women have entered the industry in recent decades, particularly on the subcontracted side, and they have had to make their way through traditionally male-dominated workplaces—a classic setup for harassment from coworkers that has been well documented in other industries. Moreover, the supervisory ranks continue to be highly male-dominated even as the gender composition of the frontline workforce has become more female, adding to a set of dynamics that promote sexual harassment.
Background

Conditions Creating Vulnerability

The structure of the California janitorial industry and the isolated nature of the work combine with the social marginalization of the workforce to create a sharply unequal set of power relations. This web of conditions leaves janitorial workers vulnerable to sexual harassment and other workplace abuses while creating barriers to recourse. Grasping these conditions provides important context for understanding the worker- and survivor-led approach to confronting sexual harassment.

California’s janitorial industry has a major footprint in the state’s economy, employing nearly a quarter of a million people. In recent years, employment growth in the industry has outpaced employment growth in the private sector as a whole. Despite the increased demand for janitorial labor, however, wage growth has remained flat, lagging far behind the trends seen in other industries. Low wages are one factor contributing to the vulnerability of janitors to sexual harassment and other forms of abuse, along with difficulties pursuing recourse. Many cannot afford to risk losing their jobs or even their shifts by speaking up, or to spend the time off from work required to look for a new job. The logistics of the work also exacerbate this web of vulnerability. Janitors often work in isolation and at night—precisely when the fewest people are around—which means fewer potential witnesses to any harassment, greater control on the part of supervisors, and limited channels to report sexual harassment and other abuses when they occur. These conditions also make workers more vulnerable to particularly egregious abuses such as sexual assault.

Subcontracting poses additional challenges for many janitors—for example, channels for reporting may be obscured, with janitors unsure to whom they should report misconduct. Profit margins of cleaning contractors are low and labor is the primary cost of business, leading these companies to wage a “highly competitive race to the bottom” that has increasingly relied on multiple layers of subcontracting, wage theft, and misclassification of employees as independent contractors. The fact that many contractors operate “underground” or off the books—particularly in the non-unionized segment of the industry—also makes it difficult to hold employers accountable for various abuses, including workplace sexual harassment.

The shifting demographics of California’s janitorial workforce have also helped to fuel sexual harassment in the industry. More women have entered the industry in recent decades, particularly on the subcontracted side, and they have had to make their way through traditionally male-dominated workplaces—a classic setup for harassment from coworkers that has been well documented in other industries. Moreover, the supervisory ranks continue to be highly male-dominated even as the gender composition of the frontline workforce has become more female, adding to a set of dynamics that promote sexual harassment.

The share of immigrant workers in the California janitorial industry has increased even more sharply. Today, a slight majority of janitors—and a significant majority on the subcontracted side of the industry—are foreign-born, mostly with origins in Mexico and Central America. For those who are not U.S. citizens, and especially for undocumented workers,
immigration status often has a chilling effect on reporting of abusive situations. With many janitors having limited English proficiency, language barriers also hinder awareness about resources and knowledge of workplace rights. Together, legal status and language barriers leave many janitors with limited job opportunities, adding to the set of reasons they are hesitant to speak out about sexual harassment.

Workplace sexual harassment can have profound and far-reaching effects, creating multiple forms of harm that bleed over into different areas of people's lives. A recent briefing paper on the impacts of workplace harassment summarizes a large body of research on costs, which include “negative effects on mental and physical health,” “reduced opportunities for on-the-job training,” and “forced job change, unemployment, and abandonment of well-paying careers.” Stigma and victim-blaming often shame workers into silence, creating an added trauma of coping in isolation. For low-paid workers, these impacts are often compounded. Workers who already experience different axes of marginalization—based on their race or ethnicity, gender or gender identity, economic insecurity, and immigration status—are forced to navigate a workplace that no longer feels safe, often believing they have no recourse.

Building Worker Power and Protections

Amid challenging conditions, janitors in California achieved voice and collective representation over a long and winding road. Today, the Service Employees International Union—United Service Workers West (SEIU-USWW) represents some 25,000 janitors in several urban centers throughout the state of California, and the Maintenance Cooperation Trust Fund (MCTF) acts as a statewide industry watchdog that focuses special attention on combating unfair and illegal practices in the non-union segment of the industry.

To provide deeper context for how an industry-wide approach to confronting sexual harassment came to be developed, it is important understand the history of efforts to build power and extend worker protections among California janitors. The Building Service International Union (BSEIU) was founded in 1921 (it was later renamed “Service Employees International Union” in 1968 to reflect its growing membership across different industries). In the 1930s and 1940s, BSEIU gained a foothold in California, and the post-World War II period saw BSEIU-affiliated local unions in the state grow their membership and influence by organizing janitors and other building service workers, helping to lift wages and living standards.

By the 1980s, however, the terrain on which the union had built power had shifted dramatically. The industry was rapidly expanding in California, but accelerated outsourcing and concerted efforts by building owners, building managers, and contractors to de-unionize the industry gutted the union’s membership base, with hard-won standards quickly eroding. While the outsourcing of janitorial services initially began in the 1950s as national and international investors increasingly replaced local ownership of commercial real estate, janitorial subcontracting increased at a much sharper pace.
starting in the 1980s, part of a larger trend that was unfolding across many industries.²⁷

These structural changes helped to propel a shift in the demographics of the janitorial workforce. During the post-World War II years, the janitorial workforce was mostly native-born, including large numbers of African American workers. Latinx workers comprised only a small fraction of the workforce during this period. There is often a mistaken assumption that an influx of immigrant workers led to the erosion of wages and working conditions. However, as Milkman (2006) has shown, the causality actually flows in the opposite direction.²⁸ As de-unionization and subcontracting by building owners drove down wages and other standards, the jobs became less appealing to native-born workers. Immigrants—including substantial numbers of immigrant women—were recruited to fill these vacancies and the new jobs created by rapid industry expansion, producing the demographic contours we see today.²⁹

As it was bleeding members, the SEIU building service local in Los Angeles started to innovate a proactive response to the changing conditions, developing a strategy that progressively spread to other cities in California and across the country. The “Justice for Janitors” campaign turned on its head the misplaced idea that immigrant workers were “unorganizable.”³⁰ The campaign addressed the restructuring of the industry by keeping the focus on building owners and managers that held the ultimate decision-making power over how much money they would pay cleaning contractors to cover labor costs. Through mobilizations in city streets and other public places, largely immigrant janitors pressured and shamed these decision-makers into backing (or at least not blocking) their right to organize and accepting the costs of their efforts to bargain fair contracts. The campaign has helped improve pay, benefits, and other conditions for janitors in several major cities across the country and has helped to inspire other immigrant-led organizing efforts across the country.

In 1999, recognizing that the non-unionized portion of the California janitorial industry remained large and replete with labor violations, SEIU Local 1877 (a precursor to the current statewide building service local, SEIU-USWW) partnered with a set of unionized cleaning contractors to create the Maintenance Cooperation Trust Fund (MCTF) as an industry watchdog group. Since its founding, MCTF has sought to confront the rampant problem of unscrupulous contractors driving down costs by skirting their legal obligations to their workers—for example, failing to pay workers minimum wage and overtime or not paying for workers’ compensation coverage.³¹ These contractors’ illegal practices often allow them to outbid responsible contractors, taking advantage of murky chains of accountability to lower standards across the industry.³²

To investigate and hold accountable the worst violators in the industry, MCTF’s strategy has entailed investigations of hundreds of cleaning companies and interviews and relationship-building with thousands of workers, leading to enforcement actions that have won $80 million in remedies for janitors experiencing labor and employment law violations.³³ A critical element of the organization’s effectiveness is the corps of staff investigators who formerly worked as janitors; they identify potential employment law violations and unfair business practices at worksites across California. By partnering with enforcement agencies, local prosecutors, and the private bar, MCTF plays a unique labor compliance role that helps to counter the industry’s “race to the bottom”³⁴ in pay and working conditions.
Prioritizing the Fight Against Sexual Harassment

The Ya Basta! Coalition was created to launch a multi-pronged, comprehensive response to the entrenched problem of workplace sexual harassment and sexual violence in California’s janitorial industry. The Coalition includes MCTF, SEIU-USWW, anti-violence advocates, legal advocates, researchers, and safety and health professionals. The collaborative initiative supports worker-survivor leadership in improving labor conditions in the industry, addressing the factors that make workers particularly vulnerable to experiences of sexual harassment on the job.35

Over time, many who were engaged with SEIU-USWW and MCTF became aware that workplace sexual harassment and sexual violence were an entrenched problem in the janitorial industry.36 The presence of these two organizations created the conditions for developing a response across the union and non-union segments of the industry. However, it took years of effort on the part of committed staff and worker-leaders for that response to be more fully realized.

The pathway to making the fight against sexual harassment in this industry a top priority was spurred by a series of events beginning in late 2015. That year, several women in SEIU-USWW leadership showed their fellow union leaders and union members a recently released Frontline documentary called Rape on the Night Shift, which exposed the widespread sexual harassment and sexual violence that janitors faced on the job.37 At internal screenings of the documentary, members began sharing stories of their own experiences of sexual harassment and violence. Union leadership was struck by how many members seemed to be affected by the issue, prompting them to survey the membership more widely.

While preparing for a new round of negotiations around the Janitorial Master Contract, which covers all 25,000 members in California,38 the SEIU-USWW leadership included questions on sexual harassment and gender-based violence in a bargaining survey disseminated to membership. Significantly, the survey revealed that sexual harassment was one of the top three concerns of the union’s janitorial members. The union then made sexual harassment a priority during contract negotiations and crafted new contract provisions that required sexual harassment trainings, prohibited supervisors from dating subordinates, and required companies to provide workers with information about a confidential crisis hotline for those experiencing sexual harassment on the job.39

At an event in 2015 celebrating the passage of a bill fighting wage theft in the industry,40 a janitor named Georgina Hernández gave a speech that laid out the work yet to be done around putting an end to sexual harassment and sexual assault on the job. Hernández had been a key leader in the legislative campaign against wage theft, and the relations of trust and solidarity she built through that process helped her to break her silence and reveal her own experience of being sexually assaulted by a supervisor. Several women in SEIU-USWW leadership heard Hernández’s speech as a further call to action, seeing the need to address the issue beyond the master contract in order to have an impact in the large non-union segment of the industry.

The first step in carrying out a more comprehensive response to this problem was launching a campaign to pass new legislation protecting all workers in this industry. The Property Service Workers Protection Act (AB 1978), signed into law in 2016, requires all janitorial services companies to conduct in-person sexual harassment prevention training for employers and employees. To facilitate more effective tracking and investigation of fly-by-night firms and companies known to violate labor laws, the law also mandates that all janitorial services companies register with the state. Winning support for AB 1978 entailed leveraging pressure at multiple levels, including through public awareness campaigns, union outreach, and survivor-led protest actions. The campaign culminated with women janitors engaging in a hunger strike on the steps of
the California State Capitol in the summer of 2016, in order to pressure then-governor Jerry Brown to sign the bill. Four days into the hunger strike, the bill was signed into law.

As the campaign to pass AB 1978 was launched in March 2016, SEIU-USWW and MCTF both decided that a comprehensive response to workplace sexual harassment should involve worker-survivors taking leadership to transform the industry. The issues of sexual harassment and violence were new and sensitive territory for the union and MCTF, and it became clear that mounting a strong industry-wide response would require collaboration with organizations that had established expertise in these areas. They reached out to the California Coalition Against Sexual Assault and the East Los Angeles Women’s Center in order to launch a *promotora* program (described in detail in the following section) for janitorial workers to become peer educators and advocates on the issue of workplace sexual harassment.

In November 2016, months after the successful passage of AB 1978, several groups formalized this collaborative approach by creating the Ya Basta! Coalition. Members of the coalition include MCTF, SEIU-USWW, California Coalition Against Sexual Assault (CALCASA), East Los Angeles Women’s Center, Equal Rights Advocates, UC Berkeley Labor Occupational Health Program, Worksafe, and Futures Without Violence. Collaborating to support worker-survivor leadership and improve labor conditions in the industry, the coalition builds on existing grassroots work to address the factors that make workers particularly vulnerable to experiences of sexual harassment on the job.

### The *Promotora* Model

The Ya Basta! *promotora* program applies a peer education approach for responding to and preventing workplace sexual harassment in the janitorial industry, drawing inspiration from popular and adult education strategies and building on a model that has been widely used in the field of community health. The program positions survivors of workplace sexual harassment to take leadership in changing conditions in the industry, becoming resources for their peers, and creating responses to workplace sexual harassment based on their lived experience.

