



Reduce harmful work stressors.
Improve job quality and health.

Healthy Work **Strategies**

Panic Buttons: An intervention to prevent psychological trauma and physical assault among hotel housekeepers

Need for a Program

About half of women, and nearly two-thirds of women aged 18-24 years old, have experienced sexual harassment at work.^[1] About 42% of the women in the food and hospitality industry have reported sexual harassment. Hotel housekeepers (also referred to as hotel maids, hotel room cleaners, or guest room attendants) are particularly at risk due to the isolated nature of their working conditions.^[2] Their identities (that is, primarily women, individuals of color, immigrants)^[3] heighten the risk for this psychological trauma and physical assault. The nature of the industry, which is driven by customer satisfaction and an overemphasis on cost and labor control continuously (e.g. heavy focus on profit margins and meeting demands) further put the workers at risk.^[4-8]

Despite comprising the largest worker group in the hospitality industry, hotel housekeepers experience the highest rates of injuries compared to the other worker groups. They are exposed to physical hazards and to sources of stress at work, such as irregular work schedules, time pressure, and few opportunities for professional growth. Hotel housekeepers (HHs) have the highest injury rate of all workers in the hospitality/accommodation industry (7.9 per 100 workers per year).^[3, 9, 10] Data from California suggests increasing claims from illnesses and injuries among hotel housekeepers (e.g. an average increase of 897 more claims per year from 2010 to 2014).^[10]
^[11] A 2006 analysis of US Workers Compensation data revealed an annual cost of over \$4.7 million from injured housekeepers.^[12]

Until recently, little attention had been given to the psychological trauma caused by sexual harassment among housekeepers.^[13] The #MeToo movement has provided a platform for a close look at sexual harassment among low-wage workers and for organizations to be proactive in protecting the safety of their workers, including hotel housekeepers.^[14, 15] A 2015 survey of 500 housekeepers in Chicago found that 49% of the workers experienced indecent exposure. The workers reported that the guests answered their doors “naked, exposed themselves or flashed them.”^[16] In this Chicago survey, women

working in the food service/hospitality industry experienced higher levels of sexual harassment than other women nationwide.

Panic Button Programs

One solution is to require hotels to provide their workers with panic buttons, which are carried by workers. They can be used to immediately contact building security if an employee feels uncomfortable or is in an unsafe situation. A city-wide mandate for such panic buttons at work was put into place in Chicago^[17, 18], and the State of New Jersey implemented such a mandate state-wide.^[19, 20] The States of Miami^[21] and Washington^[22] also passed ordinances to protect hotel staff from harassment. In addition, several large hotel chains have signed a pledge created by the American Hotel and Lodging Association which includes equipping their employees with panic buttons. Those who have signed the pledge include G6 Hospitality, Hilton, Hyatt, InterContinental Hotels Group, Marriott International and Wyndham Hotels and Resorts.^[23] This pledge will also require the hotels to enhance policies, training and resources to improve safety and reduce risk of assault. A timeline of implementing panic buttons to increase safety for hotel housekeepers is shown in Appendix 1.

Since implementation of panic buttons is recent, formal evaluation research has yet to take place. Research is needed on:

