

Submission 14

I have felt compelled to write a submission to this inquiry regarding sexual harassment in the workplace because I not only have been exposed to sexual harassment in a number of different workplaces by being on the receiving end of it but I also see and hear about its prevalence in the workforces of my friends and family and it disheartens me to know that it is seen as typical and common, and usually up to the victim to implement changes without the support of their workplace.

I have worked for [REDACTED] State Government for the past 9 years including [REDACTED].

Within [REDACTED] Police I had a series of disturbing encounters with a Sergeant who worked at [REDACTED] with me but due to his rank and being in my early 20s, I didn't feel capable of making a report, though I would go out of my way to avoid interactions with this individual. He would make sexually suggestive comments to me when we were both rostered on for night shift and he would find me in the break room and this made me incredibly uncomfortable to the point I stopped requesting those shifts, which ended up having a financial impact on me as I lost the penalty rates that came with these shifts.

As I was in the workforce longer and better able to advocate for myself, I did have an experience of reporting sexual harassment to my organisation, which was [REDACTED] at this time, [REDACTED] involving one of their [REDACTED]. This [REDACTED] had asked to come into my hotel room when I was travelling away from work and he had given me a lift back after attending a work event together. After pulling up in the car park he asked me if he could come in and give me a massage despite no invitation from me to do so and his knowledge that I was married. In fact on the drive home from the event I had mentioned my husband numerous times and our plans to try and start a family.

Following this incident, this man would ring my work phone numerous times and then also my personal number, which he had obtained somehow. He wanted to have personal discussions while he was on the road to and from work sites he was visiting and tried to have a friendship with me, which I felt out of politeness that I was obliged to do. However, I was made to feel incredibly uncomfortable and with support from my husband and my direct manager, I reported his behavior to our [REDACTED] (HR) department. The initial response I received was the advice to say to him, 'Thank you for the offer of the massage, however I will have to decline.' I felt this was incredibly inappropriate advice as it validated his behaviour as being okay when it clearly wasn't.

When I pursued the matter further by making a formal complaint, I was told that his behaviour was inappropriate and would be investigated but I never heard an outcome. The union also supported me and put me in touch with someone who had had a similar experience with this individual and they reassured me that I hadn't done anything wrong, it wasn't about me leading him on, he was a known problem to the organisation and had had several incidents with other staff members that were deemed inappropriate. My question to my organisation then was, if he is a known problem why wasn't anything done about it?

Without support from my organisation this individual continued to try and contact me until I emailed him back through my work email so that it was documented and advised him that his behaviour was making me uncomfortable and I didn't want to speak to him unless it was work related. I also challenged him contacting my private number and his response was to deny knowledge that it was (despite having a personal voicemail message, where he routinely left voicemails for me to contact him) and to say that his offer of a massage was a joke.

I believe that organisations need to implement their policies better and train their staff on how to manage these kinds of issues. Policies are already in place but anyone can have a policy, it is about how they implement it that matters. The fact that I was employed by [REDACTED] and they failed to recognise the dangers that I was being put in within their workplace is a sad reminder that businesses aren't doing enough and workers are the ones that are made to suffer.

I ended up leaving this role though I remain within the organisation at this time. This unfortunately does put me in the position of having interactions with this individual on occasion that I simply have to deal with because I have not had the support I needed. Victims mustn't be put in a position of having to justify their behaviour, it is those that show the inappropriate behaviour that must be made to answer for it. I hope that is a recommendation that your inquiry puts forward because making a claim of sexual harassment is embarrassing and exposes vulnerabilities for an individual that they are unlikely to go through without just cause.

Thank you for your time.