

Sexual Harassment – Questionnaire Survey for Social Service Sector

Survey Findings

Background

With the aim of promoting the awareness of sexual harassment in the social service sector, the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) was in partnership with the Hong Kong Council of Social Service (HKCSS) to organize a series of anti-sexual harassment seminars for non-governmental organisations (NGOs) providing social service. The HKCSS, a federation of non-governmental social service agencies, has 460 agency members in May 2017. The agency members of HKCSS provide over 90% of social welfare service in Hong Kong.

2. In tandem with the organisation of seminars, a questionnaire survey titled “Sexual Harassment – Questionnaire Survey for Social Service Sector” has been carried out to explore (i) whether NOGs in Hong Kong have formulated anti-sexual harassment policy; and (ii) what other measures, such as awareness training for staff and members/service users and volunteers, NGOs have adopted for the prevention of sexual harassment.

Research Method

3. During the period of 22 July to 17 August 2016, the EOC disseminated an anonymous self-reporting questionnaire to the member agencies of HKCSS by e-mail through the HKCSS network. The completed questionnaires were directly returned to the EOC by e-mail or fax. The HKCSS also sent out invitations and reminders to its member agencies, inviting them to take part in the survey. During that period of time, the EOC only collected 14 completed questionnaires by e-mail or fax.

4. Due to the low response rate of returning questionnaires by e-mail or fax, there was a need to change the way of collecting data. Instead, the EOC distributed printed questionnaires to the agency representatives attending the Seminar on Anti-Sexual Harassment in Social Service Sector (“the Seminar”) on either 18 August 2016 or 30 November 2016. Hence those 14 questionnaires collected by e-mail or fax were not included in this analysis.

5. The two Seminars were jointly organised by the EOC and the HKCSS. Each participated member agency of the HKCSS received a printed questionnaire at the Seminars. Representatives of the agencies were invited to answer the questionnaire and returned it to the EOC at the occasion. Participants at the occasion were mainly the board members, executive directors and management staff of social welfare agencies. During the two Seminars, a total of 62 printed questionnaires were given to the agency members, and 51 completed questionnaires were successfully collected. The response rate was 82.3%.

Key Findings

Profile of the participating organisations

6. In total, there were 62 NGOs participated in either Seminar. There were 41 NGOs attended for the first Seminar on 18 August 2016, and 38 attended for the second one on 30 November 2016. For the 17 agencies attending both events, their representatives were not given any questionnaire at the second Seminar.

7. According to the “Directory of Social Service Organisations in Hong Kong” of the HKCSS, the majority (82%) of the 62 agencies participating in the seminar were large NGOs with annual recurrent expenditure from HK\$ \$10 – \$50 million or more than HK\$50 million per year (Appendix 1). Among these large NGOs, 11 of them have over 1000 full-time employees. The average number of full-time employees of these 62 NGOs are 474. The average number of beneficiaries receiving services from the 62 NGOs is 428,342 man-times per year.

8. Out of the 62 participating NGOs, 51 completed and returned the questionnaires to EOC. All these agencies deliver direct social services to individuals. In terms of the scope of service, their main target users include children and youths (61% of responding NGOs), senior citizens (51%) and persons with disabilities (49%) (Chart 12.1). For those NGOs providing service to persons with disabilities (PWD) (n = 25), their target service users includes persons with intellectual disability (64%), mobility disability (44%) and with chronic illness (36%) (Chart 12.2).

Overall analysis - Half of the NGOs without policy and training

9. A written policy and training programmes are both essential elements for an effective strategy to prevent sexual harassment. However, among the 51 responding NGOs, just more than half of the NGOs (51%, n = 26) have formulated a written anti-sexual harassment policy, whereas the remaining half (49%, n = 25) do not have one (Chart 1). Also, about half (51%, n = 26) of the responding NGOs did not provide sexual harassment awareness training to their employees (Chart 8). It is important to note that about one-third of the responding NGOs (33%) have neither developed an anti-sexual harassment policy, nor provided the relevant awareness training for their staff to prevent sexual harassment (Table 8.1).

10. Even fewer NGOs have provided sexual harassment awareness training to their members/service users and volunteers. Only 25% (n = 13) of the responding NGOs indicated that they had provided anti-sexual harassment training to their members/service users and volunteers, while 75 % had not (Chart 8).

11. The survey also found that NGOs with an anti-sexual harassment policy are more likely to have provided training to their staff, member/service users and volunteers. Two-thirds (65%) of the responding NGOs with a written anti-sexual harassment policy have provided training for employees, whereas only one-third (32%) of those without a policy have trained their staff on this subject (Chart 8.1). Similarly, 35% of those NGOs with a policy have provided training to members/service users and volunteers, while only 16% of those without a policy have done so (Chart 8.2). The figures show that NGOs with a policy have a higher awareness of preventing sexual harassment and have more substantial strategies, such as training, to implement their policy.

12. Comparing NGOs serving different target groups, it is found that NGOs providing social service to women (59%) are more likely to have developed a policy to prevent sexual harassment (Chart 8.3). Regardless of the scope of service, the majority of the NGOs did not provide sexual harassment prevention training to their staff and members/service users/volunteers. (Charts 8.4 and 8.5).

NGOs with written anti-sexual harassment policy

13. Eight essential elements for an effective anti-sexual harassment policy have been identified. The survey examined whether NGOs adopted these essential items in

their policy. For those NGOs with anti-sexual harassment policy statement (n = 26), only 7 NGOs (27%) included all eight items in their anti-sexual harassment policy (Table 2). The median number of items adopted by NGOs in their policy was 5. The most common items in their policy are as follows (Chart 2):

- Procedure for dealing with sexual harassment complaints (88%);
- A clear statement that sexual harassment will not be tolerated (85%);
- The Policy applies to all levels of staff of the NGO (85%);
- Definition and examples of sexual harassment (77%);
- The Policy applies to all members/service users and volunteers of the NGO (69%).

14. These results suggest that the anti-sexual harassment policy of the NGOs may not be comprehensive. The implementation measures, such as contact information of the designated complaint-handling personnel, and a note about disciplinary action, have often been omitted in the anti-sexual harassment policy.

15. In addition, the survey asked the NGOs about their means of notifying their staff, members/service users and volunteers about the anti-sexual harassment policy (n = 26). Most of the NGOs gave their staff a physical copy (69%) of the policy, or notified them via the Intranet (50%). The NGOs are less likely to upload the policy on their Internet website for staff to view (Chart 3). Their methods of notifying their members/service users or volunteers are similar. Most of them gave members/service users or volunteers a printed copy of the policy statement (62%), and very few upload the policy on their website (4%) (Chart 5).

NGOs without written anti-sexual harassment policy

16. For those NGOs do not have an anti-sexual harassment policy (n = 25), the reasons for not formulating a policy are mainly “staff was not trained in formulating an anti-sexual harassment policy” (44%), and “no urgency to formulate a policy statement on sexual harassment” (40%), “no need to formulate a policy on sexual harassment as the ‘Code of Practice for Registered Social Workers’ provides guidelines on code of conduct” (16%), and “Never thought of developing a policy” (16%) (Chart 6).

17. Over half of the NGOs currently without a written anti-sexual harassment policy (56%, n = 14) will consider formulating one in the coming 12 months. For the rest, 40% (n = 10) replied that they did not know whether their organisation will do so

or not in the coming year, whilst one NGO (4%) indicated it will not adopt any anti-sexual harassment policy in the near future (Chart 7).

Lack of comprehensive preventive measures

18. Among the 51 responding NGOs, almost one-fifth (18 %) have not taken any preventive measures against sexual harassment. Most of the NGOs (41%) indicated that they have taken only one single preventive measure. Less than half have taken two or more preventive measures (Table 8). The most common measures are: “Provide sexual harassment prevention training for employees” (49%) and “Requiring the prospective employee to verify nil criminal conviction records against a specified list of sexual offences under the ‘Sexual Conviction Record Check’ Scheme” (45%) (Chart 8).

19. Even for the NGOs that have formulated an anti-sexual harassment policy, regular training may not form part of their preventive strategy. Among those 26 NGOs with a written anti-sexual harassment policy, 6 NGOs (23%) indicated that they have not provided any anti-sexual harassment training to their staff at all. For the 17 NGOs (65%) that have both developed a written anti-sexual harassment policy and provided relevant training to staff, only 6 of them (23%) also regularly provide refresher training to staff (Chart 4).

Sexual harassment complaints

20. According to the responding NGOs, only two NGOs (4%) reported a total of four sexual harassment complaint cases in the 12 months before the survey. The form of sexual harassment of those cases included inappropriate physical touching, patting and/or kissing (n = 2); non-verbal sex cues (n = 1); verbal, textual and/or electronic messages related to sex (n = 1) (Table 10).

High demand for training on anti-sexual harassment

21. All of the responding NGOs (100%) indicated they themselves or their colleagues would participate in the sexual harassment prevention training if the EOC organized such programme (Chart 13). In the light of this finding, we can see that the responding NGOs believe they need to provide training courses on prevention of sexual harassment for staff, which will help their employees to equip with knowledge and skills in handling sexual harassment incidents.

Limitations

22. The questionnaire survey conducted by e-mail to all agency members via HKCSS has a fairly low response rate. This might have been related to the sensitivity of or the lack of awareness of the sexual harassment issue. In comparison, the questionnaire survey conducted during the Seminars has a much higher response rate. However, the data collected at the seminar may contain self-selection bias.

23. Referring to HKCSS Directory of Social Service Organisations in Hong Kong, there were 440 agency members in 2015. Among those 440 agency members, only 17% of the NGOs (n = 75) have an annual recurrent expenditure of HK\$50 million or above. Over 60% of HKCSS agency members are small to medium NGOs (refer to Appendix 1 for details). However, according to the data collected at the Seminar organised by the EOC, most of the participants are from large NGOs (82%) and very few of them are from small and medium NGOs (18%). Therefore, the results from this questionnaire survey should not be generalized as findings representing the entire population of the social service sector in Hong Kong.

24. Large NGOs have more resources which enable them to delegate management staff to attend seminars organised by the EOC in the first place. Second, given that they have more resources and their services cover more clients, their management's awareness of the sexual harassment issue may be higher than their small and medium counterparts. As a result, the Seminars may have attracted NGOs that already have concerns in preventing sexual harassment or those which have already formulated an anti-sexual harassment policy. In this regard, caution has to be taken in interpreting the present survey data in this questionnaire survey.