The community health worker or *promotora* approach is designed to address health-related problems within communities that confront various barriers to access—particularly communities that are marginalized based on factors such as race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, or immigration status. *Promotoras* and peer education models have deep roots in Latin America, having drawn inspiration and legitimacy from the popular education movement embodied by Paulo Freire’s work in Brazil in the 1960s and 1970s. The Freirian approach to popular education challenges a hierarchical model of education, and positions popular education as a means for people to understand the conditions they face in order to change them—principles that are aligned with peer education.

In the United States, many *promotora* programs are aimed at addressing health disparities facing Latinx and immigrant communities. *Promotoras*, also known as peer educators, community health workers, or lay health advisors, are trained on a particular health topic and share knowledge and skills among people within their own social group through a range of activities, including information sharing and education, peer support and informal counseling, advocacy, and liaising with advocacy groups and service providers. The significance of *promotoras* sharing background
In fall 2019, the role of peer educators was formalized in the California janitorial industry. Building on the in-person sexual harassment and violence prevention training that was mandated by AB 1978, SEIU-USWW supported the Janitor Survivor Empowerment Act (AB 547), which was signed into law in October 2019. This legislation requires that janitorial services vendors fulfill the employee training requirement by using specified organizations that provide qualified peer trainers. Further, it mandates the use of a training curriculum developed by the UC Berkeley Labor Occupational Health Program (LOHP) with the support of janitor promotoras and other members of the Ya Basta! Coalition; includes other provisions that set standards for these trainings; and stipulates additional regulations around subcontracting in the industry. In order to create a pathway for janitor promotoras and compadres to further develop their role as trainers, SEIU-USWW has created the Ya Basta! Center, which offers a maestría (or “master”) certification program for janitors to become professional peer-to-peer advocates in sexual harassment prevention. The maestría requires janitors to complete 80 hours of training followed by fieldwork under the supervision of a coach.

The foundational 40-hour training of the Ya Basta! promotor and compadre programs includes four main modules facilitated by CALCASA with the lead trainers from the Ya Basta! Center:

- Understanding sexual harassment
- Crisis intervention (including units on discrimination and oppression, the impact of sexual assault, and trauma-informed practice)
- Understanding sexual abuse of kids and young adults
- Role of response teams

Training Modules of the *Promotora*, *Compadre*, and *Maestría* Programs

"Ya Basta! is a powerful, effective and comprehensive campaign to protect janitors from sexual harassment in the workplace. The Ya Basta! Center is proud to serve as the training center for all of Ya Basta! training programs. Through our training, we provide education and power to janitors to stand up for themselves and their co-workers. We are committed to creating a safer workplace for all janitors and are proud to be part of the growing movement to end sexual harassment in the workplace." - SEIU-USWW.
To complete the maestría, promotoras and compadres are required to complete the following additional 40 hours of training:

**Employer Obligations and Worker Protections Under State and Federal Law** (16 hours)

*Facilitated by Equal Rights Advocates (based on curriculum developed by Equal Rights Advocates with additional support from LOHP):*

- Protection against sexual harassment and other forms of discrimination
- AB 1978
- AB 547
- Other protections, including the SEIU-USWW Master Contract for Union Janitors

**Safe and Respectful Workplaces: Preventing Sexual Harassment and Abusive Conduct in the Janitorial Industry** (16 hours)

*Facilitated by LOHP and the lead trainers from the Ya Basta! Center (based on curriculum developed in conjunction with Futures Without Violence, SEIU-USWW, MCTF, and the California Department of Industrial Relations). This module teaches participants the content of the two-hour training that peer educators will deliver at worksites in accordance with California state law:*

- Introduction
- Understanding sexual harassment and abusive conduct
- Responding to sexual harassment and abusive conduct
- Worker rights and employer responsibilities
- Additional resources and survivors’ stories

To complete the maestría, participants must participate in **eight hours of practice sessions** in which they practice delivering the two-hour worksite training, and undergo assessments of content knowledge, delivery of the material, and facilitation skills. They must also demonstrate trauma-informed and nonviolent communication values in their practice, demonstrating that they have progressed in their own process of healing trauma and are prepared to teach others and listen to others’ stories regarding this sensitive subject matter. Following the practice sessions, participants engage in fieldwork that entails supervised practice teaching sessions with small groups of janitors.

In order to encourage support for the peer educator model and promote higher standards across the industry, SEIU-USWW is also working with the real estate investment arms of top pension funds. This engagement includes developing responsible contractor policies and gaining assistance with outreach to real estate investment partners of the funds to spread awareness about the maestría training program and run pilot trainings at key worksites. The union is engaging in similar outreach to the largest building owners in the real estate, technology, and biotechnology sectors across the state.
characteristics with communities in which they work is that their nuanced understanding of norms, networks, language, and culture enables them to communicate the message more effectively and promote self-advocacy and self-development.47

There is a body of research highlighting peer education and promotora programs as effective tools for intervention and prevention, demonstrating a strong positive effect in reducing disparities in health outcomes, healthcare access, and learning outcomes.48 The efficacy of these programs has been documented across a wide range of issues, including support for survivors of sexual violence,49 diabetes management, cancer screening, and education and support related to sexual and mental health.50 Notably, the positive impact of peer education programs is frequently experienced not only by the “target group,” but also by those trained to become peer educators; these programs have proven effective in cultivating the leadership and confidence of those who become promotoras (more on this below in the discussion of the findings from the Survey of Promotoras and Compadres).51

The Ya Basta! promotora program for janitors was initially hosted by the East Los Angeles Women’s Center, in partnership with MCTF and SEIU-USWW. The East Los Angeles Women’s Center had been running promotora programs about sexual harassment and sexual violence for years; because their training was not focused on the workplace, however, subsequent versions of the Ya Basta! janitors’ promotora training evolved quickly to address the particular industry and workplace environment.52 Through this program, women janitorial workers are trained to provide peer-to-peer education to their coworkers by informing them about their rights, supporting them in feeling empowered to report sexual harassment, connecting them to community resources and service providers, and offering trainings on preventing and responding to sexual harassment as well as self-defense.

Promotoras undergo culturally competent and trauma-informed training about recognizing sexual harassment; relevant legal rights; the impacts of sexual harassment and assault; resources for supporting survivors; prevention strategies; and skills for effective peer education and training. Importantly, the janitors’ promotora training program centers a trauma-informed and healing-oriented approach as a basis for survivors being able to take leadership and help transform workplace culture. Building on the Ya Basta! promotora program, SEIU-USWW created a compadre training program for men choosing to be allies in confronting workplace sexual harassment and violence. The compadre program includes the same foundational training modules as the promotora training, with added material on understanding and deconstructing toxic masculinity; learning to listen to women and gender non-conforming workers about their experiences of sexual violence at work and in society; and the role of allies in helping to change culture and practices, including specific tools for effectively intervening.

While the Ya Basta! promotora program breaks new ground in applying this model to address sexual harassment and assault in the workplace, it is a logical extension of how the model has been used to address intimate partner violence and sexual violence in other arenas. Community health workers and promotoras have been effective in connecting survivors of sexual violence to healthcare services and resources, providing emotional and mental health support,53 and sharing strategies for addressing violence against women and intimate partner violence.54 The peer education approach has been effective in tackling sensitive issues, as people often find it easier to relate to peer educators with shared background, culture, and language.55 The logic of what makes peer education approaches effective for healthcare also echoes principles that are familiar to the labor movement writ large—solidarity, mutual aid, and leadership development.
Participatory approaches to research are rooted in many of the same principles as peer education and popular education—challenging the hierarchy of teacher/student or researcher/subject, and viewing education or research as a tool for communities to use in order to understand and change conditions of inequity and oppression.... The research team anticipated that adopting a participatory approach would make the research more effective in reaching the affected population, posing questions attuned to participants’ social and cultural realities, and amplifying worker voice in addressing sexual harassment.
Methodology

This report uses a mixed-methods approach that includes surveys, focus groups, and in-depth interviews. The research team sought to develop a research design that was methodologically rigorous, relied on the knowledge and leadership of janitors themselves, and minimized risks and potential trauma to participants in light of the sensitive subject matter. The approach incorporated elements of a community-based participatory research model (CBPR), in which those who are directly affected by the issue under study participate in various stages of the research, including design, data collection, analysis, and dissemination of the results. In this model, researchers share tools of research and analysis with community members, who in turn inform the research with their knowledge and interpretation, all toward the goal of applying the resulting insights to address community issues and concerns.57

Drawing on elements of CBPR was important to this research project for two key reasons. First, participatory approaches to research are rooted in many of the same principles as peer education and popular education—challenging the hierarchy of teacher/student or researcher/subject, and viewing education or research as a tool for communities to use in order to understand and change conditions of inequity and oppression. This project seemed like a valuable opportunity to build on the existing leadership and peer education toolbox of the Ya Basta! promotoras by providing them with training and experience in research. Second, the research team anticipated that adopting a participatory approach would make the research more effective in reaching the affected population, posing questions attuned to participants’ social and cultural realities, and amplifying worker voice in addressing sexual harassment.

2018 California Janitorial Survey

The goal of the 2018 California Janitorial Survey (hereafter referred to as the “janitorial survey”) was to deepen understanding of sexual harassment and violence in California’s janitorial industry while further developing the leadership capacities of worker-leaders. The survey was conducted by The Worker Institute at Cornell in partnership with the Maintenance Cooperation Trust Fund (MCTF), Service Employees International Union–United Service Workers West (SEIU-USWW), and Futures Without Violence. To be eligible, each participant had to be an adult working in California as a janitor within the past year. Following approval from Cornell University’s Institutional Review Board (IRB), more than 700 surveys were collected in July 2018 by IRB-certified staff and worker-leaders from MCTF and SEIU-USWW in different metropolitan areas across the state of California: the Bay Area, Los Angeles, Sacramento, and San Diego. A number of the surveys had substantial missing data and were thus not included in the results reported below. The analysis reports results from 672 surveys. The data was entered into Qualtrics and analyzed in Stata by researchers at The Worker Institute.

A committee of worker-leaders provided input to researchers in developing a set of questions that were relevant to the experiences of janitors. In addition to Worker Institute staff, 40 staff and worker-leaders from SEIU-USWW and MCTF were trained as “survey facilitators” and completed the National Institute of Health’s “Protecting Human Research Participants” online course.58 As part of their training, facilitators were instructed on how to provide appropriate support for study participants who might experience traumatic stress reactions from responding to survey questions.59

The survey instrument consisted of 17 questions that took participants around 10 to 15 minutes
Survey questions aimed to capture basic demographics, experiences as targets of and witnesses to workplace sexual harassment, responses to such behaviors, and views and experiences related to workplace anti-sexual harassment training (for the full list of questions, see Appendix A). In order to help ensure the validity of the survey questions, the project team elicited feedback from outside experts, including staff from the UC Berkeley Labor Occupational Health Program. Given previous work showing that survey responses vary based on whether participants are asked directly about “sexual harassment” or presented with a list of qualifying behaviors, the California Janitorial Survey used both approaches.60

The survey was administered primarily in group settings where significant numbers of janitors had gathered for existing meetings and classes, which was integral to gaining access to respondents. In some parts of the state where organizational capacity was limited and/or the population of interest was geographically dispersed, surveys were delivered to participants in their homes. In either case, survey facilitators read the oral consent portion at the beginning of the survey document and remained on hand to answer clarifying questions for participants. Completed surveys were placed in sealed envelopes and sent to designated point people at MCTF and SEIU-USWW, who mailed the surveys to The Worker Institute at Cornell for data entry and subsequent analysis.61

In the event that survey participants became upset due to the subject matter covered in the survey, two phone numbers were prominently displayed in the survey document: a national hotline number that participants could call for immediate support, and a phone number for the California Coalition Against Sexual Assault (CALCASA) for referral to local support and resources. Facilitators were instructed to highlight the availability of these resources when introducing the survey. In order to protect the confidentiality and safety of participants, facilitators were also instructed never to discuss issues that participants raised during the survey process; to only administer the survey at pre-planned times and locations; and to always collect all complete and incomplete surveys at the end of these planned meetings.
The methodology that was used for the janitorial survey did not produce a representative sample of janitors across the state, for gathering a representative sample presented major feasibility challenges. Because janitors comprise a relatively small share of the overall workforce, random sampling over the phone was prohibitively expensive. Although the rigor of less expensive online survey methods is fast improving, concerns about addressing sensitive and potentially upsetting subject matter without sufficient support for participants, as well as potential respondents’ limited access to online platforms, led the project team not to pursue this option. Even apart from these issues, a key goal of the project partners was to involve worker-leaders at each phase in the process, including survey collection. Given these constraints and objectives, the survey methodology that was used in this study nonetheless provides a reasonably good snapshot of the problem of workplace sexual harassment in California’s janitorial industry in the state’s major urban centers.

