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National Inquiry into Sexual Harassment in Australian Workplaces
Australian Human Rights Commission
Sydney NSW 2000

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[REDACTED]

Dear Commissioner Jenkins

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the National Inquiry into Sexual Harassment in Australian Workplaces.

Having undertaken a significant amount of research on women's working lives and experiences we have collected a significant body of data on sexual harassment at work. The findings of this work is summarised in brief below:

- Our Australian Women's Working Futures (AWWF) report found that 10% of the national survey respondents of 16-40 year old women agreed that they were presently experiencing sexual harassment in their job. The rate was much higher for certain groups of women including CALD women.
- Qualitative work associated with the AWWF project (as yet unpublished) suggests that women victims of harassment and those who have observed this behaviour in their workplaces as 'bystanders' are confused about the best mechanisms for dealing with it. An overwhelming theme is that victims and bystanders report being frightened of the personal and career consequences of taking formal (and even informal) action in a harassment matter.
- Our Women's Careers in Male-dominated Occupations and Professions project has found that sexual harassment and gender-based disrespect is a common experience for women working in investment management, automotive trades and as pilots, with 22 to 43 per cent of women

experiencing offensive remarks or behaviours relating to their gender at their current workplace and 13 to 25 per cent of women experiencing sexual harassment at their current workplace.

- Our report 'Skipping a Beat', investigating the experience of women working in the Australian music industry, found that sexual harassment was rife in venues and other industry workplaces.
- Our research on 'service sector workers responses to sexual harassment' found that the experience of sexual harassment was pervasive in restaurant, bar and retail work to the point where employees and managers framed the experiences as being 'part of the job'.

We attach links to the relevant reports and articles (below) for your interest.

In terms of potential solutions to the problem, we see merit in:

- Ensuring that sexual harassment is understood as being nested within a broader context of gender-based disadvantage at work. Encourage employers and workplace stakeholders to attempt to tackle the problem in a holistic and integrated way rather than in isolation;
- Constructing a positive duty for employers to ensure workers are free from the harmful experience of sexual harassment;
- Learning from the experience in the work health and safety arena to catalyse behaviours at the most senior levels of organisations through linking process and outcomes to directors' and officers' duties;
- Establishing a more streamlined and effective system for victims of sexual harassment to have their issues heard expeditiously and appropriately;
- Funding agencies such as the AHRC, state based human rights commissions and the Fair Work Commission to enable them do their work effectively and efficiently, to meet the needs of complainants;
- Funding the collection of data (to which academics have open access) on the incidence of sexual harassment;
- Encouraging academics to undertake independent research on gender-based inequality at work, including sexual harassment, and to make government funding available to properly resource this work;



- Resource trade unions and working women's centres to provide independent, free and accessible advice to victims of sexual harassment and other people (such as witnesses) in the workplace. Presently the work these organisations do in this area is enormously underfunded, especially when considered in relation to the scale of the problem and the potential impact of such services.

Source material by WWLRG academics, on sexual harassment

Skipping a beat – the music industry

<https://sydney.edu.au/content/dam/corporate/documents/business-school/research/women-work-leadership/skipping-a-beat.pdf>

AWWF – young women's present and future of work

<https://sydney.edu.au/content/dam/corporate/documents/business-school/research/women-work-leadership/women-and-the-future-of-work.pdf>

Women in investment management – part of the women in male-dominated occupations and professions study

<https://sydney.edu.au/content/dam/corporate/documents/business-school/research/women-work-leadership/non-traditional-investors-report.pdf>

Sexual harassment in the hospitality industry – young worker responses to sexual harassment

Good L, and Cooper R (2016) 'But It's Your Job To Be Friendly': Employees Coping With and Contesting Sexual Harassment from Customers in the Service Sector *Gender, Work and Organization*, 23 (5), 447-469. [[More Information](#)]

Good L, and Cooper R (2014) Voicing their complaints? The silence of students working in retail and hospitality and sexual harassment from customers *Labour and Industry*, 24 (4), 302-316. [[More Information](#)]



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Yours sincerely,

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