Recommendations

25. NGOs form a big sector of our Society. The provision of social services involves a lot of personal contacts. There is an urgent need for these NGOs to develop an anti-sexual harassment policy to prevent such incidents from happening and to respond to sexual harassment complaints quickly and effectively. Yet, the survey revealed that only half of the responding NGOs (51%) have formulated a written anti-sexual harassment policy. In addition, the survey found a seemingly low prevalence rate of sexual harassment in the social service sector -- just a total of 4 sexual harassment complaints were received by 2 NGOs in the 12 months before the survey. The true scale of the problem may be far greater than the figures suggest. The lack of

awareness of sexual harassment and the uncertain consequences of filing a complaint may discourage victims to come forward to file a complaint.

26. In the light of the findings, it is therefore strongly recommended that NGOs should formulate their own anti-sexual harassment policy as soon as possible. The formulation of such a policy not only reflects the social service agencies concern about the issue of sexual harassment, but also provides guidelines for the agencies to handle complaints and for the victims to seek justice.

27. The survey also revealed that just about a quarter (27%) of the NGOs with anti-sexual harassment policy statement included all 8 essential items for an effective policy (Table 2). It is recommended that NGOs should develop a comprehensive anti-sexual harassment policy including the procedure for complaint-handling, contact information of designated complaint-handling personnel, and a note about disciplinary action. In this regard, the EOC has compiled a "Framework for Sexual Harassment Policy in Social Service Agencies" in order to facilitate NGOs to formulate an anti-sexual harassment policy of their own. For those NGOs which have already formulated a written anti-sexual harassment policy, it is recommended that the policy should be regularly reviewed to ensure its effective implementation.

28. Transparency of and accessibility to the anti-sexual harassment policy are crucial for the successful implementation of the policy. From the survey findings, most of the responding NGOs tend to provide a hard copy of the policy and procedures to their staff, members/service users and volunteers by circulation. We encourage NGOs to notify all level of staff and their members/service users and volunteers about the anti-sexual harassment policy at the orientation programmes too. NGOs should also consider uploading a soft copy of the policy and the complaint handling procedures onto their website. This may help service users and the public to have access to the policy.

29. Moreover, the survey found that the most of the responding NGOs lack of a comprehensive strategy to prevent sexual harassment. About 18% of the NGOs do not have any preventive measures against sexual harassment. Less than half of the NGOs have taken two or more preventive measures against sexual harassment. NGOs should take a proactive approach and carry out reasonable practicable steps to prevent sexual harassment from occurring. The development of an anti-sexual harassment policy alone is not sufficient to protect both the service users and employees from sexual harassment. Training and promotion are equally important in enhancing the

understanding of all parties of NGOs on the issue and helping nurture the right and proper values of respecting others.

30. Having said that, training for employees and volunteers is fairly inadequate. About half of the responding NGOs did not provide sexual harassment prevention training to their staff. Only 25% of the responding NGOs provided sexual harassment awareness training to their members/service users and volunteers. It is recommended that NGOs should provide training and refresher training to their employees, members/service users and volunteers.

31. NGOs are usually unaware of the importance of training for members/service users and volunteers. Social service organisations may consider using the Bystander Intervention Approach to engage their members/service users and volunteers in the sexual harassment prevention program, as well as foster a cultural change in the organisation. The bystander intervention approach focuses on the role of peers which encourage them to speak up when they witness or suspect harassment incidents have occurred or take ownership on the prevention of sexual harassment. A bystander could be a member, volunteer, service user or employee in the organisation. Such approach will help preventing sexual harassment when this peer culture has been developed.

32. All of the responding NGOs indicated they are in need of sexual harassment prevention training for their staff. In addition, the survey found that the most common reason for NGOs not having an anti-sexual harassment policy is that “staff are not trained in formulating the related policy statement”. On top of the two Seminars for the management of NGOs in August and November in 2016, the EOC continue to join hands with stakeholders to provide anti-sexual harassment training for front-line workers in the social service sector. The EOC will work with the HKCSS again to organize three workshops on handling complaints of sexual harassment in August and September in 2017.

33. Apart from the NGOs themselves, the Government, being the main source of funding of NGOs, can play a vital role in encouraging NGOs to adopt a comprehensive strategy to prevent sexual harassment. To ensure the quality of service of subvented NGOs, the SWD has published a set of Service Quality Standards (SQSs), the Implementation Handbook and assessment indicators for NGOs to follow. Subvented NGOs are required to submit self-assessment report indicating the compliance with the performance standards to SWD each year.

34. The current SQSs require the NGOs to take all reasonable steps to protect service users from all forms of abuse, including verbal, physical and sexual abuse. The SQSs further provides that the service units should have policy and procedures for ensuring that service users are free from verbal, physical and sexual abuse. “Sexual abuse” is a general term rather than a legal term under the laws of Hong Kong, and the term, in particular the term in Chinese, may give the wrong impression that only serious forms of undesired sexual activity inflicted upon the victims are considered as sexual abuse.

35. To promote the prevention of sexual harassment among subvented NGOs, the SWD should consider reviewing the SQSs and the guidelines of the Implementation Handbook for the SQSs. It is recommended that the SWD should enhance the current SQSs by explaining the definition of sexual abuse and specifying that sexual harassment is also a form of sexual abuse. The current guidelines of the Implementation Handbook for developing policy and procedures to deal with incidents of alleged abuse just provide a skeleton without reference materials. The SWD may consider enhancing the Implementation Handbook and related assessment indicators by specifying the service units of NGOs can develop policy and procedures with reference to the Sex Discrimination Ordinance. Then the NGOs and their service units can make reference to the legislation and the related case law, as well as equal opportunities or anti-sexual harassment policies written by other institutions to develop their own comprehensive strategy against sexual abuse.

Annual Recurrent Expenditure*	Size of NGOs#	No. of HKCSS Agency Members	No. of HKCSS Agency Members attending the EOC Seminar(s)	Percentage of Agency Members attending the Seminar(s)
> 50 million/year	Large	75 (17%)	35 (56%)	47%
\$10 – \$50 million/year		89 (20%)	16 (26%)	18%
\$5 - \$10 million/year	Medium	42 (10%)	5 (8%)	12%
\$1.5 - \$5 million/year	Small	101 (23%)	3 (5%)	3%
< \$1.5 million		133 (30%)	3 (5%)	2%
Total		440 (100%)	62 (100%)	

(Source: HKCSS: Directory of Social Service Organizations in Hong Kong)

*Annual recurrent expenditures of the Agency Members of HKCSS are as at October 2015 according to HKCSS' information and statistics.

In the study, the figure of annual recurrent expenditures been used as an indicator to categorize the size of NGOs.

No. of full time employees	No. of NGOs attending the EOC Seminar(s)
0-100	21 (34%)
101-500	24 (39%)
501-1000	6 (9%)
>1001	11 (18%)
Total:	62 (100%)