Focus Groups
After the survey was completed, the research team conducted focus group discussions with 35 janitors to provide further context to the data and allow for additional leadership opportunities for the IRB-certified worker-leaders. Reflecting the integration of participatory research methods, this was rooted in the perspective that janitors have a unique and nuanced understanding of their workplace context that should inform interpretation of the survey data. The goal of the focus groups was to elicit janitors’ interpretations of survey findings and further unpack janitors’ experiences of sexual harassment and challenges in responding, beyond what was covered in the janitorial survey. Three separate focus groups were conducted in order to account for how prior engagement with promotoras might affect janitors’ perspectives on training and peer education.

The focus groups included (1) janitors who had little to no experience engaging with promotoras; (2) janitors who had some engagement with promotoras through meetings, trainings, or activism; and (3) promotoras and compadres. Both union and non-union participants were recruited according to these criteria. All focus groups were conducted in Spanish, with simultaneous interpretation into English made available. To preserve the anonymity of participants, each participant was assigned a number and was instructed to state their number before responding to questions; notetakers were thus able to ascribe statements to distinct participants without revealing their identities. Each focus group ran for 90 minutes, and participants were asked a series of questions related to their experiences of workplace sexual harassment; challenges in responding to harassment; and their perception of peer educators or promotoras, professionally trained advocates, and supervisors as resources on sexual harassment. Promotoras were asked additional questions regarding their work as peer educators and their experience with the program, including leadership activities and impact on their work life. Detailed notes of the focus groups were subsequently translated into English, and analysis included a first round of coding for broad themes and a second round of coding for patterns within each theme.

Promotora and Compadre Surveys and Interviews
In order to better understand janitors’ experiences of the Ya Basta! promotora and compadre programs, the research team conducted the “Survey of Promotoras and Compadres” (hereafter, “promotora & compadre survey”) and in-depth interviews with three promotoras and one compadre (hereafter, “interviews”). The promotora & compadre survey, which had 36 respondents, sought to understand janitors’ motivations in joining the program, their leadership development outcomes, impact on work life, and benefits and challenges of being a promotora or compadre. Surveys were distributed at group meetings for promotoras and compadres, and the results were tabulated and coded by the research team. The in-depth interviews, which were semi-structured and conducted in Spanish, sought to represent a more nuanced portrait of the lived experience of sexual harassment in the janitorial industry and the particular challenges surrounding it, as well as to gain a deeper understanding of the leadership development experience of the promotora and compadre programs for participants. The interviews were transcribed and coded, and excerpts were then translated for use in this report.
Across all focus groups, the most frequently cited barrier to speaking out about workplace sexual harassment was the fear of a specific form of retaliation—being fired. Participants described the fear of losing their job and the consequences for their economic security.
Experiences of Workplace Sexual Harassment

Experiences of workplace sexual harassment were common among janitors responding to the 2018 California Janitorial Survey. When asked if they had experienced “unwelcome verbal, visual, or non-verbal/physical conduct of sexual nature/based on someone’s sex” in their work as a janitor, 23.8% of women and 14.6% of men said that they had. As in previous research on the topic, the numbers were higher when respondents were presented with a longer list of unwanted sexual behaviors: 32.2% of women and 20.3% of men said they had experienced at least one of those behaviors in their work as a janitor. All of the descriptive analysis below that refers to experiences of sexual harassment is based on responses to the question asking about the list of behaviors (for the full list of behaviors included in the survey question, please see Appendix A).

Reported experiences of sexual harassment differed based on how long people had worked in the janitorial industry and the segment of the industry in which they were employed. Variation based on tenure in the industry was especially pronounced for women: 43.2% of women with 15 or more years of experience said they had experienced a behavior associated with workplace sexual harassment, as opposed to 38.3% with 6-15 years of experience, and 19.7% with 5 or fewer years of experience. At the same time, despite average industry tenure being substantially higher in the union segment of the industry (see box on page 26), reported experiences of sexual harassment were lower among Service Employees International Union–United Service Workers West (SEIU-USWW) women members (30.5%) than among their non-union counterparts (38.5%).

Findings

In the janitorial survey as well as in the focus groups, those indicating experiences with unwanted sexual behavior identified a variety of sources of this behavior, including supervisors, coworkers, and “tenants” (employees of businesses in the buildings they are cleaning) (see Table 1 in Appendix B for the survey results). Due to male janitors being underrepresented in the survey sample and male respondents being less likely to report experiences of sexual harassment, there is a relatively small number of responses from which to draw conclusions about men’s experiences. Still, some of the variation along gender lines seems to indicate real differences in experience. Most strikingly, nearly half of women who reported unwanted sexual behaviors (47.2%) said they had been targeted by a supervisor at some point. In contrast, 12.0% of men said a supervisor had been a source of the unwanted behavior.

In all of the focus groups, multiple participants described experiencing sexual harassment personally and observing it among their coworkers. In all but one of the experiences described, participants either stayed silent due to fear of retaliation or fear of being stigmatized, or reported the harassment and were met with employer inaction and/or retaliation. Many also highlighted the fear of being fired, intimidation based on immigration status, and widespread stigma toward victims of sexual harassment and assault as reasons not to report abusive conduct. In one case, a participant described how a fellow janitor only elicited a response to her complaint after she was able to capture video evidence of the harasser in action (previously, this same person had harassed this participant with no consequences). Another participant said sexual harassment is often “seen as a game” by those engaging in harassing behavior due to a lack of education and accountability about the issue, and noted that the problem has been rife
in the industry since she started working as a janitor in 1996.

The focus group discussions also touched on the complexities of how experiences of sexual harassment are inflected by sexual orientation and gender. One participant commented that discrimination against LGBTQ+ janitors makes them even more vulnerable to sexual harassment and assault, noting that harassment because of sexual orientation is common and that it is more difficult for LGBTQ+ janitors to speak out due to a broader workplace culture that sanctions discrimination based on sexual orientation. Separately, another participant asserted the importance of recognizing that men are victims of sexual harassment as well, and that advocates should remember to include men in their programming and services.

Responses and Barriers to Recourse

Together, the 2018 California Janitorial Survey and the focus group discussions point to the complex circumstances that janitors navigate in figuring out whether and how to respond to workplace sexual harassment. The research reveals that many janitors who had experienced workplace sexual harassment took action (see Table 2 for a summary of the survey results), but that taking action did not necessarily result in meaningful remedy. Importantly, many focus group participants articulated a set of factors that prevented them and others they knew from speaking up at all.

Among those who had experienced unwanted sexual behavior, many took action in response to their own experiences or others that they observed. More than one-third told the person engaging in the behavior to stop, told a coworker about the behavior, and/or reported the behavior to a supervisor. A higher share of women than men said they had told someone engaging in harassing behavior to stop. A number of women (15.1%) also reported that they had left or changed their job or position within the industry due to the harassing behavior, whereas no men said they had done so. Among men reporting experiences of unwanted sexual behavior, nearly half (48.6%) said they had taken no action, as opposed to 20.0% of women. In the discussion section, we consider some possible reasons for these gender differences in responses to unwanted sexual behaviors.

While the survey results show that many janitors take some form of action in response to sexual harassment, focus group participants pointed to employer retaliation or inaction as a common outcome of reporting, as noted above. Participants across the focus groups also described an ingrained workplace culture that, in addition to enabling sexual harassment, promotes silencing of victims and contributes to a lack of accountability for perpetrators.

Across all focus groups, the most frequently cited barrier to speaking out about workplace sexual harassment was the fear of a specific form of retaliation—being fired. Participants described the fear of losing their job and the consequences for their economic security. For example, one participant described the fear of losing her job and not being able to put her children through school; another participant explained that getting a new job would be difficult due to her immigration status. One participant commented that when she spoke out about sexual harassment, she had to switch jobs while the harasser’s job was not affected.

In addition to retaliation, a number of focus group participants noted inaction on the part of janitorial companies and protection of supervisors and other harassers. A few participants described experiences in which supervisors and human resources staff failed to support victims of harassment or to hold harassers accountable. In each focus group, echoing the survey findings, at least one participant said another significant barrier to addressing sexual harassment is that supervisors are often the harassers. One participant said that some supervisors will harass workers and then say, “If you talk, it’s your word against mine, and I will say you are a liar.”

Immigration status emerged as an important theme in all focus groups, with a number of participants describing fear that reporting sexual harassment could lead to deportation or that their immigration status would leave them without legal protections.
CENTERING THE MARGINS

Survey research often fails to capture certain experiences for reasons having to do with the accessibility of given populations and their size relative to the overall population of interest. In survey research on work and employment, the conditions facing low-paid immigrant workers have often not been fully captured due to these and other factors.

The experiences of those who do not fit within the prevailing gender binary also tend not to be captured by mainstream survey research. Until recently, it was rare to include options other than “female” or “male” in questions about gender, and this remains common practice.

The 2018 California Janitorial Survey includes a “gender non-conforming” option in its question about gender. The survey question was limited in capturing the spectrum of gender identity. With that in mind, of the five survey respondents who indicated that they were gender non-conforming, four said that they had experienced sexual harassment. Subsequent sections of the report discuss the importance of further investigating the experiences of gender non-conforming janitors and other groups whose particular challenges may remain hidden from view.
They also described specific incidents of supervisors intimidating workers with threats based on immigration status. In addition to immigration status-related threats, participants also described other experiences of intimidation from supervisors or other harassers, such as being bullied by the friends of the harasser after attempting to report abusive conduct.

Another frequently cited barrier to speaking out was stigma, victim-blaming, and the attendant shame surrounding sexual harassment and sexual assault. Participants described sexual harassment as a taboo subject leading to silence. Participants also described the fear of not being believed, or of being judged or blamed by coworkers through insinuations that the victim somehow provoked the harassment. Several noted the economically and socially vulnerable position of janitors and how it combines with stigma and victim-blaming to prevent many victims from speaking out about their experiences.

For participants in focus group #1, stigma and shame in the familial context also emerged as barriers to coming forward about experiences of sexual harassment. Participants described fear and shame about what their husbands or children would say if they found out about experiences with sexual misconduct, and felt uncomfortable discussing the issue with their husbands. One participant commented that some husbands are “sexist” and likely to say that women provoked the unwanted sexual behavior; another described traditional cultural stigma surrounding the issue that leads to the expectation that speaking out could result in divorce or the family no longer speaking to the victim.

Finally, participants across all focus groups said that workers’ lack of knowledge about their rights prevented people from speaking up about sexual harassment. Participants cited the need for more education about sexual harassment, workers’ rights, and the law; they also commented that supervisors needed more training on the issue. One participant reflected on the inadequacy of company trainings on sexual harassment that she had attended, noting that they were difficult to understand, administered on a computer, and far too short. Finally, two respondents said that if the harasser is a coworker in a unionized workplace, they feared the union would protect the harasser.

**Experiences and Views Related to Sexual Harassment Training**

The janitorial survey and focus group discussions provide a picture of janitors’ experiences with anti-sexual harassment training and their comfort levels speaking about sexual harassment with people in

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**DIFFERING CONDITIONS ACROSS THE UNION/ NON-UNION DIVIDE**

According to its own estimates, SEIU-USWW represents one in five janitors in the state of California. Results from the 2018 California Janitorial Survey speak to some key differences in conditions between the union and non-union segments of the industry.

Job tenure was higher in the union segment of the industry than the non-union segment: 55.5% of union respondents said they had worked in the industry for 10 or more years, as opposed to 31.7% of non-union respondents. Meanwhile, the proportion of those working part-time was lower: 13.8% of union respondents said they were working less than 40 hours per week, as opposed to 28.0% of non-union respondents.

These numbers suggest, not surprisingly, that union janitors tend to be in more stable, standard employment situations, which, in addition to the protection of working under a collective bargaining agreement, carries implications for their ability to demand fair treatment.
different organizational positions. Nearly two in five union janitors (37.7%) said they had received on-the-job training concerning sexual harassment. By comparison, just 15.4% of non-union janitors said they received such training. Many of those receiving training said it had been provided by someone from within the company—usually supervisors or human resources (HR) representatives, though some also indicated that managers (i.e., individuals above the level of a direct supervisor) had provided the training (see Table 3).\(^6^4\) Very few said they had received training from a source external to their janitorial employers.

Comfort levels talking with supervisors and HR representatives varied along the union/non-union divide (see Table 4). Though a majority of union janitors surveyed said they would feel comfortable speaking with an HR representative about sexual harassment, just around a third of non-union janitors said they would. Gender and union membership both factored into comfort levels in speaking with supervisors. In general, men were more comfortable than women speaking with supervisors, including 53.7% of non-union men versus 41.3% of non-union women.

