

## **Time to Stamp Out Sexual Harassment in the Police**

### **An executive summary of an LSE/UNISON research study**

#### **Introduction**

UNISON has long championed the right of employees to enjoy a workplace free from harassment or discrimination of any kind. Keen to address the very limited analysis of sexual harassment in the police service in England, Scotland and Wales, Professor Jennifer Brown of the Mannheim Centre at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE), and UNISON decided to collaborate on a study to address the gap in knowledge, and tackle any adverse findings.

The research is a ground-breaking exposé of the prevalence and range of sexual harassment in the police service, and shows that much needs to be done to eradicate it. UNISON is determined to work with the police service to address the problems identified.

#### **Definition of sexual harassment**

The definition of sexual harassment is often debated. The LSE/UNISON research uses the World Bank's (2009) definition:

“...any unwelcome sexual advance, request for sexual favour, verbal or physical conduct or gesture of a sexual nature, or any other behaviours of a sexual nature that might reasonably be expected to be perceived to cause offence or humiliation to another. Such harassment may be, but is not necessarily, of a form that interferes with work, is made a condition of employment, or creates an intimidating, hostile or offensive work environment”.

#### **About the study**

In 2016, 1,776 UNISON police staff members from forces across England, Scotland and Wales volunteered to take part in an online survey. They represent 5.3% of UNISON's police staff membership and 2.1% of all police staff employed in Britain. The survey did not cover police officers.

The objective of the research was to tease out information about the nature of sexual harassment, how often it occurs and what causes it, with a view to develop preventative strategies in the police.

UNISON is the main union for police staff, with 33,700 members across all forces, apart from the Metropolitan Police and the Police Service in Northern Ireland. They include police community support officers, 999 call takers, crime scene investigators, clerks, fingerprint experts, custody and detention officers, analysts and other support roles within police forces. Their work is essential to effective policing.

Professor Jennifer Brown and Dr Ioanna Gouseti from the Mannheim Centre for Criminology, LSE, and Professor Chris Fife-Schaw from the University of Surrey

carried out the research. UNISON is grateful for their work and commitment to addressing sexual harassment in the police service today.

### **Existing research**

Existing evidence shows sexual harassment at work remains an enduring phenomenon. A 2016 YouGov public opinion poll found that one in ten individuals had experienced some form of sexual harassment in public places (of these 56% were women and 44% men).

Additionally, a survey across a wide range of UK business sectors, conducted on behalf of the Trades Union Congress (TUC, 2016), reported that more than half (52%) the women questioned said they had experienced sexual harassment at work.

A Ministry of Defence (2015) survey of sexual harassment in the army suggested generalised sexualised behaviour was common among serving personnel, with 90% of those surveyed reporting that they'd heard sexualised stories and jokes a lot over the preceding 12 months.

### **Key findings**

#### **1. Incidence of Sexual Harassment**

In the 12 months preceding the survey:

- almost half (49%) the police staff had experienced the repeated telling of sexualised jokes
- a third (33%) had faced intrusive questioning about their private life
- one in five (21%) had experience of inappropriate staring/leering
- almost one in five (19%) had received a sexually explicit email or text
- a similar number (18%) had been touched at work in a way that made them feel uncomfortable
- one in ten (12%) had witnessed or been the subject of unwelcome touching, kissing or hugging
- a similar number (11%) had experience of co-workers asking colleagues out for a date when that person was clearly not interested
- almost one in ten (8%) had been suggested to that sexual favours could lead to preferential treatment
- almost one in 20 (4%) had been pressurised into having sex with a colleague.

#### **2. Prevalence of sexual harassment**

- Sexual harassment among police staff is consistent with those experiences reported in the 2015 Ministry of Defence survey of army personnel, which found 90% of those surveyed reporting that they'd heard sexualised stories and jokes.

- Seventy per cent of police staff who have direct contact with the public, and who work alongside police officers, have witnessed sexual harassment compared to 50% of their colleagues that don't. And of those working with the public, and alongside police officers, 60% have personally experienced sexual harassment, compared to 40% of their colleagues who don't work in these environments.

### 3. Impact on the workforce

- Police staff suffered stress as a result of sexual harassment, either because they were the target of harassment or were witness to the behaviour. Although some police staff said sexualised gossiping and joking alleviated stress at work, a larger number (22%) said it not only increased their stress, but also hindered their work and productivity.
- The more serious the behaviour, the less likely police staff were to challenge it. Asked why they would not complain, 39% said it was easier to keep quiet, 37% that nothing would be done if they did speak out, 34% that they were not confident the matter would be kept confidential, and 31% that they would not be taken seriously.
- As for dealing with complaints about sexual harassment, almost half (45%) of those surveyed said they had no confidence in their HR department, 35% had no confidence in senior managers, 31% no confidence in their line manager and 20% no confidence in their force professional standards department.

### Conclusion

Existing research<sup>1</sup> suggests that where there are more men in the workforce, an environment of sexualised joking and boasting can be created. There has been some suggestion in the literature<sup>2</sup> that much of this 'banter' type of behaviour is perceived as 'harmless fun', thus relieving some of the workplace stress.

However, it is evident from Professor Brown's research that the presence of 'banter' makes serious forms of sexual harassment more likely.