Sexual Harassment – Questionnaire Survey for Social Service Sector

Table & Chart

Chart 1

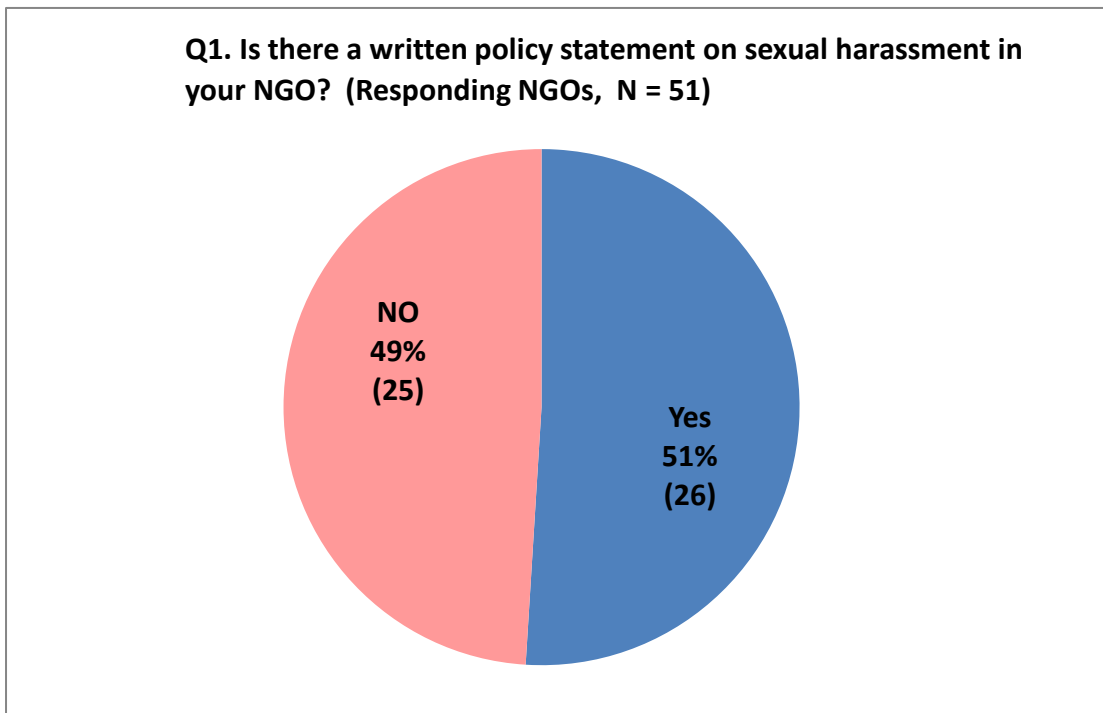


Chart 2

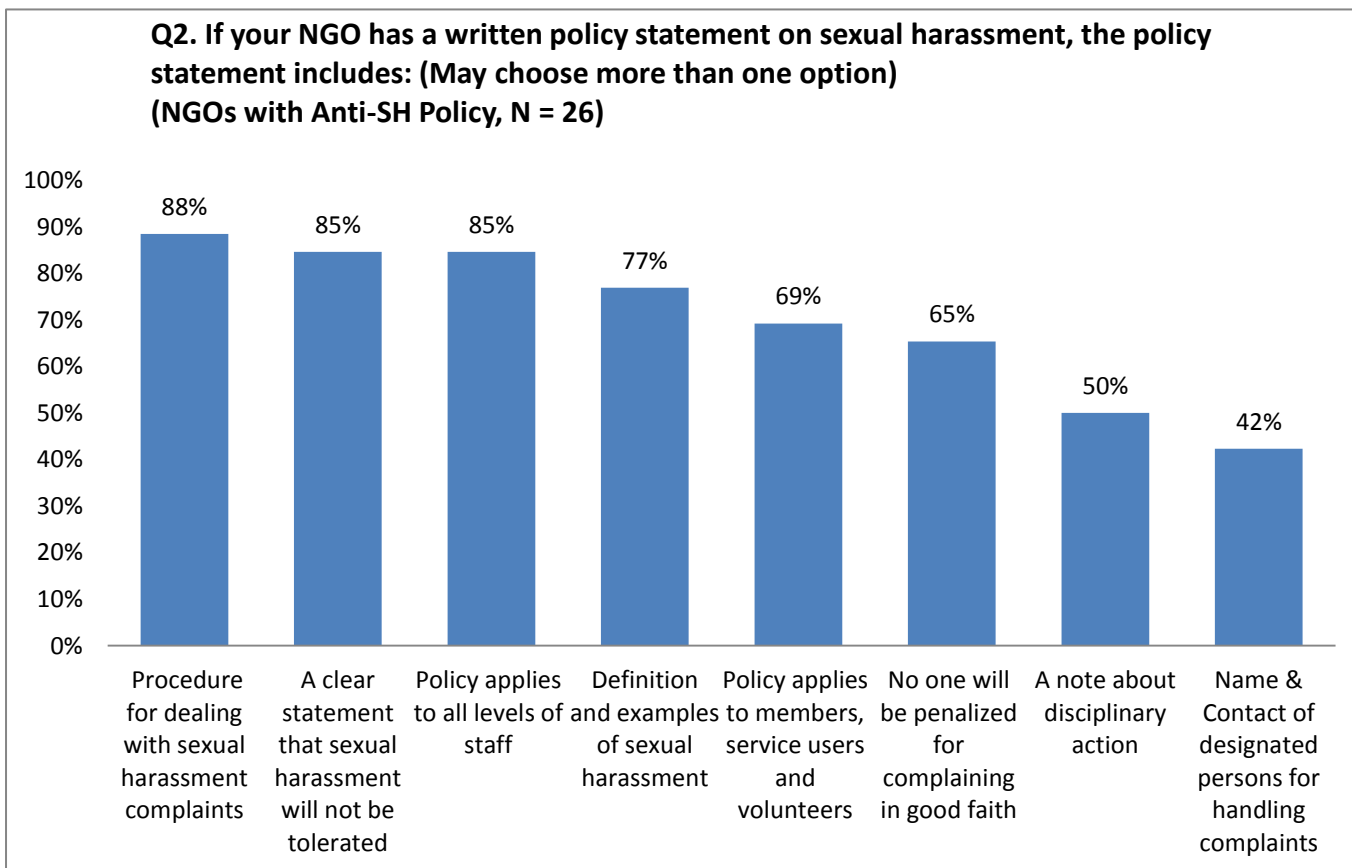


Table 2: Among those NGOs with anti-SH policy (N= 26), the number of essential elements included in their policy

Number of essential elements in the anti-SH policy	Number of NGOs	Percentage
1	1	3.8%
2	1	3.8%
3	2	7.7%
4	3	12%
5	5	19%
6	5	19%
7	2	7.7%
8	7	27%
Total number of NGOs:	26	100%