Among women with personal experiences of workplace sexual harassment, comfort levels speaking with supervisors and HR representatives were low on both the union and non-union sides of the industry (see Table 5). Though comfort levels speaking with trained peers or trained advocates also dipped somewhat among this set of women survivors, an overwhelming majority in union and non-union settings still felt that they would be very comfortable speaking with a trained advocate, and a slight majority on both sides said they would be very comfortable speaking with a trained peer.

Comfort levels with supervisors dropped to particularly low levels among women who said they experienced sexual harassment from a supervisor at some point in the past: 17.4% said they would feel very comfortable; 21.7%, somewhat comfortable; and 60.9%, not very comfortable.\(^6^5\) Meanwhile, comfort levels speaking with trained peers were actually somewhat higher among women saying they experienced unwanted sexual behaviors from a fellow janitor than among women reporting unwanted sexual behaviors in general: 63.0% said they would be very comfortable; 23.9%, somewhat comfortable; and 13.0%, not very comfortable.

Across all of the focus groups, many participants expressed distrust of supervisors and HR representatives that impacted comfort in reporting sexual harassment through existing channels within their companies. Many respondents explained that janitors stay silent about sexual harassment because supervisors are likely to either do nothing if sexual harassment is reported, or to retaliate against the worker who reports the harassment. Further, many said that in their experience, the supervisors are often themselves the harassers. A number of janitors also said that HR representatives typically ignore reports of sexual harassment. For example, one respondent said:

*With a supervisor, it’s hard to share what is going on and it is difficult because there is no trust and there is a fear of retribution... You go to human resources at the company, they see the problem, and they don’t do anything—nobody takes responsibility for what is going on—they really don’t care about the workers and they pretend to be blind and they fail.*

Turning to comfort levels discussing sexual harassment with advocates and trained peers, an overwhelming majority of women and men in the union and non-union segments of the janitorial industry said they feel comfortable doing so with a “professionally trained advocate”; more than half also said they would be comfortable engaging with a “trained peer” (see Table 4). Note that we are using the exact language of the survey only to report the results here, despite the issues with this language explained in “A note about terminology” on page 20, which calls into question a hard-and-fast distinction between “professionally trained advocate” and “trained peer.”

Complicating the patterns found in the survey data, many focus group respondents emphasized that they would be more comfortable discussing sexual harassment with a peer trained on the issue than with an outside community-based advocate. This perspective was more widely expressed in focus group #2 (janitors who had some previous
engagement with *promotoras*) than in focus group #1 (those who had little to no engagement with *promotoras*). One of the primary reasons cited for feeling more comfortable discussing the issue with another janitor was trust—respondents noted that it would be easier to trust someone who understands what it is like to work as a janitor and how sexual harassment shows up in the industry.

A large majority of survey respondents also identified having an instructor knowledgeable on the subject (93.1%), shared cultural background (93.0%) and shared work experience (88.2%) as factors that would have a “positive impact” on their learning in the context of a training on sexual harassment (as shown in Table 6, these percentages were in a similar range to those for other factors identified in the survey). This was echoed by several focus group respondents who cited shared language and shared ethnic background as important factors contributing to feelings of trust. Focus group respondents also widely emphasized that trust was dependent on the person being trained and knowledgeable about the issue of workplace sexual harassment, whether they were a trained janitor or an outside advocate. Some respondents highlighted the general importance of training, while others also specifically highlighted the importance of *promotoras* undergoing training. (See below for *promotoras*’ views on further training and certification.)

Respondents in all focus groups also highlighted that they would feel most comfortable with someone who had experienced sexual harassment personally, since that person would understand the circumstances and pain of the experience. Participants in focus group #3 (janitors who were *promotoras*) emphasized that many of them have lived through experiences of sexual harassment and sexual violence themselves and spoke about how this impacted their ability to connect with other janitors on the issue. One *promotora* commented that sharing her experiences of sexual harassment both in person and on social media had helped other janitors feel comfortable speaking to her about their experiences.

When asked about how they understood the term “*promotora*,” many participants in focus groups #1 and #2 defined *promotoras* as janitors who have been *professionally trained* (emphasis ours) on the issue of sexual harassment, and who share information on sexual harassment and educate other janitors about their rights through conversations and trainings. In the survey question included in the janitorial survey, “trained peer” was meant to evoke an association with “*promotora*.” However, as noted above, what emerged in the focus groups was that some participants associated “*promotora*” just as much, if not more, with the term “professionally trained advocate.” The survey results should be interpreted with this ambiguity in mind; due to the apparent measurement error in the wording of the question, comfort levels with *promotoras* may be higher than the results for the “trained peer” category indicate. The discussion section addresses further how the janitorial survey results should be interpreted alongside the focus group results.

Some focus group respondents described reasons why it may be difficult to discuss sexual harassment with their coworkers (importantly, they were often speaking here about fellow janitors at their own

“With a supervisor, it’s hard to share what is going on and it is difficult because there is no trust and there is a fear of retribution... You go to human resources at the company, they see the problem, and they don’t do anything—nobody takes responsibility for what is going on—they really don’t care about the workers and they pretend to be blind and they fail.”
worksite, rather than janitors who might be peer educators across the industry). In focus group #1, two respondents said they would hesitate to speak to coworkers about the issue because they feared coworkers might not be neutral, might not respect their confidentiality, or might not do anything out of fear of losing their own job. Two respondents in focus group #2 explained their general caution about opening up to coworkers about the issue of sexual harassment. One said that, even though she viewed outsiders as less trustworthy, she would be “careful about who to tell” among coworkers. She also said she would be more likely to feel a sense of connection when approached by someone who had also experienced sexual harassment, and that, recently, more people appeared to have the courage to speak up about sexual harassment because the topic was becoming less taboo—“not so much in the shadows anymore.”

Engagement with the Promotora and Compadre Programs

Of the 34 individuals responding to the promotora & compadre survey, more than three quarters of respondents (27 in total) said they were motivated to join the program out of a desire to help others through sharing resources and extending peer support; a number of these respondents connected this to the prevalence of workplace abuses, and, significantly, to their own experience as survivors of sexual harassment or assault. Some survivors commented that they did not want others to have to endure what they went through, and wanted to be able to help others going through similar experiences. Nearly half (16/34) of the survey respondents also articulated a desire to empower themselves through education, developing a deeper understanding of sexual harassment and
relevant rights and resources; many of those respondents connected this, in turn, to being able to better educate their peers. Two in five respondents (14/34)—including one who reported “seeing how coworkers don’t respect others”—noted that changing workplace culture had been a motivation for becoming a promotora or compadre.

The vast majority of respondents (33/35) indicated that they had a better understanding of their workplace rights since participating in the promotora or compadre program. All respondents reported that they were more capable of advocating for themselves and had improved their ability to listen to others, and most (33/35) noted that they were more capable of advocating for others. Most respondents (32/35) also said they felt better able to teach others about their rights.

Respondents identified three major elements of being a promotora or compadre that they found empowering. Two of these themes related directly to connecting with other janitors: being able to help others through public speaking, training, listening to others’ experiences, and/or providing guidance (12/35), and the capacity to talk about sexual harassment in a more open and informed manner (10/35). Pointing to the links between connecting with other janitors and overcoming the personal pain of experiencing abuses, one respondent noted that she “can finally talk about sexual harassment without crying.”

Knowledge of relevant rights, laws, resources, and tools for responding were also identified by many respondents (15/35) as being empowering. “I feel strong,” said one respondent, “because I can defend my rights.” In a number of cases, as in the question on motivations, educating oneself was connected to being able to educate others. Among the other themes mentioned as empowering, a smaller number of respondents (3/35) noted culture change, including one who spoke about “being able to change the toxic culture.” Yet, many (7/34) also noted the challenges involved in “changing other people’s mentality” and “changing the toxic culture.”

Over a quarter of respondents (10/34) identified educating others as a central challenge they are taking on as a promotora or compadre—including through public speaking, being an instructor, and taking more classes to be better prepared to support coworkers. Relatedly, some of the respondents (5/34) mentioned undertaking the challenge of developing “soft” skills such as being supportive, positive, calm, and flexible. Four respondents explicitly mentioned taking on the challenge of demonstrating to coworkers that “silence is not good” and “educating others so they can speak out.”

A substantial majority of participants in the promotora program (24/34) mentioned learning leadership skills and how to create and conduct professional training as key benefits. Ten out of 34 respondents indicated appreciation for the professionals involved in the training and the teaching methodology employed. Suggestions for future development of the program included additional training (8/34) around a variety of issues such as information about relevant legal issues and “how to handle someone in a crisis”; increased funding to support efforts (7/34); and expansion to more workplaces (8/34). The desire to meet and know more promotoras and organizations was reflected in more than two-thirds (5/8) of the responses that recommended expansion of the program.

The focus group of promotoras also provided some insight into how participants view the program. Promotoras highlighted the need to have courage and strength in order to “break the silence” about this issue and help other janitors do the same; some described becoming a promotora as a healing process that enabled them to feel “liberated” and able to speak of their personal experiences with sexual harassment and sexual violence. Finally, promotoras noted that another key part of their role is connecting janitors with resources and referring them to appropriate channels of support.
“Unfortunately, at that time I didn’t know the laws and rules we have to protect us. If I had reported everything that happened, we could have fought it... But because people treat trans people however they want and don’t always want to believe us, we sometimes hold back.”

—JADE
This section draws on in-depth interviews with three promotoras and one compadre to reveal in more detail the dynamics of sexual harassment in the janitorial industry as well as the leadership development experience of janitors who were trained through these programs. The Ya Basta! promotora program trains janitors to become peer educators on the issue of sexual harassment in the industry, fostering their capacity to take leadership in the workplace, facilitate trainings, support coworkers, and participate in advocacy and activism.

**Experiences of Sexual Harassment on the Job**

**Jade** is a trans woman from Mexico who started working in California at 18 years of age, holding a steady job at a bar and restaurant for 14 years until the establishment had to cut back their staff. As a trans woman navigating the job market, her experience was difficult and rife with discrimination—despite her cooking skills and work experience, Jade was turned away from one restaurant after another. It wasn’t until a friend pointed her to a janitorial position that Jade was able to secure a job, and one that was unionized, no less. Although racism and discrimination exist everywhere, Jade says, she notes that “thanks to the union, we’re not discriminated against as much and we don’t get humiliated much because we can defend ourselves with the union.”

*Racism always exists. And for those of us who are trans or gay, there are people at work who turn around to look at us and then want to stay away from us because they think the way we are is contagious.*

—JADE

“*We are living bridges. Something we say is that we crossed a bridge from a place where we were victims but now we are survivors. So this path that you go down to arrive at the other side is [made up of] all the people, all the organizations, and all the laws that can help us. So I can describe a promotora as a living bridge—we are living bridges who can help someone cross to the other side so they can be a survivor.*”

—VERONICA
“Being able to stop coworkers from saying vulgar things or attacking a woman—this was the change I’ve experienced since becoming a promotora. This happened at work even with a supervisor who was abusing his power... we managed to get him removed from this building... For me, it was a big accomplishment to get him out of there.”

—VERONICA
Although Jade has felt more protected from discrimination, she knows there is still a long road to stamping out sexual harassment in the janitorial industry. Among the various forms of sexual harassment that Jade has endured at work, one cost her a job for refusing to comply. A supervisor repeatedly tried to get Jade to give him oral sex, persisting day after day even after Jade repeatedly refused. She even had a recording on her phone of him approaching her from behind, touching himself.

*Some people see the way we are [transgender], and they think that we only exist for whatever they want to do with us. They think, “Come on, she’ll like it.”*

—JADE

As Jade continued to refuse her supervisor’s advances, he began assigning Jade more difficult tasks and treating her with hostility, trying to create reasons for the company to fire her. He would yell at her if she finished her tasks early, while saying nothing to the cisgender women janitors who finished early. Eventually, he called for her to be dismissed, falsely claiming that she had failed to perform the tasks she was assigned. Jade decided to go to the union office to report that she had been unjustly forced out of her job—although she didn’t feel quite ready to open up about the sexual harassment. There was an event happening that day at the union and the representatives weren’t able to fully attend to Jade, and she ended up deciding not to fight the unjust dismissal.