### UNISON's call for action

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<sup>1</sup> Giuffre PA and Williams CL (1994) Boundary lines: Labelling sexual harassment in restaurants. *Gender and Society* 8(3): 378-401.

<sup>2</sup> McDonald, P. (2012). Workplace sexual harassment 30 years on: A review of the literature. *International Journal of Management Reviews*, 14(1), 1-17.

All employers have a duty of care to their employees and are legally liable for any sexual harassment which takes place at work, particularly if they have failed to take reasonable steps to prevent it. UNISON is currently working with the National Police Chiefs Council to develop policy and practice guidance to tackle sexual harassment in the police workplace.

UNISON believes this will require:

- An action plan to root out, and create a zero tolerance policy towards all sexual harassment in the police service to:
  - a personal commitment from police leaders
  - updating anti-harassment policies to make it clear there is a zero tolerance approach to sexual harassment
  - appropriate training for all staff
  - a review of reporting channels so staff feel they can report any sexual harassment without fear of reprisal or victimisation
  - regular evaluation of the effectiveness of action against sexual harassment via regular staff surveys.

For its part, UNISON is to review its policies and guidelines on sexual harassment, ensure that its representatives are appropriately trained, seek to work constructively with police forces to negotiate effective policies and procedures to tackle sexual harassment, and ensure that policies are regularly reviewed and monitored.

## Tables

**Table 1: Participant details**

Demographic characteristics (Numbers in brackets valid responses)	% Valid Responses	% Total Sample
<b>Women (N=713)</b>	66	40
Men (N=370)	34	21
<b>Under 35 years of age (N=186)</b>	19	10
Over 35 years of age (N=788)	81	44
<b>Disabled (N=140)</b>	13	8
Not identify as disabled (N=945)	87	92
<b>Alternative sexual orientation (N=69)</b>	74	
Heterosexual (N=875)	93	56
<b>BME (N=44)</b>	4	2
White (N=1023)	96	58
<b>Occupational details</b>		
Supporting processes (N=443)	40	15
Publically facing (N=645)	60	35

**Table 2: Overall frequency of exposure to sexual harassment**

Type of sexual harassment	Frequency %
Risqué joking (B)	78
Gossiping about another's private life (B)	74
Comments about another's appearance (B)	56
Repeatedly telling dirty jokes (HE)	49
Intrusive questions about private life (E)	33
Inappropriate leering or staring (E)	21
Forwarding email/text containing sexualised content (HE)	19
Touching making you feel mildly uncomfortable (HE)	18
Sexual gestures (E)	18
Unwelcomed touching, hugging, kissing (E)	12
Asking people for dates when clearly not interested (HE)	11
Hints that sexual favours may lead to preferential treatment (E)	8
Circulation of explicit posters/photos (E)	6
Pressurised into having sex (E)	4

B=Banter HE= Hostile Environment E=Explicit

**Table 3: Profiles of exposure to three types of sexual harassment as target, bystander and/or instigator**

<i>Target</i>	<i>Bystander</i>	<i>Instigator</i>	<i>Banter</i> % (N)	<i>Hostile Env</i> % (N)	<i>Explicit</i> % (N)
No	No	No	27% (490)	57% (1020)	74% (1020)
No	No	Yes	1% (17)	0	1% (17)
No	Yes	No	20% (350)	17% (305)	11% (196)
No	Yes	Yes	3% (49)	1% (22)	0
Yes	No	No	4% (79)	2% (30)	2% (41)
Yes	No	Yes	2% (44)	0	0
Yes	Yes	No	22% (389)	16%(285)	10% (189)
Yes	Yes	Yes	20% (358)	6%(102)	2% (25)

**Table 4: Instigators of different types of sexually harassing behaviours**

Instigator	Banter %	Hostile environment %	Explicit %
Police staff peer	79	69	66
Police officer peer	70	69	65
Police staff supervisor	47	41	32
Police officer supervisor	45	54	37
Junior	36	31	22

**Table 5: Organisational fairness / procedural justice**

Item	Response Sometimes/often
Fair distribution of work	77.9% (N=1456)
Managers, supervisors explain decisions	68.2% (N=1572)
Given recognition for contributions	63.4%(N= 1537)
Felt involved in decision making	60.8% (N=1516)
Encouraged to challenge work routines	54.4% (N=1545)
Helped to develop career	47.6% (N=1402)
Helped to gain promotion	30.8% (N=1179)

Cronbach's Alpha reliability scale =0.89.

**Table 6: Personal outcomes**

Impact	<i>Banter</i>	<i>Hostile environment</i>	<i>Explicit</i>
Increases my stress *	22% (328)	29% (381)	32% (380)
Makes no difference	61% (909)	66% (868)	67% (800)
Decreases my stress	18% (261)	5% (69)	1% (16)
Helps me complete my work**	2% (35)	1% (12)	0.2% (3)
Makes no difference	85% (1266)	78% (1022)	74% (880)
Hinders me completing my work	13% (199)	21% (273)	25% (300)

\*Chi square 256.611 (df =,4) p<. 001

\*\* Chi square 85.64 (df = ,4) p<.001

Chi square is a statistical test commonly used to compare observed data with data expected to be obtained according to a specific hypothesis.