Chart 3

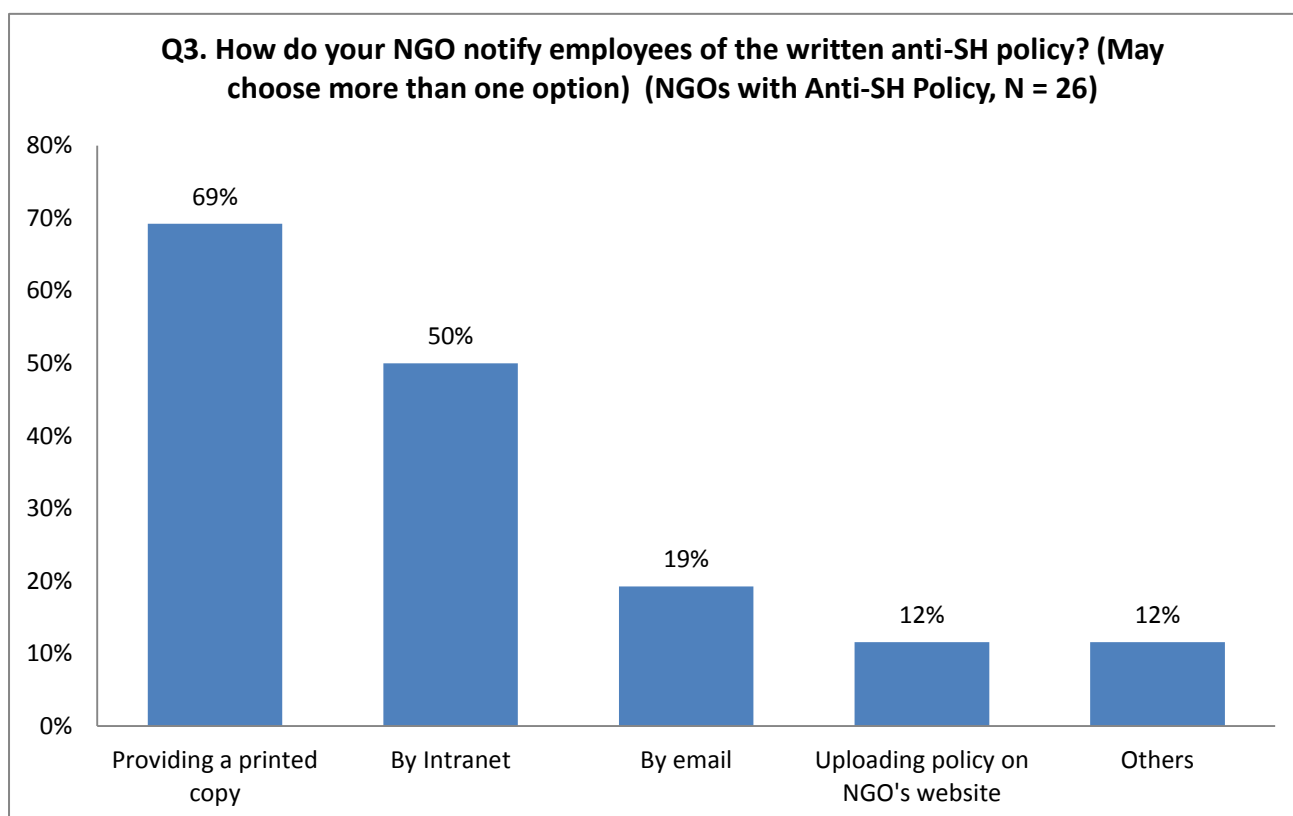


Chart 4

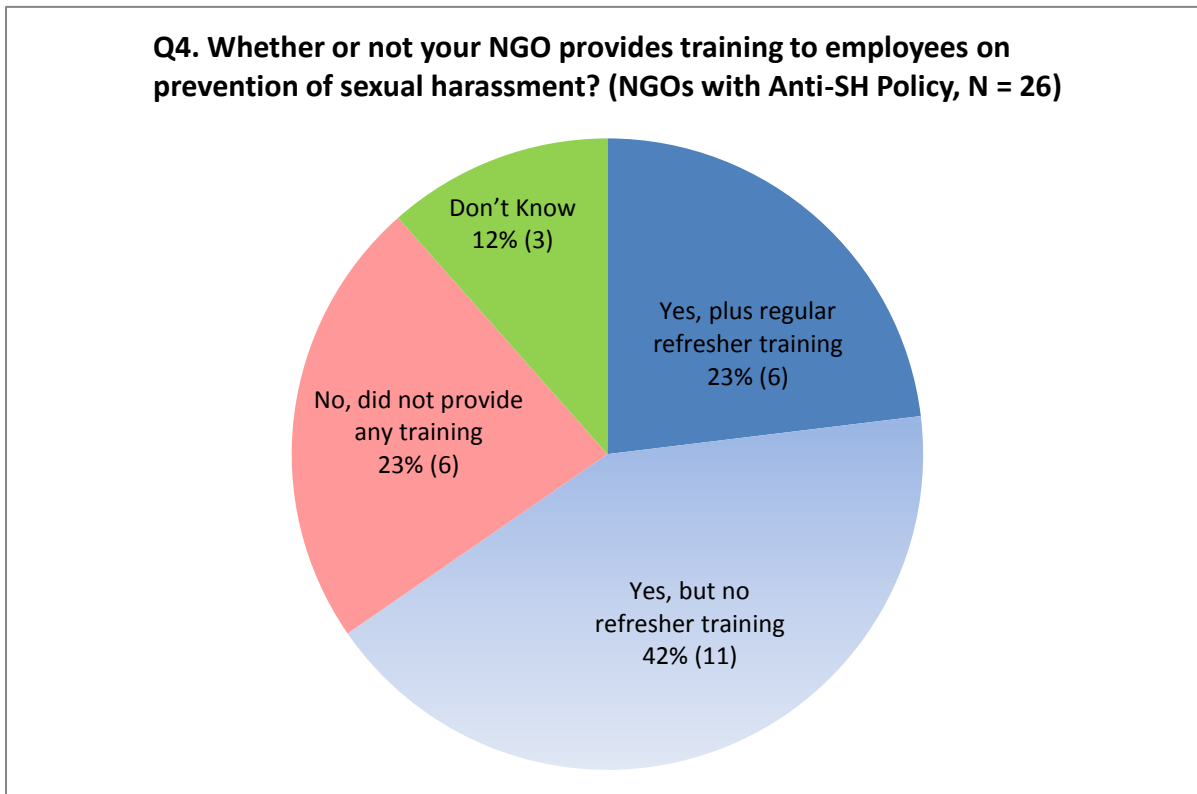


Chart 5

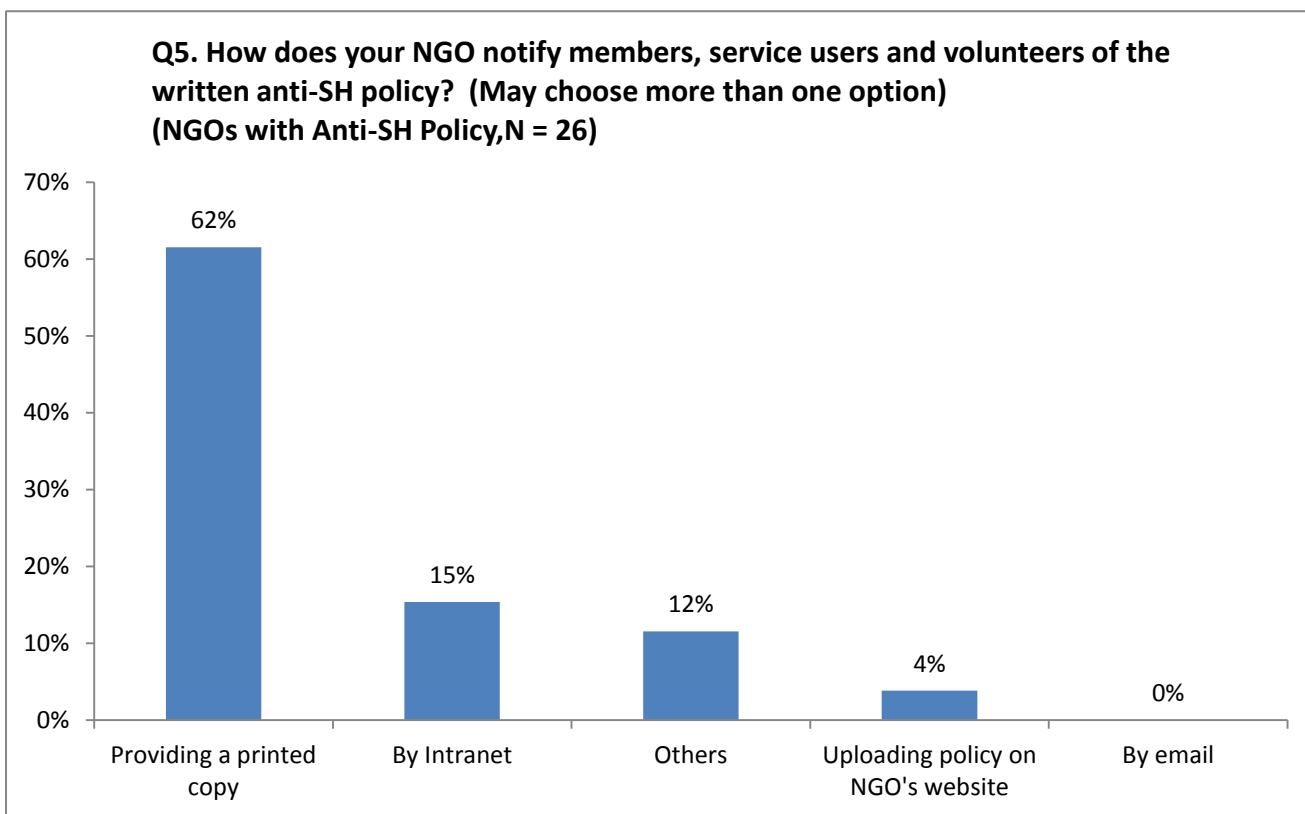


Chart 6

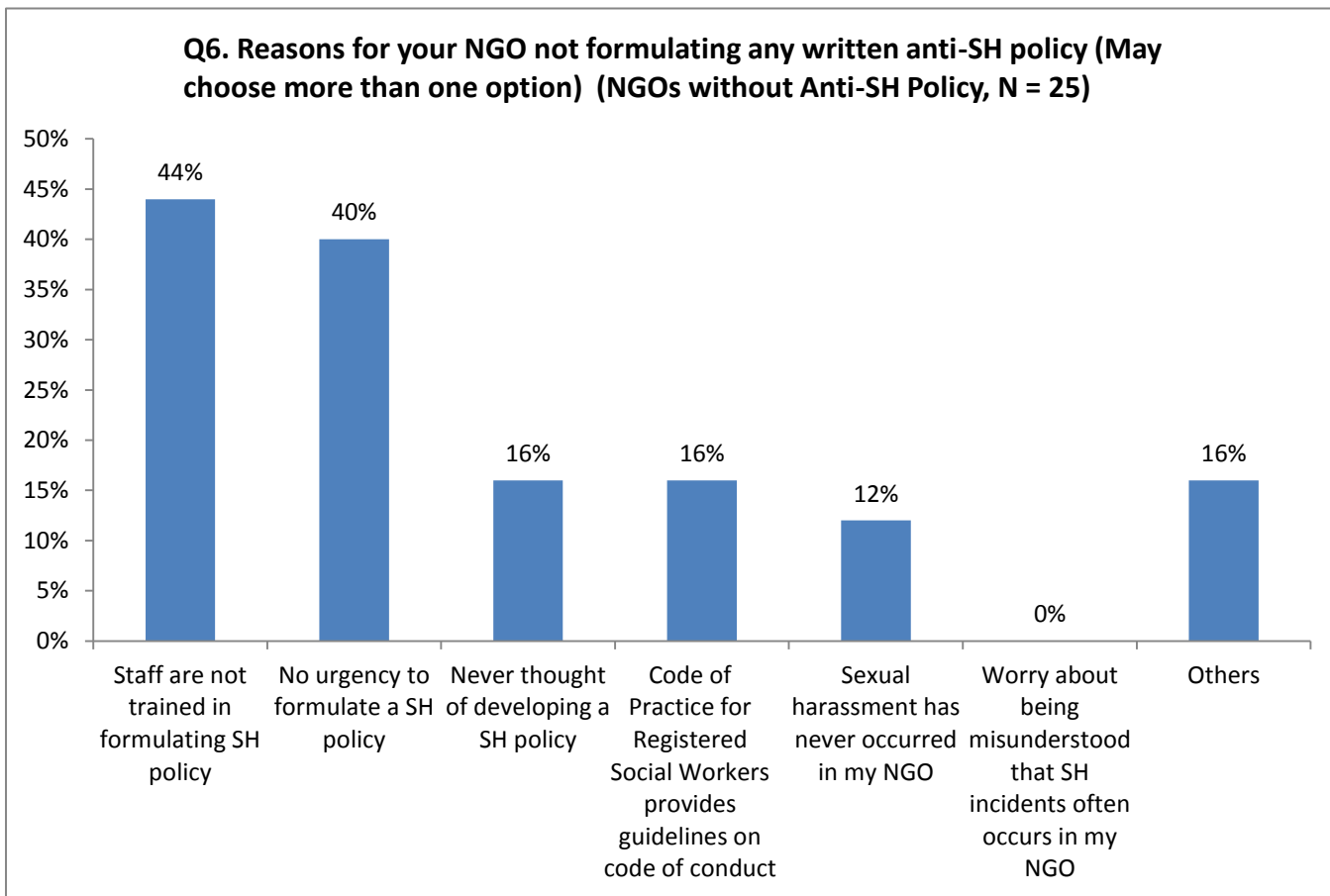


Chart 7

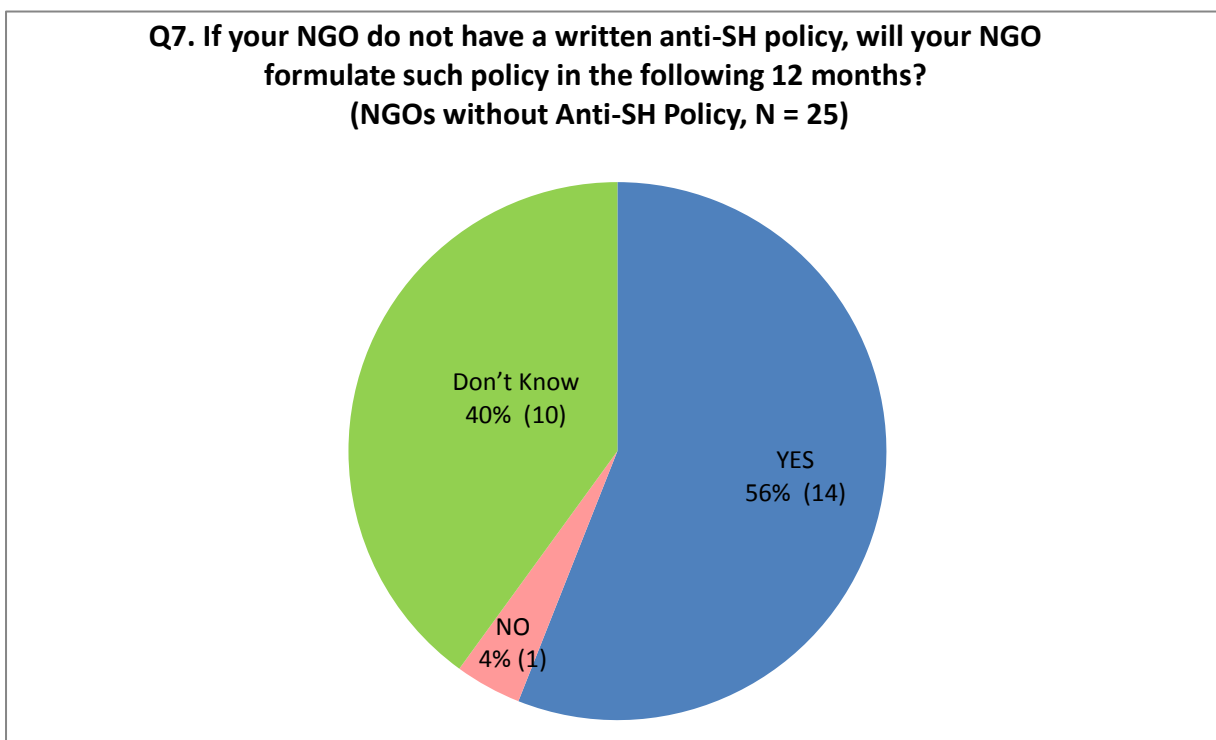


Chart 8

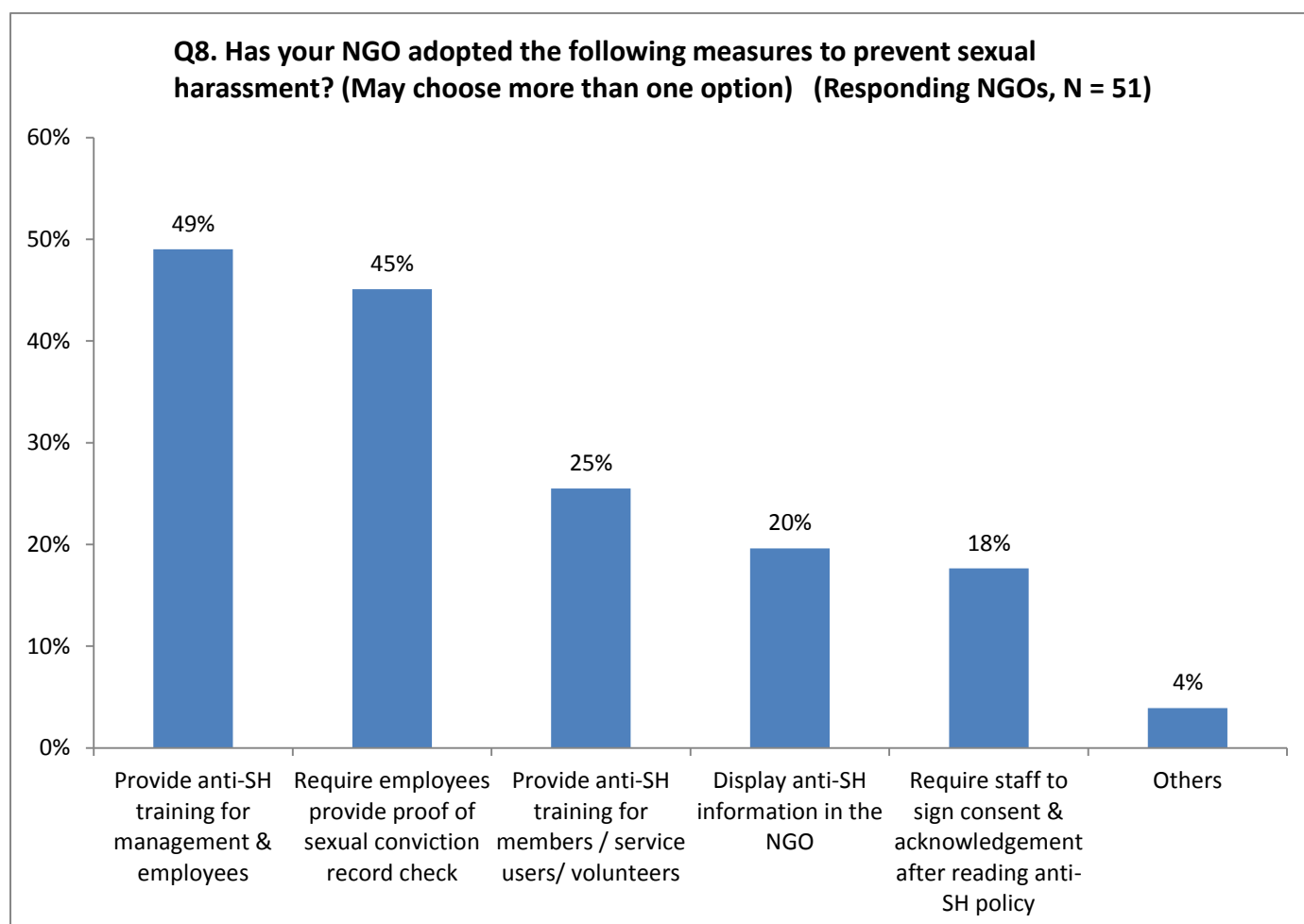


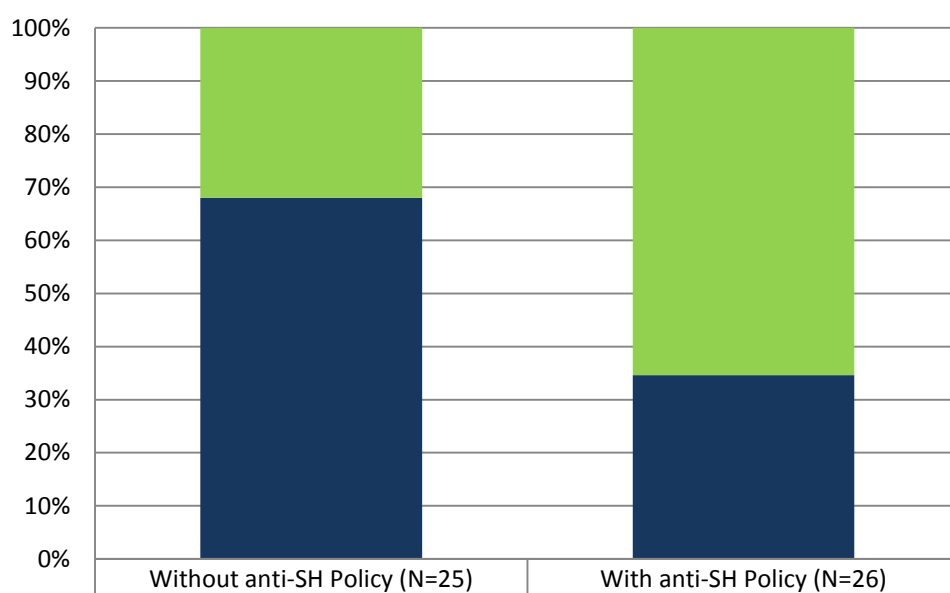
Table 8: Number of measures on preventing sexual harassment adopted by NGOs (Responding NGOs, N = 51)

No. of preventive measure(s) adopted	Number of NGOs	Percentage
None	9	18%
1	21	41%
2	9	18%
3	7	14%
4	3	6%
5	2	3%
Total number of NGOs:	51	100%

Table 8.1: Provision of sexual harassment prevention training to employees — analysed by formulation of written sexual harassment policy or not. (Responding NGOs, N = 51)

	Without any written anti-sexual harassment policy	With a written anti-sexual harassment policy	Total
Did not provide any sexual harassment prevention training to staff	17 (33%)	9 (18%)	26 (51%)
Provide sexual harassment prevention training to staff	8 (16%)	17 (33%)	25 (49%)