*I’d been working with the union for about three years when we watched this film Rape on the Night Shift. And I saw this was a real problem. I thought, “Wow, I haven’t experienced it in the same way as the women in the [documentary], how awful.” But then I thought about when someone had stalked me at work—and yes, I was scared! A man who worked in the offices [of the building where I clean] was secretly taking photos of me, and I started to get scared. Then he put a photo in the bin where we throw away the trash—he put a photo there, where I’m there with the vacuum cleaner and you can see all [my cleavage], and there were rolled up dollar bills all around it. I thought, “Well, he’s propositioning me,” and I felt scared when he did that, so I went to tell my supervisor. She said to me, “We can’t report this because this is a big account and it would create a scandal, so it’s better to avoid that. So it’s best if you just avoid going to that area in the hours when he’s there.” But this floor was open 24 hours and he was always there when I arrived at work. So, feeling that fear and then seeing that I had reported it and they did nothing—I thought to myself, there’s something to be done here, no? Why should someone have to keep silent, why should someone have to work in fear? With me it was just this experience of stalking, but then these other janitors who had to suffer rape were either not believed or they were ignored because [the perpetrators] were clients or tenants [of the building] who have a lot of money or maybe a lot of power, and [the company] doesn’t want to lose the account over something that happened to a worker.*

—VERONICA
Veronica described the impact sexual harassment had on her and her coworkers, saying that it leaves them feeling unsafe and uncomfortable, having to avoid certain areas to stay away from harassers, or trying to avoid being alone because they’re afraid. “You don’t want to go to work anymore because you think you’ll see him there,” Veronica added.

**Collective Action and Building Trust**

Most of the *promotoras* and *compadres* didn’t expect to be publicly taking on the issue of workplace sexual harassment. Even for the many *promotoras* who have endured sexual harassment and other forms of gendered violence, their pathway into the program was more likely to start with reaching out to a coworker, organization, or union regarding a different workplace challenge. The taboo subject of sexual harassment and sexual violence comes to light as trust builds—by hearing peers speak out, sensing safety in numbers, and collectively learning about rights.

What María, a non-union janitor, first noticed was a wage theft issue. At the time, María didn’t know there were laws that could protect her and her coworkers from working extra hours without pay, but she began taking leadership in calling out injustices anyway. She would lodge complaints with supervisors and encouraged her coworkers to do the same.

*I didn’t know anything about [the law at the time], but I did this anyway. And I motivated my coworkers not to let [the company] get away with it, to also make complaints... Even though I didn’t know my rights or even that I had rights, I stood up for my coworkers and defended myself too.*

—MARÍA

María began seeing the different ways janitors were taking action to change their industry. When she learned that a group of janitors were carrying out a hunger strike to pressure the California governor to sign a bill instituting increased regulation and oversight in the janitorial industry, María decided to join them. It was here that María first heard janitors open up about their experiences of workplace sexual harassment and assault.

*At the time, I was going through a separation. I was a victim and I’m now a survivor of domestic violence. I endured it for around 20 years. And this is part of the same [issue], because all types of violence go hand in hand—sexual harassment, sexual assault, rape, and domestic violence. Often these different kinds of violence are also intertwined. So I decided to take the classes and become a promotora because I wanted to heal. That’s when I began to heal what I experienced with domestic violence, through my activism with the promotora program.*

—MARÍA

Through the *promotora* program, María ended up finding a space where she could open up about her experience with domestic violence, heal, and stand alongside other women in drawing the connections among different forms of gendered violence. Jade also didn’t originally plan on taking action in response to sexual harassment—she didn’t seriously consider it until her first time joining a march with the union, when she first experienced what solidarity and collective action feels like.

*I was interested in joining this program more than anything to help my community—I say that as someone who is marginalized. Honestly, when I first started getting involved it wasn’t serious—they invited me to come to a march, and I thought, “OK, I’ll go see what this is.” But once it started, I saw that it was beautiful—I liked it because you could feel the energy that you’re fighting for your rights, that you’re fighting and they’re paying attention, because they stop harassing you in general, and because the community is helping us and supporting us so much.*

—JADE

Ricardo, a father of six originally from Mexico City, had been working as a janitor for about a year when he noticed the company was committing various labor violations. It was when he went to report these violations that he found out he was a member
“When it’s time for me to teach someone about what’s happening, I think of my four daughters, because I don’t want them to have to go through this. Two of them are married, and I need to teach them what a healthy relationship is. I also want to prepare [my daughters] to have a voice and to be able to speak up and report [anything that happens]—that they don’t have to stay silent about what happens to them.”

—MARÍA
of a union. He became involved in organizing with
the union from that day forward, and became more
active over the years as he saw the impact they
were having on changing conditions in the industry.
Years later, when Ricardo joined other union
members in conducting outreach about legislation
to prevent wage theft, he began to realize that
sexual harassment was a serious problem in the
industry. The group of worker-leaders met janitors
in non-union workplaces, and while discussing the
issue of wage theft, they began hearing stories
about the other abuses workers were facing—
including sexual harassment.

“This is what motivated me [to become a
compadre]... we began to see what was
happening in our industry, and also among
union workers. We got more involved in this
issue as we heard the complaints...”
—RICARDO

Changing Workplace Culture
The promotoras and compadres describe how
their training has prepared them to intervene in
toxic workplace dynamics that range from lewd
comments in the cafeteria to supervisors abusing
their power. Promotoras and compadres view
changing workplace culture as a critical part of
their role, and recognize the need to respond not
only to blatant abuses but also to the everyday
comments and behaviors that perpetuate a broader
acceptance of harassment, stigma, and victim-
blaming. Veronica spoke about confronting male
coworkers whose inappropriate comments were
driving women to avoid the cafeteria. She informed
them that what they were doing was sexual
harassment, that it was illegal, and that it could get
them fired.

“Being able to stop coworkers from saying
vulgar things or attacking a woman—this was
the change I’ve [experienced since becoming
a promotora]. This happened at work even
with a supervisor who was abusing his
power... we managed to get him removed
from this building... For me, it was a big
accomplishment to get him out of there.”
—VERONICA

Ricardo describes the role of the compadres:

“Compadres are a group of men who are here
to truly support the promotoras, to have their
backs. And so that people see that as men,
we too can support women who’ve suffered
some type of harassment. ...so that we can
break this taboo among men... that we can
teach other men how to leave behind this
sexism. That when people complain that men
are saying bad things to them and men say,
“Oh, well she enjoys it”—no. Our responsibility
now is to tell them no, it doesn’t mean they
like it. If someone is being harassed by a
manager, the problem is the manager, not her.
We have to be the ones telling them this isn’t
OK. So above all, it’s about supporting the
promotoras—they are the leaders...”
—RICARDO

Impact of the Ya Basta! Program
Interviewees described the Ya Basta! program as
a revelatory experience for many promotoras who
realized that behavior they thought they had to
endure and stay silent about was actually sexual
harassment—and that they have the right and the
capacity to take a stand against it in the workplace.

“If you know your rights, it’s much easier to
defend yourself—because, well, I didn’t have
any idea of the rights we have as workers... I
was used to the fact that men would say things
to you or follow you, follow you around your
work area... or look at you in a perverted way... I
thought this was normal, but now I understand
that it’s not normal and they can’t do that
because it’s harassment... These are things that
surprise you [to learn], it makes you say, “Wow,
we let things like this happen without knowing
they aren’t allowed to do this.”
—JADE

The process of learning their rights and sharing
a space for collective healing is a critical step in
enabling women who have experienced sexual
harassment and other forms of gender-based
violence to take on leadership roles and confront
the issue in their workplaces. Connecting with
women who share similar experiences allows them to build trust and collectively work on healing trauma, as described above in “Collective action and building trust.” For many women, seeing fellow janitors with similar experiences in leadership and training roles is an important first step in imagining that change is possible.

There’s value in seeing people like you who’ve been affected. So when you tell people that the ones who will be training them are people who’ve been in the same situation as them, they already feel freer. Little by little they feel like it’s possible. This is the best part about all working together and being able to share the message… Because now I’ve had the experience of hearing from compañeras who we’ve helped, and they’ve overcome… and the pain they had now becomes strength to help more people.

—RICARDO

All four interviewees described effects of being a promotora or compadre that spill over beyond the workplace, speaking of how they have shared the learnings within their families and how their training has made them better able to respond to and communicate in challenging situations.

When it’s time for me to teach someone about what’s happening, I think of my four daughters, because I don’t want them to have to go through this. Two of them are married, and I need to teach them what a healthy relationship is. I also want to prepare [my daughters] to have a voice and to be able to speak up and report [anything that happens]—that they don’t have to stay silent about what happens to them.

—MARÍA

As the saying goes, the union makes us strong, right? And the more women we have, the more we can reach more places and more people, and the message can be spread to everyone. To give you an example… the way I was able to find a solution to [the marital problems] I was experiencing in my home—every woman is making these changes in each of their workplaces. So it’s like a network—we’re a group together here and then we spread out to here and there. And at the same time, my children will be learning this information, and they will form their own families, and there it becomes another network, another chain. That’s why this work is important.

—VERÓNICA

Looking Ahead

The promotoras who were interviewed echoed their fellow promotoras in the focus groups in articulating a vision of the program expanding—within their industry, and perhaps to other industries and even other countries.

The way I think about it is, if you’re going to make a house, you need a cement foundation—the promotora training is the foundation… It gives you power, and I believe every woman needs empowerment—to know what her rights are, to learn the differences between sexual harassment, domestic violence, and sexual assault, and what to do when they happen. I think it would be excellent if this training were spread all throughout the country, because every woman would experience this empowerment like I have now.

—MARÍA

In early 2019, María also became a lead promotora for the East Los Angeles Women’s Center program and she now certifies anti-violence promotoras there. She commented that she feels especially motivated by the work of training youth about healthy relationships.

Jade spoke of the value of the janitors’ promotora program in creating a space that was safe and supportive, and committed to fighting against harassment and discrimination. She expressed her desire for other trans women to join the program in order to then be able to support their community:
“This is what motivated me [to become a compadre]... we began to see what was happening in our industry, and also among union workers. We got more involved in this issue as we heard the complaints…”

—RICARDO
I’d like to invite my community to these types of trainings because I’m the only transgender person in the group. Even though people criticize us, criticize the idea of a trans women doing these types of trainings and wanting to give classes on this… I hope more women will have the courage to take these classes to help our community.

—JADE

Veronica initially became more involved in the union because she wanted to learn more about her workplace rights, in order to stand up for herself and her coworkers as they dealt with a supervisor. She became a union steward, then joined the bargaining team negotiating the union contract, and eventually trained to become a promotora. Today, she is a co-founder of the Ya Basta! Center and a professional peer-to-peer advocate in sexual harassment prevention, with a strong vision for the possibilities that lie ahead.71

I believe we can start spreading [this program]. We graduated as trainers to be able to give this type of training in workplaces. Honestly, I see myself in the future going to other industries and telling them, “This is what we were going through, and this is how we overcame it. So now we want to give this model to other industries.” …This promotora program can be expanded because it works... Ultimately, I want to have a Ya Basta! Center in my home country [of El Salvador] because I see the need there. I was invited to give a workshop there, and the union leaders were all so interested in the work we’re doing. They asked, “So is this something we can apply here in El Salvador?” and I said “Yes!” And they asked who could give them training—well, here I am. So, I see a future in which I’m helping the women in my country.

—VERONICA
Given the multiple axes of vulnerability that janitors experience, it is perhaps not surprising that focus group participants and interviewees described a slow and gradual process of feeling enough trust and security to speak out about workplace sexual harassment.
Discussion

The surveys, focus groups, and interviews conducted for this report indicate widespread experiences of sexual harassment and assault among this workforce. Participants reported unwanted sexual behavior from a range of sources, including fellow janitors, supervisors, and others working in the buildings they clean. The impact of sexual harassment was described by focus group participants and interviewees who recounted working in fear, grappling with trauma in silence, and detrimental impacts on job stability.

Despite the formidable barriers to confronting unwanted sexual behavior in this context, many participants reported that they had taken action in different ways; indeed, it bears underscoring that just one in five women and slightly less than half of men who had experienced or witnessed unwanted sexual behavior said they had not taken some form of action in response. Yet the focus group responses and interviews shed light on the factors discouraging janitors from reporting sexual harassment, as well as the serious barriers to justice that janitors often confront even if they do report harassment. Participants’ descriptions revealed that most janitors who had reported harassment to supervisors or other company representatives encountered either employer inaction or retaliation for reporting. This contributed to a widespread sense that workplace culture and practice often fosters sexual harassment and fails to hold perpetrators accountable; the extensive barriers that prevent janitors from speaking out in the first place are discussed further below.

Differential Impact

The survey results suggest that, as elsewhere, experiences of sexual harassment in the California janitorial industry are highly gendered. Women participants were more likely than men to report experiences of sexual harassment on the job. Women reporting unwanted sexual behavior were also much more likely than men reporting such experiences to say they had been targeted at some point by a supervisor. This is significant because it suggests that women in this workplace context are more frequently targeted by those who have power and authority over their work, careers, and pay. As noted in the background section and as borne out in the focus group discussion and interviews, gender often intersects with other factors, including immigration status, economic insecurity, and industry structure, to make women in this context highly vulnerable to retaliation for speaking out.

