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and assault are locally.

Of the men interviewed, the consensus was the issue existed but that it was mostly consensual among co-workers and was worse for women, especially from guest to co-worker.

One man, though – a veteran downtown bartender – told Street Roots he has been repeatedly stalked by female patrons, as well as harassed by a male patron.

“But the women have it way worse,” he said. “On busy nights, I’ve seen guys reach up and try to grab them as they’re bending over and things like that. It’s awful.”

Of the women interviewed for this article, here are a few of their many stories. Due to the nature of their accounts, Street Roots agreed to anonymity.

One woman said she was asked to perform a sex act on her male manager in order to retain her job at a popular downtown tavern.

Another woman was terminated for refusing service to a patron who was repeatedly verbally abusive to her, often calling her a “c*nt.”

Another bar worker said her male manager coaxed her onto the roof after closing and then made sexual advances toward her. She bolted and was later met with a barrage of inappropriate text messages.

Another woman said a male patron at the bar where she worked “shoved his fingers up my skirt and into my underwear and then ran off.”

Another reported an intoxicated male patron was sitting on her car when she left work, prompting her to go back inside to retrieve other employees to escort her out.

None of these experiences would be included in any retrievable statistic because none of these women filed a harassment or assault complaint to law enforcement. If the

incident were reported to management, an incident report and investigation would likely occur, the results of which would remain confidential within the company.

In the event of a reference check, companies are reluctant to ask much more than basic information like dates, titles and salaries and whether the person is eligible for rehire.

“Some employers may limit the amount of information they give out of caution and fear of defamation suits,” said Charlie Burr, BOLI’s communications director. “It’s an individual choice by the employer, not a legal mandate.”

Kelly Vaughn, a manager and bartender in Northeast Portland and a survivor of sexual assault, said, “It’s definitely a problem I’ve seen in the industry – cases where managers get terminated and then go get hired somewhere else and repeat the same practices. There’s just no way to track it, unfortunately, because managers have to adopt a legal approach. It’s a gray area, very tricky.”

Coming forward

Some high-profile cases of women and girls coming forward have captured headlines recently.

In October, six women filed a class-action lawsuit against the owners of Italian restaurant Nonna Emilia in the Southwest Portland suburb of Aloha, accusing them of sexual harassment and abuse. A comprehensive investigation by BOLI found substantial evidence regarding the allegations that kitchen manager Justin Ceccanti otherwise aided, abetted, incited, compelled and/or coerced unlawful employment practices.

In BOLI documents obtained by Street Roots, the allegations included:

- One woman, who was pregnant at the

time, alleged that Ceccanti demanded to walk her to her car, where he assaulted her.

■ Another woman claimed Ceccanti “would regularly call female members of the staff profane names such as ‘stupid bitch,’ and made other harassing and threatening statements.”

■ Another said Ceccanti provided her and her co-worker with alcohol and pressured them both to engage in sexual conduct; at one point, she said, one of the women was unconscious.

In a separate case, two teenagers sued Stars Cabaret in July, with the help of Oregon Labor Commissioner Brad Avakian and BOLI, on charges of “unlawful sexual harassment of minors.” The girls, including one who was prostituted to customers when she was 13, recently went in front of a judge for closing arguments in the civil rights case. One of the girls came forward a year after the events took place when she confided in a counselor. That one confession catapulted events that would end up causing Stars to go bankrupt, lose its liquor license and send three men to prison for compelling prostitution, first-degree sex abuse and second-degree rape, among other charges.

It is common practice to question a victim’s trustworthiness when it comes to sexual harassment and assault. Look no further than public reaction to sexual assault allegations against celebrities and politicians such as Bill Cosby and Donald Trump.

In the case against Stars Cabaret, in spite of

Report discrimination

If you believe that you have been illegally discriminated against on the basis of a protected class or protected activity, contact the Bureau of Labor and Industries’ Civil Rights Division at 971-673-0764 or crdemail@boli.state.or.us. The BOLI website, www.oregon.gov/boli, includes a Sexual Harassment Q&A, detailed information with regard to the complaint process, and more.

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PHOTO BY ELIZABETH BUELOW

From left: Kelly Vaughn, Danielle Verbus and Jessica Rosengrant founded Not OK PDX, a nonprofit that will provide training to local bars to educate staff on sexual assault and harassment.