Total	25 (49%)	26 (51%)	51 (100%)

Chart 8.1: Percentage of NGOs providing sexual harassment prevention training to staff — analysed by formulation of anti-SH Policy



Provide anti-SH training	32%	65%
Did not provide anti-SH training	68%	35%

Table 8.2 Provision of sexual harassment prevention training to members/ volunteers — analysed by formulation of written sexual harassment policy or not. (Responding NGOs, N = 51)

	Without any written anti-sexual harassment policy	With a written anti-sexual harassment policy	Total
Did not provide any sexual harassment prevention training to members/ volunteers	21 (42%)	17 (33%)	38 (75%)
Provide sexual harassment prevention training to members/ volunteers	4 (7%)	9 (18%)	13 (25%)
Total	25 (49%)	26 (51%)	51(100%)

Chart 8.2:
Percentage of NGOs providing sexual harassment prevention training to members/volunteers — analysed by formulation of anti-SH Policy

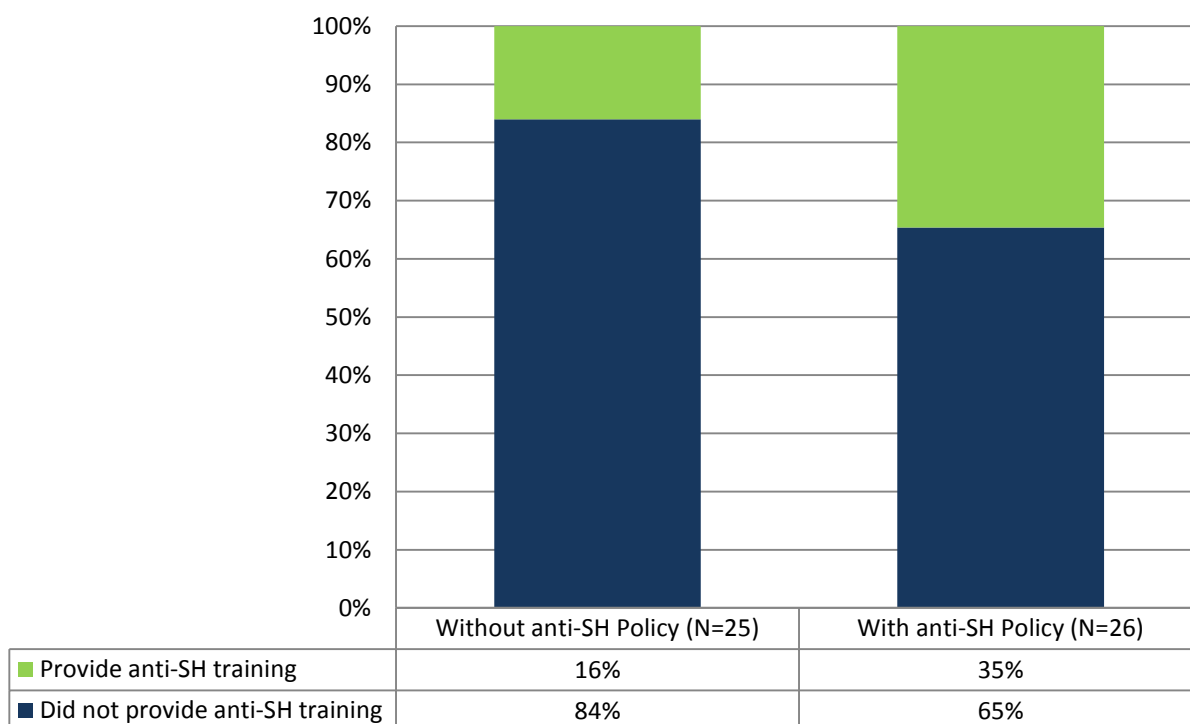


Chart 8.3 NGOs with/ without anti-SH policy — analysed by scope of social service (Responding NGOs, N = 51)