The research also indicates that the impact of workplace sexual harassment on careers and livelihoods is gendered. Many women, but no male respondents, said they had changed jobs within the industry as a result of unwanted sexual behavior. In addition to the trauma involved in navigating unwanted sexual behavior, changing jobs may be linked to a broader set of long-term implications for women’s livelihoods and career trajectories. This could ultimately include feeling compelled to leave the industry or the workforce entirely—a potential outcome that our survey was unable to capture, but one that has been found in other research on the consequences of workplace sexual harassment.

The higher proportion of women than men who reported taking action in response to unwanted sexual behavior could reflect their experience of these behaviors as more serious or impactful. That said, the focus group discussions underscored the fact that even those who experience very severe forms of harassment and violence often do not feel empowered to report these behaviors through officially designated channels or to take other forms of action. Some men may not speak out about experiences of harassment due to the specific kinds of shame and stigma facing men targeted for sexual harassment and assault.
The pattern noted in the sidebar “Centering the Margins” suggests that gender identity may shape experiences of unwanted sexual behavior in ways that surveys often fail to address. While the fact that four out of five gender-non-conforming respondents said they had experienced unwanted sexual behavior is not a “statistically significant” result given the small number of survey respondents involved, it points to a reality that may be immensely consequential for these individuals and other gender-non-conforming workers whose experiences often remain hidden from view. Jade’s story in the “Voices of Promotoras and Compadres” section of this report provides a window into some of the challenges faced by transgender workers. The focus group participant who drew attention to the prevalence of sexual harassment of LGBTQ+ janitors noted that this was often encouraged by the broader workplace culture.

**Fear and Silence**

Even as workplace sexual harassment has become more salient in the national consciousness, our research shows a complex array of factors that continue to promote silence around the issue in California’s janitorial industry. The focus group discussions highlighted a range of workplace power dynamics that keep people from coming forward and stymie attempts to hold perpetrators accountable, including threats, intimidation, and victim-blaming from superiors and coworkers. In the “Voices of Promotoras and Compadres” section, Veronica’s story of being stalked by an office worker in a building she cleaned—and being told by a supervisor that lodging a formal complaint would jeopardize an important company account—shows how the structure of the industry can deflect accountability and help to enforce silence. Various aspects of people’s personal lives and social positions were also raised in the focus groups and interviews as factors contributing to silence, including hostile family dynamics and tenuous immigration status.

Threats of being fired, deported, or reported to the authorities operate as a silencing mechanism, exploiting the particular vulnerabilities of a largely immigrant workforce confronted with chronic economic insecurity.74 Coming forward with experiences of sexual harassment is generally difficult, but all the more so for those whose ability to support their families or remain in the country might be at stake. Such challenges are likely amplified for workers in the contracted-out segment of the industry, who generally have lower wages and benefits and fewer job protections.75

Though focus group participants and interviewees often described feeling pressured into silence by a readily identifiable set of actors, their comments and reflections also suggested that power frequently operates in more diffuse ways to keep people from coming forward. Many spoke about a toxic workplace culture tacitly enabled or sometimes actively fostered by those in positions of power. Even for those who had not yet come forward with their experiences, fear of being stigmatized, retaliated against, or ignored often prevents people from doing so, leading many janitors to carry the painful burden of sexual harassment and violence on their own, and reinforcing the impunity of perpetrators. Lack of knowledge about relevant rights and about what constitutes sexual harassment was also named as a significant obstacle to addressing the problem; this intersects with the challenges surrounding immigration status in the industry, as participants highlighted that some immigrant workers think they do not have any protections or recourse because of their immigration status.

The experiences recounted by focus group participants and interviewees suggest that the silence surrounding sexual harassment has to be understood at both a structural and a deeply personal level. The forces compelling many janitors to remain silent are so strong that the inability to speak and seek justice for oneself or one’s coworkers becomes internalized. Breaking the silence would thus seem to require both a shift in broad workplace practices and culture and a process of personal empowerment and working through trauma. As discussed below, the Ya Basta! promotora model aims to bridge these two levels by connecting personal growth with solidarity and collective healing.
Trust and Leadership

Given the multiple axes of vulnerability that janitors experience, it is perhaps not surprising that focus group participants and interviewees described a slow and gradual process of feeling enough trust and security to speak out about workplace sexual harassment. In light of the importance of creating workplace policies and laws that are informed by survivors’ actual experiences, it is worth drawing particular attention to the perspectives of those most directly impacted by sexual harassment and sexual violence in the workplace. The janitorial survey and focus group discussions together suggest that women who have experienced sexual harassment are significantly less comfortable speaking about it with supervisors and company human resources (HR) representatives than with trained peers or advocates.

The findings on levels of comfort speaking about sexual harassment are complex. As noted above, confusion around terminology may have led some portion of survey respondents to think “professionally trained advocates” referred to promotoras, creating a downward bias in how the term “trained peer” captured comfort levels with promotoras. Overall, the focus group participants placed comfort levels with trained peers and trained advocates closer together than the survey results, and even lower comfort levels with supervisors and HR representatives were indicated. That said, the focus group discussions revealed some reasons why a portion of janitors might have issues speaking with outside advocates; some participants said they would feel less comfortable talking to an outside advocate because they would prefer speaking to someone with a similar background. Other participants noted their misgivings around speaking with coworkers due to fears that person might not be neutral or respect confidentiality.

Promotoras themselves also commented in the focus group and in the promotora & compadre survey that gaining the trust of fellow workers in the industry was a central part of their role, and they highlighted how expanding awareness of the promotora program (and increasing the number of promotoras present in workplaces) would bolster their capacity to build trust among janitors and support them in speaking out about sexual harassment. A number of respondents to the promotora & compadre survey pointed to the inherent challenges of educating others about the issue of sexual harassment and encouraging them to speak out, suggesting that changing workplace culture and practice on this issue is a necessary but long-term undertaking.

Responses from the promotora & compadre survey regarding motivations for becoming a promotora or compadre pointed to a reciprocal relationship between learning and teaching, and between personal leadership development and collective empowerment. Promotoras and compadres expressed being motivated by a desire to empower themselves through learning about sexual harassment and relevant rights, laws, and resources, in order to then be able to educate their coworkers, change a toxic workplace culture, and collectively “break the silence” about workplace sexual harassment and violence. Given that many promotoras also traced their motivation to their personal experiences with sexual harassment, sexual violence, and intimate partner violence, this learning and self-empowerment seems to involve healing of pain and trauma, and promote feelings of greater security and satisfaction at work, as well. One person who joined the program because of her own experience with sexual harassment said becoming a promotora “changed [her] life.”

As quoted in the “Voices of Promotoras and Compadres” section, Veronica described the role of promotoras as embarking on a path of healing and leadership development in order to help other survivors do the same: “Something we say is that we crossed a bridge from a place where we were victims but now we are survivors[...] So I can describe a promotora as a living bridge—we are living bridges who can help someone cross to the other side so they can be a survivor.”
Implications

Develop interventions that are trusted and shaped by workers and survivors.

Silence and inertia on the issue of sexual harassment can only be challenged through creating channels of reporting and training that feel trustworthy and accessible for workers. The janitorial survey results show that cleaning company supervisors and human resources (HR) representatives are likely to be the ones conducting anti-sexual harassment training. However, according to the focus groups, those with personal experiences of harassment often face employer retaliation or inaction, breeding distrust of supervisors and other company representatives. The janitorial survey and focus groups also showed that survivors are significantly more comfortable speaking with trained peers and advocates about sexual harassment than with supervisors or HR representatives, and that comfort with peer educators is bolstered by shared background and work experience. Together, these findings suggest that trained peers and advocates should have more of a role in training and reporting systems, while the involvement of supervisors and HR representatives should be carefully calibrated in order not to directly undermine efforts to confront and prevent workplace sexual harassment. Given the particular vulnerabilities of workers in this industry, the widespread stigma surrounding sexual harassment, and the serious issues with employer accountability, it is especially important to pursue a strategy that fosters worker and survivor leadership in crafting and implementing solutions.

Create systems that foster survivor and worker leadership.

Recent discussions around sexual harassment and gender-based violence have emphasized the importance of a survivor- and worker-led perspective in crafting effective and appropriate responses. For survivors to take leadership on the issue of sexual harassment and violence at work and in society, it is important to create leadership development pathways that are healing-centered and trauma-informed. Our research findings demonstrate that many janitors feel pressure to remain silent about their experiences because of a combination of factors—employer retaliation or inaction, widespread stigma and victim-blaming, and vulnerabilities stemming from economic insecurity and immigration status. Janitors who had become promotoras and compadres described the personal transformation they experienced through learning how to confront the issue, taking action alongside others, and engaging in personal and collective healing of trauma. For many workers who have long endured trauma on their own, the collective dimension of healing is critical, enabling them to break their silence, find a greater sense of security, and support their peers. It is worth noting that this approach requires a substantial investment of time and resources, and therefore a serious commitment on the part of unions and worker organizations to invest in long-term, sustainable change that places worker-survivors at the center.
**Treat sexual harassment as a core workplace issue.**

Workplace sexual harassment and violence are often left out of conversations about “job quality” and what are considered to be central worker issues. However, as reflected in the bargaining survey distributed by the Service Employees International Union—United Service Workers West (SEIU-USWW) a few years ago, sexual harassment is a core concern for many workers. Moreover, as evident in the fact that many women survivors responding to the janitorial survey said they had changed jobs as a result of unwanted sexual behavior, it often affects people's jobs, seniority, and career trajectories. There is a substantial body of evidence on the psychological and economic impacts of workplace sexual harassment; however, there is still a long way to go in understanding how these impacts play out in different parts of the low-wage economy, and in developing responses that fully address the complex ways in which sexual harassment and other forms of harm are intertwined. Taking sexual harassment seriously as a workplace issue should entail recognizing it within a broader set of workplace power relations that engender various forms of abuse and exploitation.

**Build partnerships across silos.**

The survivor-led and worker-centered approach to confronting sexual harassment developed by the Maintenance Cooperation Trust Fund, SEIU-USWW, and other members of the Ya Basta! Coalition warrants further study and reflection. Unions and other worker organizations have often neglected issues such as sexual harassment that have significant economic and non-economic impacts for their members, but are not considered “bread and butter” worker issues; some anti-violence organizations have failed to fully extend their reach to the most marginalized populations and into the workplace and worker justice arena. The coalition approach documented in this report is an instructive example for future efforts to expand and deepen the work of these movements—together. This multi-pronged strategy integrates worker and survivor leadership development, peer education, and collaboration among labor organizations, legal advocacy groups, and anti-violence organizations, creating the kinds of deep alliances needed to address this entrenched issue.
Address harassment and discrimination along multiple dimensions.

The janitorial survey revealed that four of five gender-non-conforming individuals had experienced unwanted sexual behavior during their time in the industry, and fears related to immigration status were cited by several focus group participants as having a chilling effect on seeking recourse. Recent years have seen an overall rise in hate crimes; an increase in policies and rhetoric targeting immigrant communities, black and brown people, and religious minorities; and a rolling back of protections for LGBTQ+ people, including specific actions affecting transgender people. In this environment, addressing the multiple intersecting identities that intensify vulnerability to workplace sexual harassment and other forms of harassment and discrimination is all the more important. All advocacy and social service organizations, unions, and government agencies tasked with protecting janitorial workers’ rights should view addressing multiple axes of discrimination as squarely within their mandate.

Engage men as allies.

The findings from the janitorial survey indicate that, as in other settings, women and gender-non-conforming people are disproportionately impacted by sexual harassment. Previous work suggests that sexual harassment training and other related interventions can have the unintended consequence of generating backlash among men who may feel a sense of threat to what they consider “normal.” These dynamics, coupled with the fact that a substantial number of men reported experiences of unwanted sexual behavior, too, suggest the importance of engaging men—particularly straight, cisgender men—as allies in the fight against sexual harassment. The compadre program that has been developed by SEIU-USWW appears to be a promising intervention in this regard, seeking to engage male janitors around cultivating a more gender-equitable workplace culture and addressing the ways in which norms of toxic masculinity are harmful to men as well.
Create pathways for more representative and accountable leadership.

The janitorial survey results show that supervisors are often the culprits of unwanted sexual behavior, and the focus group discussions suggest that supervisors often give tacit or explicit approval to harassing behavior in the buildings under their charge. These results should be understood in the context of research showing that skewed gender representation—particularly cases where men hold more powerful positions, and women are concentrated in lower-status positions—often contributes to conditions in which sexual harassment flourishes.81 More immediately, these results should be viewed in relation to the history of how sexual harassment was prioritized within SEIU-USWW, which coincided with the ascension of several women into key leadership positions within the union. All of this points to the importance of changing patterns of representation at every level in organizations operating within this industry.