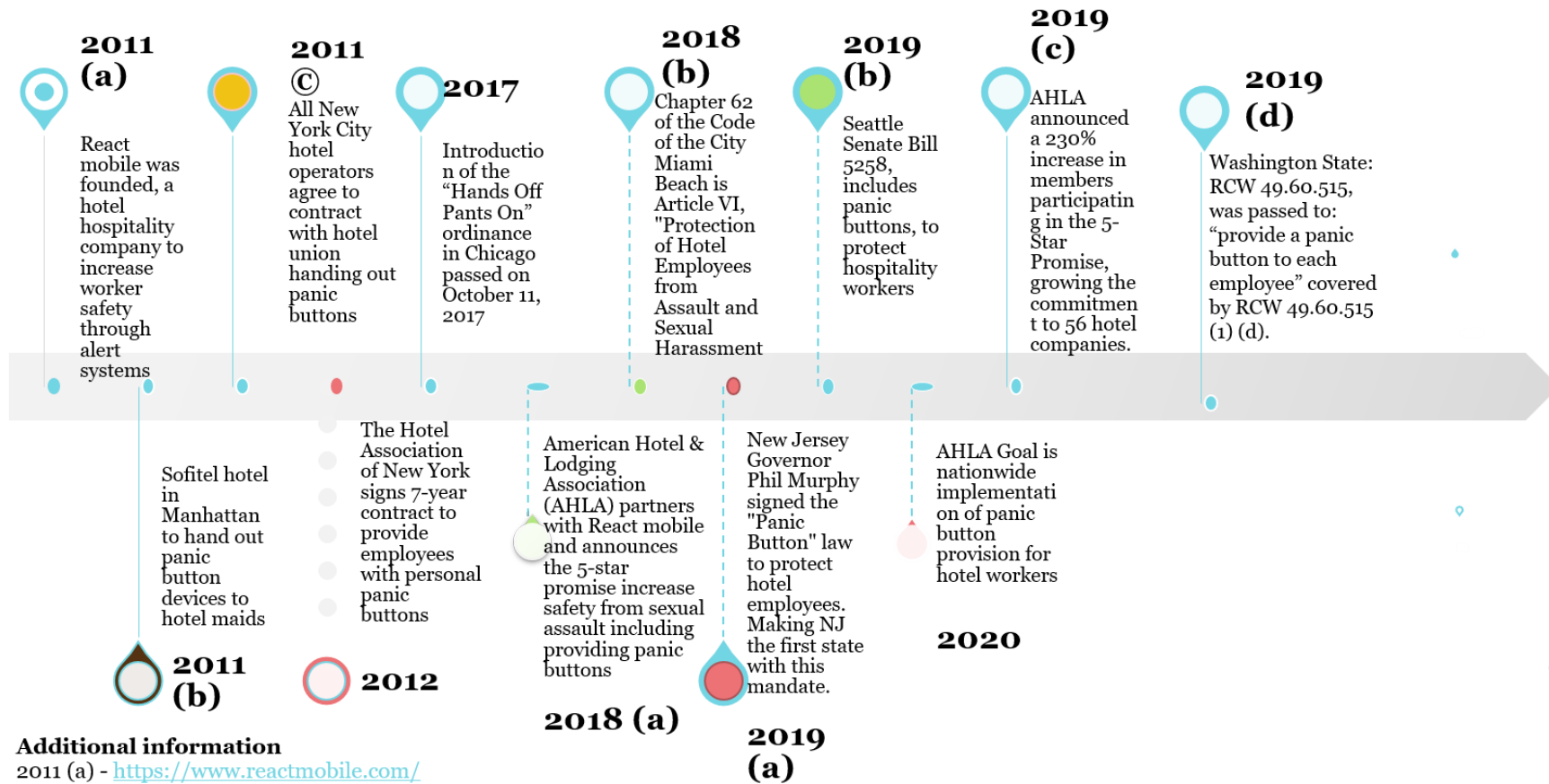
1. How common is sexual harassment (incidence and prevalence) among hotel housekeepers, both before and after panic buttons were put in place
2. Records of technological problems with the panic button devices and how quickly the problems were solved
3. How quick and effective was the response once the panic button has been activated
4. National and internal policies/mandates and implementation processes by hotels

Conclusions

Providing panic buttons to hotel housekeepers is a crucial step in preventing the psychological trauma of sexual harassment and physical assault. Despite the potential to protect the health of these workers, more work is needed for this approach to be fully effective. The passage of laws and regulations (mandates) requiring panic buttons is needed. Research is also needed to evaluate how effectively such programs are implemented and how big a difference they can make, in practice, in reducing harassment and assault.

Appendix 1

Panic Buttons to Increase Safety for Hotel Housekeepers



Additional information

- 2011 (a) - <https://www.reactmobile.com/>
- 2017 (b) - <https://www.handsoffpantson.org/protecting-and-respecting-women/>
- 2018 (a) - <https://www.reactmobile.com/5-star-promise-ahla>
- 2018 (b) - <https://f.hubspotusercontent20.net/hubfs/3344970/Case%20Studies/Nautilus/Ordinance%202018-4207.pdf>
- 2019 (a) - https://www.njleg.state.nj.us/2018/Bills/A4500/4439_11.PDF
- 2019 (b) - <https://wahospitality.org/blog/governor-signs-bill-to-protect-hotel-and-motel-workers-requires-panic-buttons/>
- 2019 (d) - [https://lni.wa.gov/forms-publications/F417-287000.pdf?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery#:~:text=A%20new%20law%2C%20RCW%2049.60,\(1\)%20\(d\).](https://lni.wa.gov/forms-publications/F417-287000.pdf?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery#:~:text=A%20new%20law%2C%20RCW%2049.60,(1)%20(d).)

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