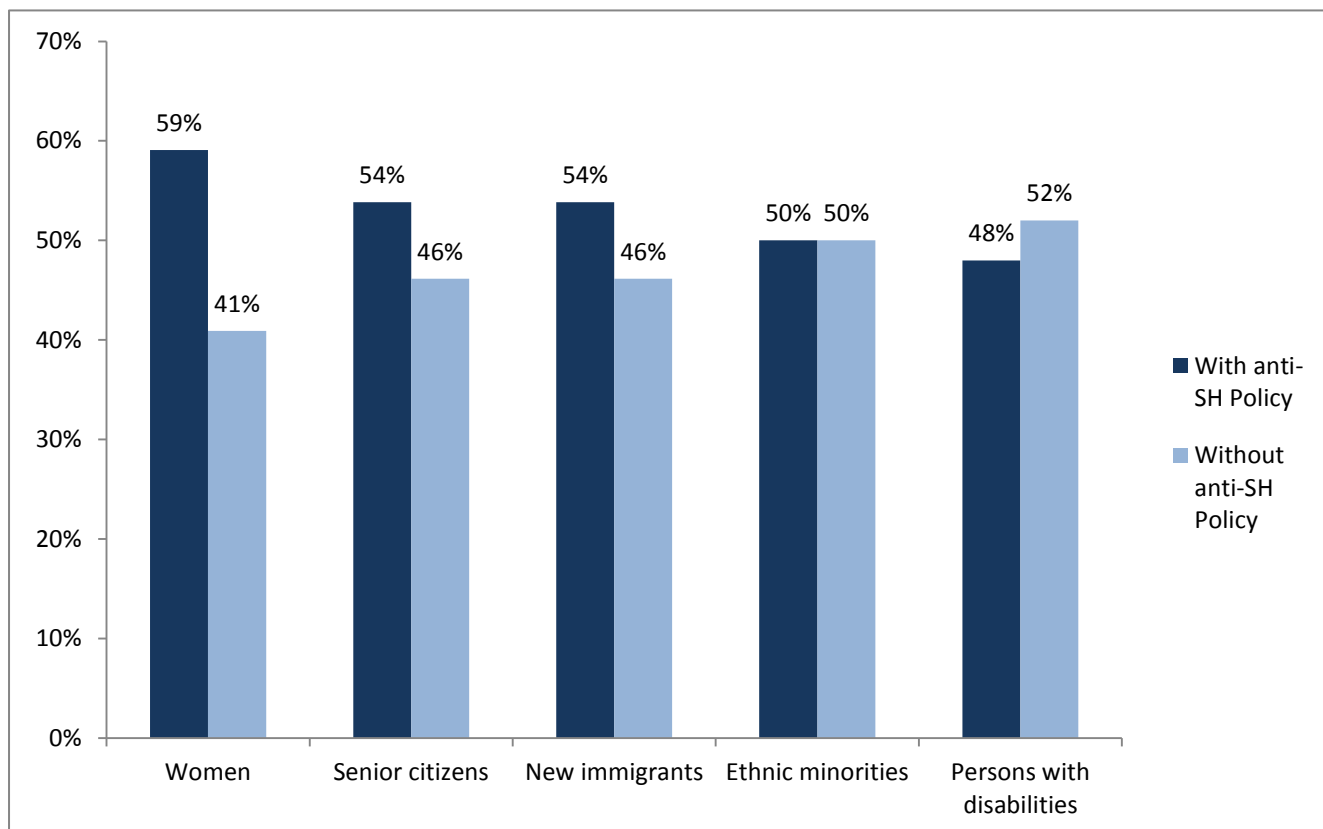


Chart 8.3.1 Disability NGOs formulation of anti-SH policy — analysed by service users’ disabilities (NGOs provide direct service for persons with disability, N = 25)

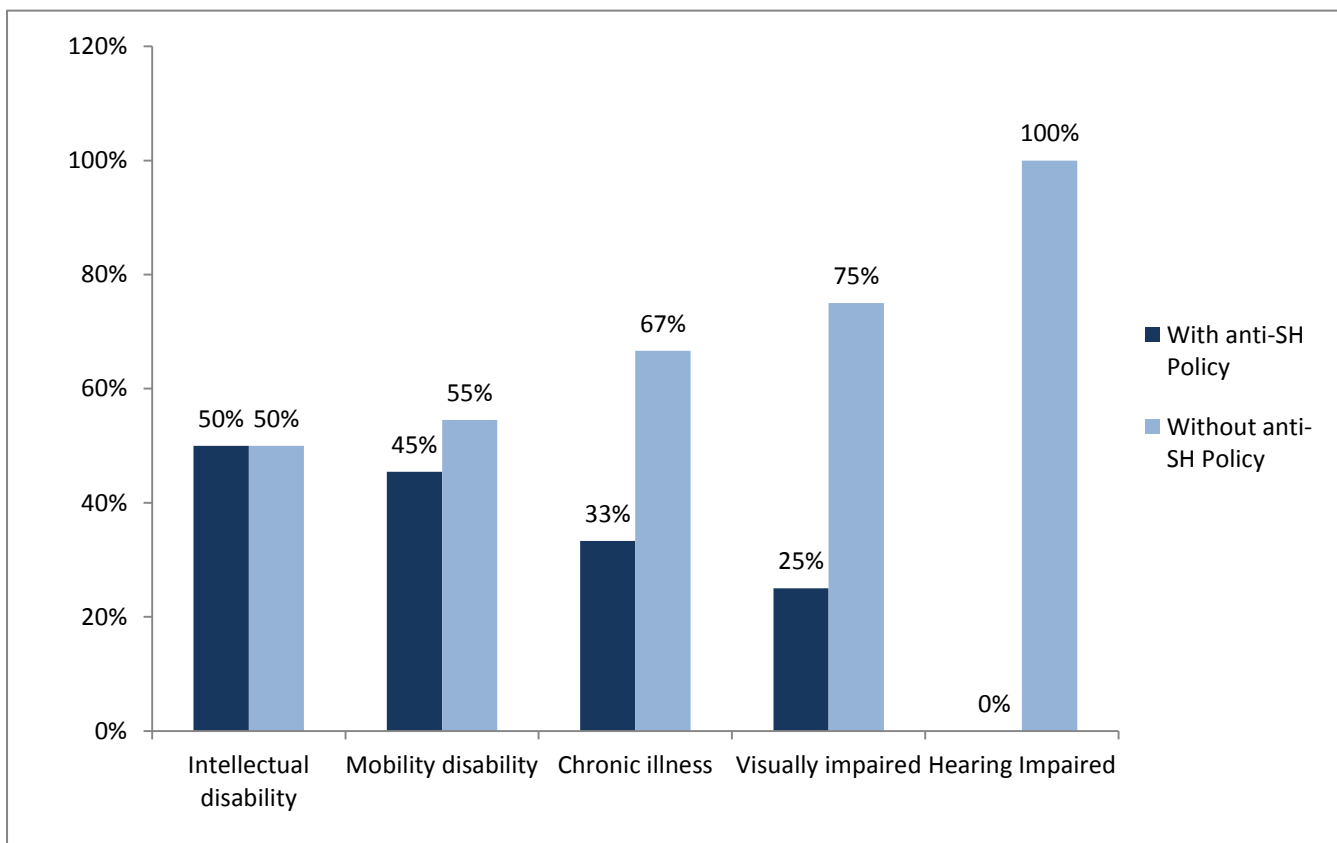


Chart 8.4 Provision of sexual harassment prevention training to staff — analysed by scope of social service (Responding NGOs, N = 51)

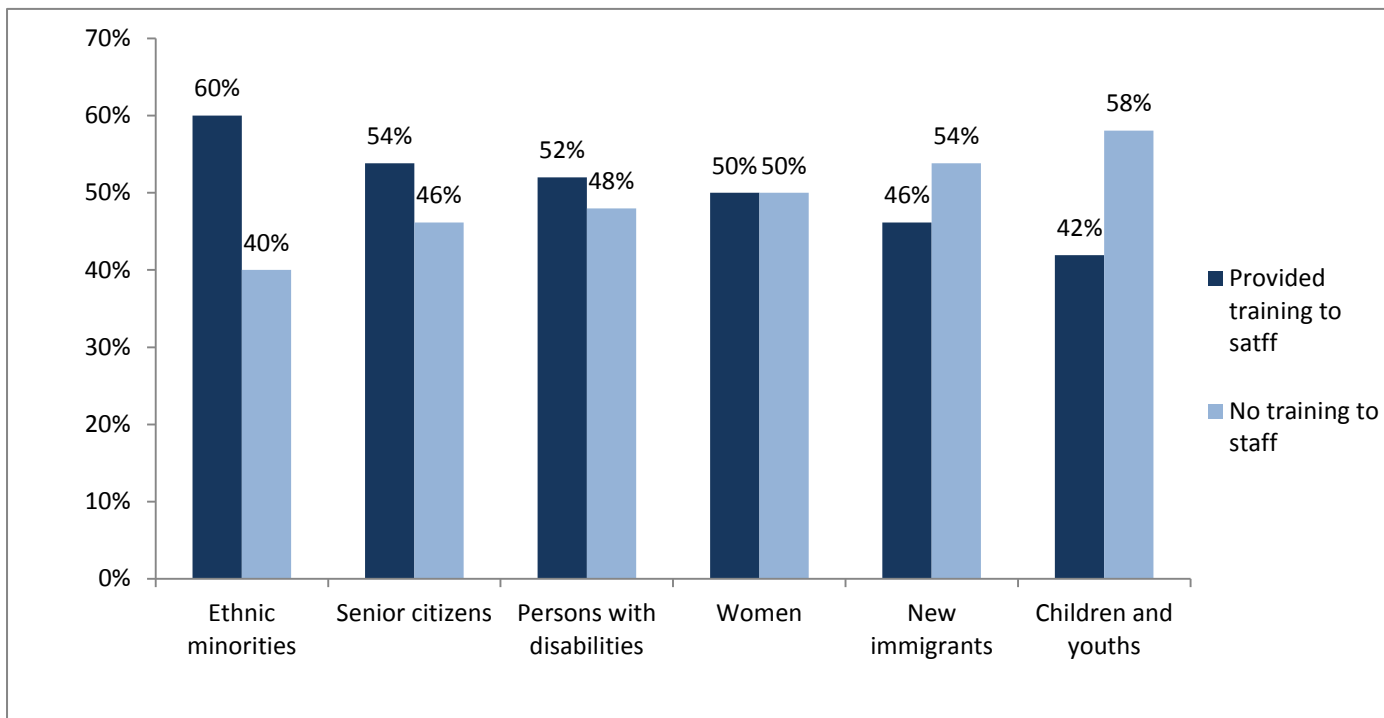


Chart 8.4.1 Provision of sexual harassment prevention training to staff among disability NGOs — analysed by service users’ disabilities (NGOs provide direct service to persons with disability, N = 25)