Recent work has also argued that, in addition to skewed gender representation in positions of power, the unchecked authority of managers and supervisors often contributes to a workplace environment that breeds sexual harassment.82 Thus, in addition to making representation more equitable along gender and other lines, it is equally critical to rein in the unconstrained authority of those in positions of power—regardless of identity. One meaningful way of taking action toward equity and accountability is to continue supporting approaches to worker representation and leadership development that place survivors and marginalized workers at the center of informing and driving change on the issues that most impact them.
Author Bios

SANJAY PINTO
Sanjay Pinto is a fellow at The Worker Institute at Cornell and the Rutgers School of Management and Labor Relations, and a consultant with the 1199SEIU Training and Employment Funds. Current projects include survey research on workplace sexual and racial harassment, strategic research on the intersection of union representation and worker ownership, case studies on the foundations of multiracial solidarity, and a scan of how labor organizations are using digital tools. Sanjay has worked and consulted with numerous worker, civil rights, and philanthropic organizations and has taught courses on labor, political economy, and public policy at Columbia, Princeton, and Rutgers. He has a PhD in Sociology and Social Policy from Harvard University and an MSc in Development Studies from the London School of Economics and Political Science.

ZOË WEST
Zoë West is an anthropologist, educator, and oral historian whose work centers on labor and migration. Her current research projects focus on alternative labor organizing models, precarity, and sexual harassment in the workplace. She teaches courses on labor, immigration, and oral history at Columbia University and the Harry Van Arsdale Jr. School of Labor Studies at SUNY Empire State College. As a founding member of Rhiza Collective, Zoë works with organizations to develop frameworks for implementing collaborative research, leadership development, narrative and healing work, and political education. She edited and compiled the oral history collection Nowhere to Be Home: Narratives from Survivors of Burma’s Military Regime (McSweeney’s, 2011; NDSP Books, 2016). Zoë has a PhD in Social Anthropology from the University of Oxford.

KC WAGNER
KC Wagner chairs the Equity at Work Initiative at The Worker Institute at Cornell ILR. She has specialized in the prevention of sexual harassment, gender bias, bullying, gender-based violence, and promoting inclusiveness in the workplace for over 30 years. KC has provided training to worker centers, unions, corporations, non-profit, educational, and government organizations in diverse industries, professions, and workplace settings. She has also provided educational coaching to those who have engaged in harassing behaviors, developed programs that engage men as allies in addressing sexual and gender-based violence, testified as an expert witness in several landmark sexual harassment cases, and engaged in applied and participatory research on related issues. In New York, she has received recognition for her work around sexual and gender-based violence from Cornell’s Advisory Committee on the Status of Women, the New York State Coalition Against Domestic Violence, and the New York Metropolitan Chapter of the US National Committee for UN Women. KC holds a Masters in Social Work from Hunter College School of Social Work and a Master’s of Labor and Industrial Relations from Rutgers University.
**THE MAINTENANCE COOPERATION TRUST FUND**

The Maintenance Cooperation Trust Fund (MCTF) is a California statewide watchdog organization whose mission is to abolish illegal and unfair business practices in the janitorial industry. Guided by this goal, MCTF investigates allegations of employment law violations in the non-union sector of the janitorial industry and partners with local, state, and federal enforcement agencies to hold irresponsible employers accountable. Established in 1999 by the Service Employees International Union—United Service Workers West (SEIU-USWW) and janitorial signatory employers, MCTF was created to defend the market from unlawful competition. In 2015, MCTF partnered with SEIU-USWW in a comprehensive effort to expose the issue of unreported rape and harassment in the industry. This effort includes non-union janitors completing a leadership program on educating other janitors about sexual harassment and violence. As first responders in the janitorial industry, MCTF saw firsthand how poverty, isolation, and predatory, undercapitalized employers can make female janitors vulnerable to male supervisors who seek to take advantage. Since its inception, the fund has helped win more than $80 million in unpaid wages for non-unionized janitors and facilitated the criminal prosecution of more than 40 contractors.

[janitorialwatch.org](https://www.janitorialwatch.org)

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**SERVICE EMPLOYEES INTERNATIONAL UNION—UNITED SERVICE WORKERS WEST**

SEIU United Service Workers West represents more than 45,000 janitors, security officers, airport service workers, and other property service workers across California. We are proud to be a part of the Service Employees International Union, an organization of 2.2 million members united by the belief in the dignity and worth of workers and the services they provide and dedicated to improving the lives of workers and their families and creating a more just and humane society. SEIU United Service Workers West’s mission is to lead the way to a more just and humane society; building power for all service workers by developing member leadership and activism, winning strong contracts, organizing unorganized service workers, building political and community power, and engaging in direct action that demonstrates our strength and determination to win.

[seiu-usww.org](https://www.seiu-usww.org)
FUTURES WITHOUT VIOLENCE

For more than 30 years, FUTURES has been providing groundbreaking programs, policies, and campaigns that empower individuals and organizations working to end violence against women and children around the world. Striving to reach new audiences and transform social norms, we train professionals such as health providers, judges, workplace leaders, educators, and coaches on improving responses to violence and abuse. We also work with advocates, policymakers, and others to build sustainable community leadership and educate people everywhere about the importance of respect and healthy relationships. FUTURES leads the only national resource center solely dedicated to addressing the impacts of domestic violence, sexual violence and harassment, and stalking on workers and the workplace, providing information, resources, training, and technical assistance to employers, workers, workers’ rights and advocacy organizations, and other workplace stakeholders to develop and implement proactive, multi-stakeholder programs to prevent violence and harassment and improve responses to ensure all workers can work free from harassment and abuse.

futureswithoutviolence.org

THE WORKER INSTITUTE AT CORNELL

The Worker Institute at Cornell, an institute of the ILR School, engages in research and education on contemporary labor issues, to generate innovative thinking and solutions to problems related to work, economy and society. The institute brings together researchers, educators and students with practitioners in labor, business and policymaking to confront growing economic and social inequalities, in the interests of working people and their families. A core value of The Worker Institute is that worker rights and collective representation are vital to a fair economy, robust democracy and just society.

ilr.cornell.edu/worker-institute/about-worker-institute
APPENDIX A

Survey of Janitors in California

Oral consent

This research is being conducted by the Worker institute at Cornell in partnership with the Maintenance Cooperation Trust Fund, SEIU-USWW, and Futures Without Violence.

The purpose of the research is to understand whether people working as janitors in California know their workplace rights concerning sexual harassment and what factors would contribute to their understanding of these workplace rights.

Your participation in this research is important. The information that is collected will be used to shape policy recommendations about training workers on their rights and options concerning sexual harassment in California’s cleaning industry.

By continuing with the survey you have agreed to be a participant in the study. However, your participation in the research is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take the survey. You may also skip questions that you do not feel comfortable answering and stop taking the survey at any time. After completing your survey, please put it in the envelope supplied, seal it, and hand it to the facilitator.

Some of the research questions may cause you to think about difficult experiences that you have had. If you feel like you need immediate support, you can contact the National Sexual Assault Hotline at 1-800-656-4673. If you would like more information about local resources for survivors of sexual harassment and assault, you can call the California Coalition Against Sexual Assault (CALCASA) at 1-916-446-2520.

The individual information you provide will never be shared with anyone. In any report based on the results of this research, it will not be possible to identify you.

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, you may contact KC Wagner at kcw8@cornell.edu or 212-340-2826. If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a subject in this study, you may contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at 607-255-8994, or www.irb.cornell.edu. You may also report your concerns anonymously through Ethicspoint at www.hotline.cornell.edu or by calling 1-866-293-3077.
1. In the past year, have you worked as a janitor (cleaner, custodian, day porter, waxer, etc.) cleaning offices or other places of business in California?
   - Yes
   - No

2. How many hours do you work as a janitor in an average week?
   - 40 or more
   - Less than 40

3. For how many years have you worked as a janitor?
   - Less than 1 year
   - 1-5 years
   - 6-9 years
   - 10-15 years
   - More than 15 years

4. Are you a member of a union?
   - Yes
   - No
   - Don’t know

5. While working as a janitor, have you experienced sexual harassment? Sexual harassment is unwelcome verbal, visual, or non-verbal/physical conduct of a sexual nature/based on someone’s sex.
   - Yes
   - No

6. While working as a janitor, have you ever experienced any unwanted sexual behaviors such as (but not limited to) the following?
   - Sexual teasing or jokes that made you feel uncomfortable
   - Unwanted texts, emails, phone calls, photos, videos, or other sexual messages
   - Comments about your looks or being told to change your appearance to look more “sexy”
   - Leering or excessive staring in a way that makes you uncomfortable
   - Being touched or grabbed in a way you did not want
   - Sexual activity against your will or without your consent
   - Being asked to perform a sexual favor
   - Agreeing to a sexual activity because it would have positive results—for example, better pay or shift
   - Being concerned with saying no to a sexual activity because it would have negative consequences—for example, you would be fired or your family would be affected
     - Yes, you have experienced such behaviors—Please continue to question #7
     - No, you have not experienced such behaviors—Please skip to question #8

7. If you have directly experienced sexual harassment or unwanted sexual behavior, who was the person/who were the people who engaged in this behavior? You can choose more than one answer.
   - A janitor
   - A manager or supervisor
   - A tenant in a building that you clean
   - Other workers in a building that you clean
   - Another person you have come across in your work as a janitor
8. Have you ever witnessed another janitor experiencing sexual harassment or unwanted sexual behavior at work?
   - Yes
   - No

9. While working as a janitor, have you ever done any of the following things after you experienced or witnessed sexual harassment or unwanted sexual behaviors? You can choose more than one answer.
   - Told the person doing the behavior to stop
   - Told a coworker
   - Reported it to a supervisor or another employer representative (such as someone from Human Resources)
   - Reported it to a union representative
   - Reached out to a community organization (for example, legal services, worker center, MCTF) for advice
   - Avoided the person engaging in the harassing/abusive behavior
   - Changed your job or position
   - Took another action - please write in here
   - You didn’t take any action
   - Does not apply because you have not experienced or witnessed sexual harassment or unwanted sexual behaviors at work

10. While working as a janitor, have you received any training at work on issues of sexual harassment?
   - Yes – Please continue to question #11
   - No – Please skip to question #13
   - Unsure

11. If you received training on sexual harassment in your work as a janitor, who provided the training? You may choose more than one answer.
   - A supervisor
   - A manager
   - A human resources representative
   - Outside representative or attorney brought in by the employer
   - Other, please specify:

12. If you received training on sexual harassment from your employer or a representative of your employer, what did you learn? You may choose more than one answer.
   - You learned how to recognize sexual harassment at the workplace.
   - You learned your workplace rights concerning sexual harassment.
   - You learned your employer’s policies and procedures concerning sexual harassment.
   - You learned how to report sexual harassment that you experience or witness/who to report it to.
   - You did not learn anything.
   - You are unsure of what you learned.
13. How you think the following would affect your learning in a training on workplace sexual harassment? You may choose more than one answer.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Would have a positive impact</th>
<th>Would have a negative impact</th>
<th>Would make no difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The training is conducted in an interactive way</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The training is in a place where you feel comfortable and safe</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The training is conducted in person</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The training is in a language you can easily understand</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being able to ask questions Instructor is knowledgeable on the subject</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructor is someone you feel you can trust</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructor has a cultural background similar to yours</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructor has similar work experience as you</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

14. How comfortable would you feel discussing and asking questions about workplace sexual harassment with each of the following?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very comfortable</th>
<th>Somewhat comfortable</th>
<th>Not very comfortable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A supervisor of yours who is trained in the subject</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Another company representative trained in the subject</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A peer trained in the subject (i.e., another janitor)</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A professionally trained anti-harassment advocate</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

15. What is your gender?
- ☐ Female
- ☐ Male
- ☐ Gender non-conforming

16. What is your age?
- ☐ 18-20
- ☐ 21-30
- ☐ 31-40
- ☐ 41-50
- ☐ 51-60
- ☐ More than 60
17. Do you identify as Hispanic/Latina/o?

☐ Yes  
☐ No

18. Which of the following best describes your racial/ethnic background? You may choose more than one answer.

☐ Black or African American
☐ Asian or Pacific Islander
☐ Native American or Alaskan Native
☐ Multiracial
☐ White or Caucasian
☐ Other

Thank you for completing this survey. After completing your survey, please put it in the envelope supplied, seal it, and hand it to the facilitator.