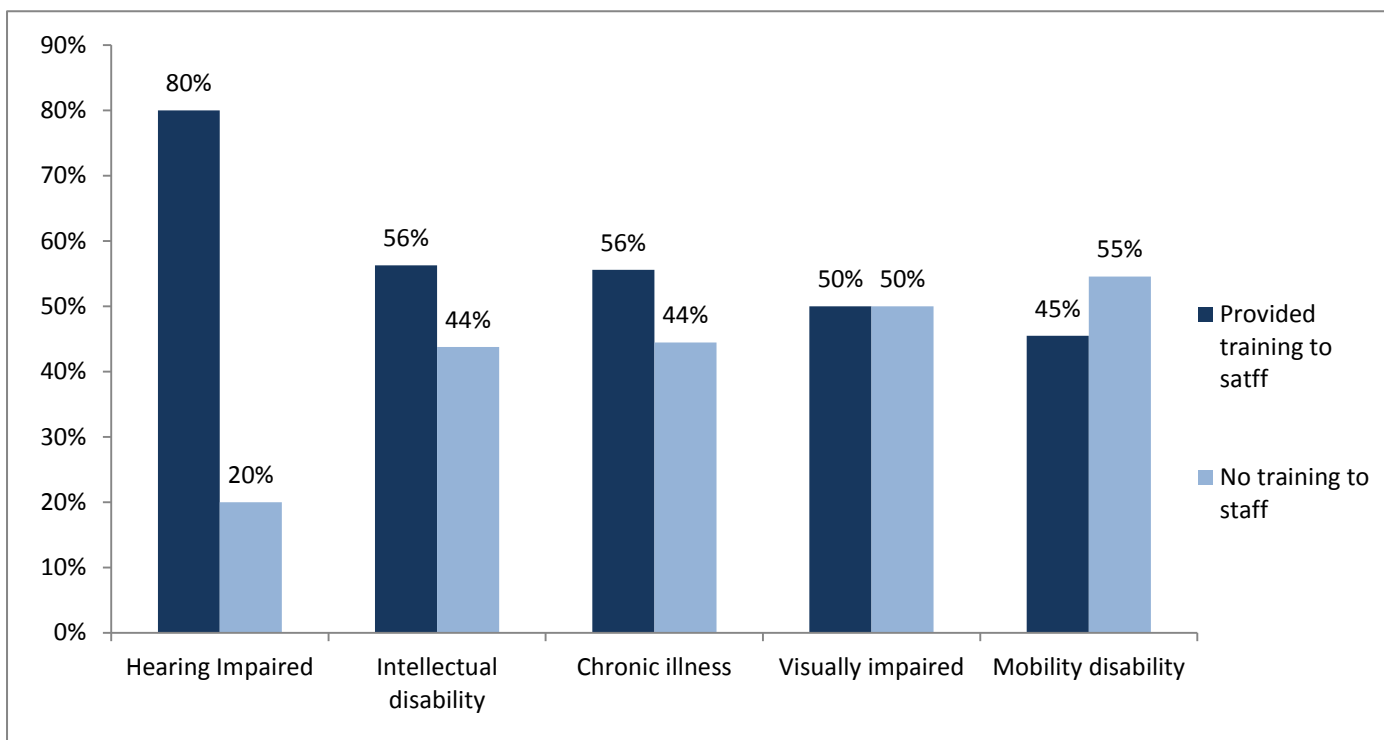


Chart 8.5 Provision of sexual harassment prevention training to members/service users & volunteers — analysed by scope of social service (Responding NGOs, N = 51)

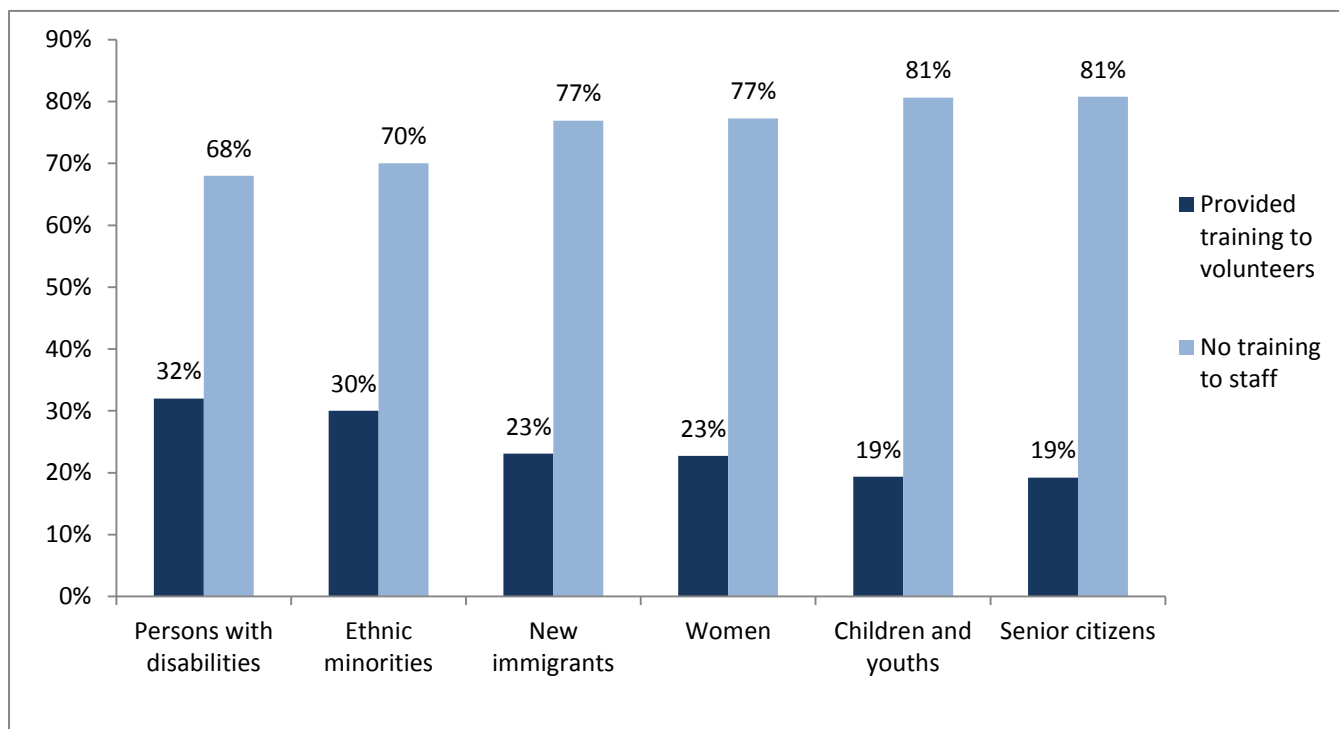


Chart 8.5.1 Provision of sexual harassment prevention training to members/ service users & volunteers among disability NGOs — analysed by service users’ disabilities (NGOs provide direct service to persons with disability, N = 25)

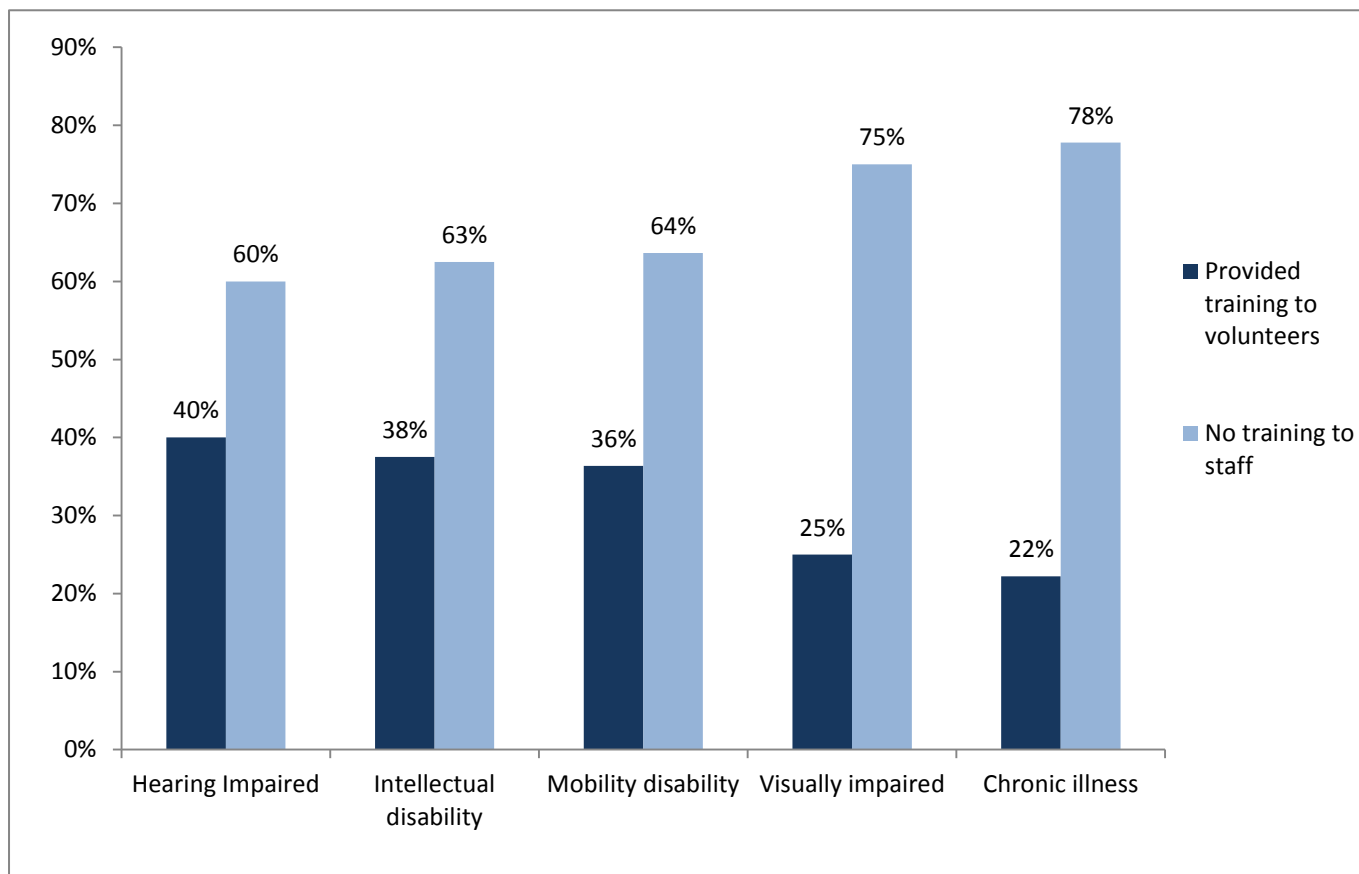


Chart 9: Number of NGOs received complaints on sexual harassment in the past 12 months (Responding NGOs, N = 51)

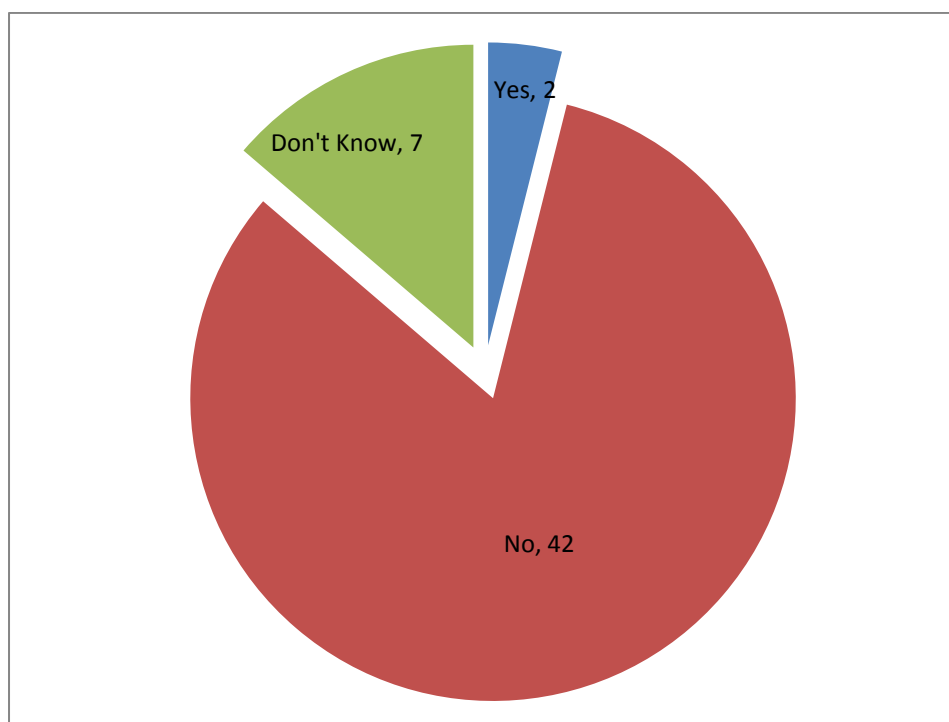


Table 10: Number and types of sexual harassment incidents reported to the responding NGOs (N = 51) in the past 12 months:

Types of sexual harassment	No. of cases
I. Non-verbal sex cues (e.g. looking someone up and down in a sexual way)	1
II. Verbal, textual and/or electronic messages related to sex (e.g. unwelcome dirty jokes, requests for sexual favors)	1
III. Physical (e.g. inappropriate touching, patting, and/or kissing)	2
IV. Hostile environment (e.g. graffiti, sexually obscene and/or suggestive photographs on toilet door, wall, notice board, locker area)	0
V. Others, please specify: _____	0
Total number of cases	4

11. Number of responding NGOs (N = 51) providing direct social services to target users: 51 (100%)

Chart 12.1

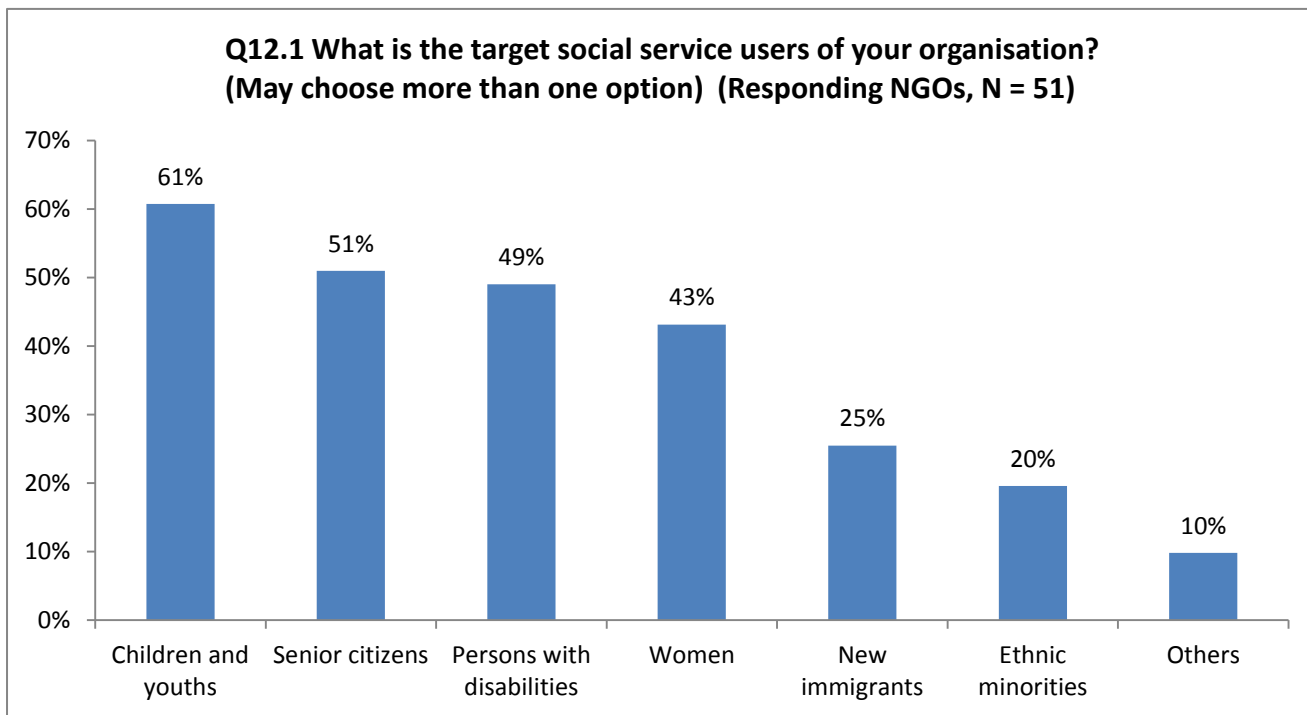


Chart 12.2

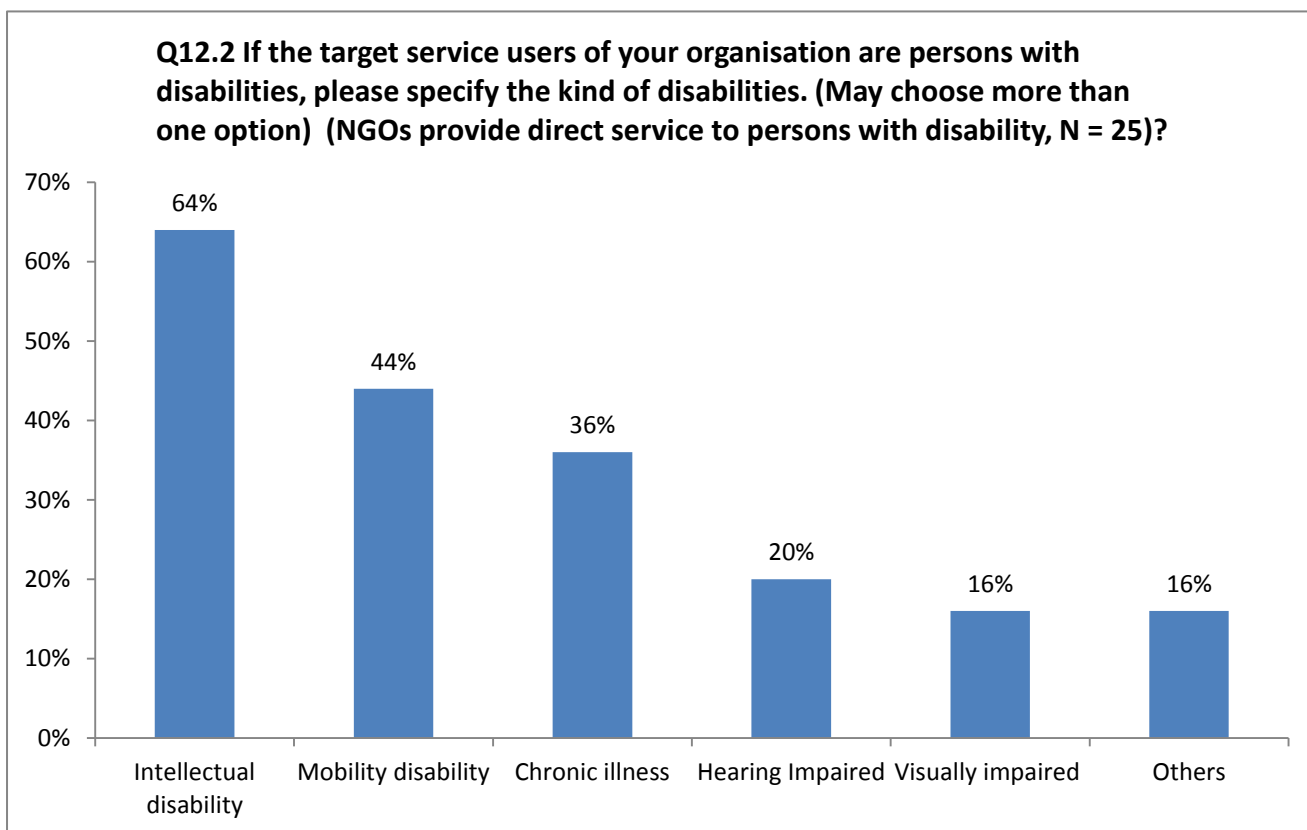


Chart 13: Number of responding NGOs (N = 51) indicated interest to participate anti-sexual harassment training organized by EOC :_51 (100%)