If you have experienced sexual harassment, there are organizations that can help. If you feel like you need immediate support, you can contact the National Sexual Assault Hotline at 1-800-656-4673 24 hours/day, 7 days/week. If you would like more information about local resources for survivors of sexual harassment and assault, you can call the California Coalition Against Sexual Assault (CALCASA) at 1-916-446-2520.
### APPENDIX B

**Tables and Figures**

### TABLE 1:
**Sources of Harassment Among Those Experiencing Unwanted Sexual Behavior**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Men</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A janitor</td>
<td>48.1% (50/104)</td>
<td>30.8% (8/26)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A manager or supervisor</td>
<td>47.2% (50/106)</td>
<td>12.0% (3/25)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A tenant in a building you clean</td>
<td>13.5% (14/104)</td>
<td>8.0% (2/25)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others workers in a building you clean</td>
<td>15.2% (16/105)</td>
<td>32.0% (8/25)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>8.7% (9/103)</td>
<td>4.0% (1/25)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### TABLE 2:
**Actions Taken by Victims of Unwanted Sexual Behavior in Response to Their Own Experiences of Harassment or Others They Witnessed**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Men</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Told the person doing the behavior to stop</td>
<td>55.1% (60/109)</td>
<td>38.7% (12/31)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Told a coworker</td>
<td>38.2% (50/106)</td>
<td>43.8% (3/25)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reported it to a supervisor or another employer representative</td>
<td>39.5% (45/114)</td>
<td>36.7% (19/30)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reported to a union representative*</td>
<td>28.4% (21/74)</td>
<td>13.6% (3/22)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reached out to a community organization for advice (e.g., legal services, MCTF)**</td>
<td>16.1% (5/31)</td>
<td>0.0% (0/3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoided the person engaging in the harassing/abusive behavior</td>
<td>24.8% (27/109)</td>
<td>11.5% (3/26)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changed your job or position</td>
<td>15.1% (16/106)</td>
<td>0.0% (0/25)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You didn’t take any action</td>
<td>20.0% (22/110)</td>
<td>48.6% (18/35)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Restricted the sample to union members  
** Restricted the sample to non-union members
### TABLE 3: Providers of Sexual Harassment Training

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Non-Union</th>
<th>Union</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Supervisor</td>
<td>38.1% (8/21)</td>
<td>38.4% (66/172)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manager</td>
<td>14.3% (3/21)</td>
<td>6.7% (11/165)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HR representative</td>
<td>20.0% (4/20)</td>
<td>30.6% (52/170)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outside representative</td>
<td>4.8% (1/21)</td>
<td>1.2% (2/166)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>15.0% (3/20)</td>
<td>13.3% (23/173)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### TABLE 4:
Janitors’ Comfort Levels Speaking About Sexual Harassment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>With a trained supervisor</th>
<th>Non-Union</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Very comfortable</th>
<th>Somewhat comfortable</th>
<th>Not very comfortable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Men</td>
<td></td>
<td>41.3% (31)</td>
<td>28.0% (21)</td>
<td>30.7% (23)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>53.6% (15)</td>
<td>10.7% (3)</td>
<td>35.7% (10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Union</td>
<td>Women</td>
<td></td>
<td>53.1% (129)</td>
<td>16.9% (41)</td>
<td>30.0% (73)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Men</td>
<td></td>
<td>66.0% (64)</td>
<td>17.5% (17)</td>
<td>16.5% (16)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>With a trained HR representative</th>
<th>Non-Union</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Very comfortable</th>
<th>Somewhat comfortable</th>
<th>Not very comfortable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Men</td>
<td></td>
<td>33.3% (22)</td>
<td>42.4% (28)</td>
<td>24.2% (16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>35.7% (10)</td>
<td>28.6% (8)</td>
<td>35.7% (10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Union</td>
<td>Women</td>
<td></td>
<td>54.7% (122)</td>
<td>25.6% (57)</td>
<td>19.7% (44)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Men</td>
<td></td>
<td>57.1% (52)</td>
<td>25.3% (23)</td>
<td>17.6% (16)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>With a trained peer</th>
<th>Non-Union</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Very comfortable</th>
<th>Somewhat comfortable</th>
<th>Not very comfortable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Men</td>
<td></td>
<td>52.8% (38)</td>
<td>25.0% (18)</td>
<td>22.2% (16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>63.0% (17)</td>
<td>22.2% (6)</td>
<td>14.8% (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Union</td>
<td>Women</td>
<td></td>
<td>56.1% (125)</td>
<td>20.6% (46)</td>
<td>23.3% (52)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Men</td>
<td></td>
<td>66.3% (59)</td>
<td>20.2% (18)</td>
<td>13.4% (12)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>With a professionally trained advocate</th>
<th>Non-Union</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Very comfortable</th>
<th>Somewhat comfortable</th>
<th>Not very comfortable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Men</td>
<td></td>
<td>85.7% (66)</td>
<td>9.1% (7)</td>
<td>5.2% (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>89.7% (26)</td>
<td>6.9% (2)</td>
<td>3.5% (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Union</td>
<td>Women</td>
<td></td>
<td>83.8% (196)</td>
<td>8.1% (19)</td>
<td>8.1% (19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Men</td>
<td></td>
<td>88.0% (81)</td>
<td>8.7% (8)</td>
<td>3.3% (3)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### TABLE 5: Comfort Levels Speaking About Sexual Harassment Among Women Janitors Having Experienced Unwanted Sexual Behaviors in the Industry

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scenario</th>
<th>Union (%)</th>
<th>Non-Union (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Very</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>comfortable</td>
<td>comfortable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With a trained supervisor</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Union</td>
<td>36.4% (20)</td>
<td>41.9% (23)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Union</td>
<td>38.1% (8)</td>
<td>38.1% (8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With a trained HR representative</td>
<td>27.0% (17)</td>
<td>30.2% (19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Union</td>
<td>36.4% (8)</td>
<td>27.3% (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Union</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With a trained peer</td>
<td>51.7% (31)</td>
<td>25.0% (15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Union</td>
<td>52.2% (12)</td>
<td>30.4% (7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Union</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With a professionally trained advocate</td>
<td>76.2% (48)</td>
<td>14.3% (9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Union</td>
<td>88.5% (23)</td>
<td>11.5% (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Union</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### TABLE 6: Anticipated Impact of Different Factors on Learning in the Context of Training on Sexual Harassment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scenario</th>
<th>Would have a positive impact (%)</th>
<th>Would have a negative impact (%)</th>
<th>Would make no difference (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The training is conducted in an interactive way</td>
<td>89.5% (437/488)</td>
<td>2.7% (13/488)</td>
<td>7.8% (38/488)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The training is in a place where you feel comfortable and safe</td>
<td>91.3% (440/482)</td>
<td>1.5% (7/482)</td>
<td>7.3% (35/482)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The training is conducted in person</td>
<td>87.7% (406/463)</td>
<td>3.7% (17/463)</td>
<td>8.6% (40/463)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The training is in a language you can easily understand</td>
<td>94.4% (472/500)</td>
<td>1.2% (6/500)</td>
<td>4.4% (22/500)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being able to ask questions</td>
<td>93.1% (442/475)</td>
<td>1.7% (8/475)</td>
<td>5.3% (25/475)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructor is knowledgeable on the subject</td>
<td>94.0% (438/466)</td>
<td>1.3% (6/466)</td>
<td>4.7% (22/466)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructor has a cultural background similar to yours</td>
<td>93.0% (437/470)</td>
<td>1.5% (7/470)</td>
<td>5.5% (26/470)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructor has similar work experience as you</td>
<td>88.2% (410/465)</td>
<td>1.9% (9/465)</td>
<td>9.9% (46/465)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ENDNOTES


10. One recent estimate put average pay in the industry at $12.23 per hour for the 2012-2014 time period (in 2014 dollars). Hourly wages for subcontracted janitors were even lower, at $10.31 per hour. See Hinkley, S., Bernhardt, A. & Thomason, S. (2016). “Race to the bottom: How low-road subcontracting affects working conditions in California’s property services industry.” University of California, Berkeley, Center for Labor Research and Education. These figures have risen somewhat since that time, and statewide increases in the minimum wage will boost pay for many janitors. However, enforcement of the minimum wage will continue to be a challenge, particularly in subcontracted firms and in the vast non-union segment of the industry, and most janitors are poised to remain on the lower end of the state’s pay spectrum.


12. Ibid.


29. Among contracted-out janitors, 53.5 percent are women, 57.6 percent are foreign-born, and 80.9 percent are Latinx. See Sinjora, Thomason, and Jacobs, 2019. Among non-contracted janitors, the proportion of women is roughly half that, Latinx workers make up 41 percent, and the percentage of foreign-born workers is slightly lower. The different worker demographics within contracted and non-contracted work are noteworthy, given that contracted janitors earn significantly lower wages and are less likely to have benefits. See Hinkley, Bernhardt, and Thomason, 2016, 13-15.
30. The union did so in part by tapping into the deep histories of organizing that many immigrants brought with them from Latin America and other parts of the world. See Milkman, 2006.

31. Sanchez, L. (2004). “Watchdog group helps keep janitorial contractors clean.” San Diego Union-Tribune, C1. 100. Information in this section is also drawn from conversations with MCTF and SEIU-USWW.


33. MCTF notes that they have won janitors $80 million stemming from violations, but thus far only $40 million of this amount has been collected. Information also drawn from Yeung, 2018; Sanchez, 2004.

34. The phrase “race to the bottom” is used in the title and analysis of Hinkley, Bernhardt, and Thomason (2016) to describe the impact of subcontracting in California’s property services industry.

35. The Ya Basta! Coalition members include SEIU-USWW, CALCASA, Equal Rights Advocates, MCTF, UC Berkeley Labor Occupational Health Program, Worksafe, East Los Angeles Women’s Center, and Futures Without Violence.

36. The discussion in this section pulls heavily from conversations with MCTF and SEIU-USWW.


38. A master contract is a union-employer collective bargaining agreement that covers all worksites across a given industry or company within a particular geographic area.


43. Ayala, G.X. et al. (2010). “Outcome effectiveness of the lay health advisor model among Latinas in the United States: an examination by role.” Health Education Research, 25(5), 816. Note that similar models of community health workers have been used in regions throughout the world.


45. Ayala et al., 2010, 816.

46. Ayala et al., 2010, 816-17.


52. The initial cohort of janitors began the promotora training in March 2016, before the Ya Basta! Coalition formalized; the program subsequently became known as the Ya Basta! promotora program.


58. Given that this was the first time most survey facilitators had engaged in research involving human subjects, they received explicit guidance on how to “switch hats” from a role as organizers or advocates to one as researchers. This included training on how to ensure the voluntary nature of the survey.

59. A key goal in designing the trauma-informed portion of the training curriculum was to guide facilitators on how to be supportive and direct participants to helpful resources without taking on a counseling or advocacy role.

61. Those taking the survey in their homes received a pre-addressed and stamped envelope as an additional safeguard to ensure that the survey remained voluntary and confidential.


63. As noted in the “Methodology,” the three focus groups included: (1) janitors who had little to no experience engaging with promotoras; (2) janitors who had some engagement with promotoras through meetings, trainings, or other activism; and (3) promotoras and compadres.

64. Worker leaders who provided feedback on the survey questions said that most of their fellow workers would draw such a distinction between “supervisors” and “managers.”

65. We do not report on union versus non-union differences here since the very low sample sizes cannot sustain that level of granularity.

66. Focus group respondents’ conceptions of “professionally trained advocate” varied substantially. At least two or more participants in each focus group stated that they understood “professionally trained advocate” to be the same as, or similar to, a promotora; this was most commonly expressed in focus group #2 (janitors who had some previous engagement with promotoras). Several people (mainly from the promotora group) said they understood “professionally trained advocate” to be someone who was not a peer or coworker. In focus groups #1 and #2, many people identified “professionally trained advocates” to be people who were trained and knowledgeable about sexual harassment and the law, and able to support and defend janitors. In the promotora focus group, a few people thought peers would understand the term as referring to an organization with resources to represent workers, while others thought it might refer to human resources representatives. Others in this group, and one janitor from another group, commented that “professionally trained advocate” sounded like an outsider who would not be helpful to janitors, would not actually investigate, and to whom janitors might not feel comfortable speaking.

67. Note that the denominators of the ratios reflect the number of people who responded to that question.

68. The options for responding were “Yes—very much,” “Somedwhat,” or “No—not very much.”


70. For more on the wage theft bill, see Kirkham, 2015.

71. See the box on page 14 for more details about the maestría certification and AB 547.


76. In focus group #3, many promotoras highlighted the importance of gaining the trust of their coworkers in order to address workplace sexual harassment, and the need to work hard to do so. They spoke of needing to carry themselves in a way that sets an example and inspires trust. Two promotoras suggested it was important to increase awareness of the promotora program, through promotoras telling their own stories, having the opportunity to train more workers, and increasing the number of promotoras so they are available in more workplaces. Several promotoras also commented that further training would help prepare them to support coworkers facing harassment as well as bolstering the credibility of the promotoras.


82. Schultz, 2018.