

Summary prepared by the Commission of Inquiry into QPS responses to domestic and family violence
Primary source material provided by the QPS in response to NTP 2.065, Item 2

Case study 4

In 2018, a female Queensland Police Service Constable made a complaint about treatment directed towards her by a male Senior Constable from the [REDACTED]

The Senior Constable was, at times, the Constable's supervisor. The Senior Constable made unwanted advances towards her over a four-month period in 2017. In particular, she alleged that:

- he used his position to regularly harass her by persistently sending suggestive text messages, telling her he loved her, referring to her as his girlfriend, and calling her pet names such as "baby" and "detective sexy".
- While they were conducting surveillance, the Senior Constable reached over and squeezed her leg just above the knee and then slid his hand down her leg.
- Despite the Constable having repeatedly rejected his advances and having told him she was not interested he continued to pursue her.
- After she left the staff Christmas party to go home to care for her 14-month-old baby, the Senior Constable sent her a series of texts including, "what no invite for drinks on the balcony", "what's your address", "don't leave me hanging" and that he was coming over. The Constable told him not to come over, that she had to work, and was going to sleep. He continued to text her saying that he was on his way in two separate messages, that he needed to have a "d and m" with her, that he would be downstairs in three minutes, he then called her mobile on two occasions and sent a final message saying that he was downstairs.
- His behaviour got steadily worse the more she rejected his advances. He would harass or get angry with her if she did not respond to his messages. He would talk down to her, belittle her about her rank, disagree with her, or be rude to her at work.

In late 2017, the Constable confronted the officer about his behaviour and a conversation he had had with another senior officer about her. She confided in her Inspector who advised their Superintendent of his conduct on her behalf. She was told that the Senior Constable would be working elsewhere for a period of time. She did not make a formal complaint at this time.

In 2018, on her first day returning from a period of leave, she was rostered to execute a search warrant with the Senior Constable, who was now acting as a Sergeant. She advised her Inspector that she was uncomfortable. He told her that he didn't have the power to remove him from the office and suggested to her that she could move desks. She subsequently spoke to ESC and made a formal complaint.

Prior to the complaint being investigated, the Senior Constable had been given managerial guidance by the Superintendent which consisted of "discussing [his] conduct and accepted professional behaviour whilst on and off duty" in a 30 minute conversation. ESC correspondence in relation to the managerial guidance stated that, "the [officer] acknowledged that in hindsight the behaviour was inappropriate and he understands that he made [her] feel very uncomfortable in the workplace and also in her own home." On the basis of this correspondence, the Assistant Commissioner formed the view that, in the circumstances, the Constable's complaint had been adequately addressed through the prior managerial process and no investigation or further action was taken in relation to the Senior Constable's behaviour.

The Commission has access to the complaint file, which includes the recordings of the conversations between the Senior Constable and the Acting Superintendent which amounted to the managerial guidance.

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The recordings demonstrate that at times there was a minimisation of the Senior Constable's conduct by the Superintendent, including using language such as:

"Mate, I'm sorry to have to do this to you."

"Just so you are aware its not a disciplinary matter at this stage, its just a management issue and I just want to talk through what I think we should be doing and some other stuff."

"I am aware of a few things that have occurred, unfortunately the matter has gone above me."

"I don't want you to think that I am blaming you in any sense."

In contrast to the ESC correspondence which indicated that the Senior Constable had acknowledged that *"the behaviour was inappropriate and that he made her feel very uncomfortable in the workplace and also in her own home,"* the recording demonstrates that the Senior Constable was defensive and dismissive of his conduct throughout the conversation. He minimised his own behaviour and only accepted some of the conduct when confronted with specific messages that the Acting Superintendent had access to. He denied other conduct despite being confronted with evidence of what had occurred. He primarily blamed the Constable for misinterpreting his behaviour. At no stage was there any real acceptance by him of his own conduct or the harm he had caused his junior female colleague. Comments made by the Senior Constable about his behaviour included:

"I can see where she has misconstrued it."

"I can see how she has read it as being inappropriate but that wasn't its intention."

"It was a joke."

The subsequent complaint was finalised less than two weeks later with the Senior Constable being advised in writing by the Assistant Commissioner that:

"...I am satisfied that this complaint has been adequately addressed through managerial process. No further action will be taken in relation to this complaint and no adverse reference will be placed on your personal file."

In 2020, the Constable resigned from the Queensland Police Service. In her separation notice, she stated that the main reason for her separation was the harassment she had received by the Senior Constable, the bullying by another officer after her complaint, and the treatment she received as a result. She wrote:

"I made a justified complaint about sexual harassment in the workplace. A complaint I had evidence of, in the form of months worth of text messages. I had the right to come to work and not be sexually harassed. After repeated attempts to shut the advances down, I asked for help. I was then victimised and bullied by another male colleague when all I had wanted was to come to work and be treated professionally. After being sexually harassed, I was then ignored, intimidated, ostracised, spoken badly about and punished for speaking up."

My workplace was never the same. I had various male colleagues treat me differently after I raised these issues, I had male colleagues ignore me and deliberately not include me in discussions or in social events like morning coffee. The level of distrust was soul destroying and it destroyed my career. I could not rectify it. I often wonder how these colleagues would react

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if their wives or daughters were unfairly victimised like this in a workplace on top of being sexually harassed."

A complaint was generated because of her separation notice. It was finalised on the basis that the Senior Constable and the other officer had already been dealt with and no additional allegations were made. No further action was taken.

Related complaints

A cross reference of other Queensland Police Service files obtained by the Commission demonstrates that about six months later, the Superintendent who provided the managerial guidance in relation to the Senior Constable made a derogatory comment about a female Senior Constable, during her panel interview in which the Superintendent was the panel convenor. During the interview, the Superintendent wrote the word "loose" on a piece of paper and showed it to another panel member, a male Detective Senior Sergeant, who acknowledged it by nodding. The QPS files demonstrate that the female applicant saw this, felt rattled, lost focus during her interview and performed poorly. The Superintendent was, himself, later dealt with by way of Local Management Resolution in relation to this matter.

A further cross reference of Queensland Police Service files that have been obtained by the Commission demonstrate that the Senior Constable who the "loose" comment had been made about was sexually assaulted by one of the panel members (the Detective Senior Sergeant who nodded at the "loose" comment) moments before she entered the interview room. The sexual assault involved the Detective Senior Sergeant waiting until the other panel members entered the interview room and then standing beside the Senior Constable and slowly sliding his hand over her bottom, up her back and onto the bottom of her bra, before walking into the interview room as if nothing had happened. The Senior Constable did not want to report the matter for fear of professional detriment as the Detective Senior Sergeant was in a position of power. Despite making disclosures to a colleague immediately after the interview, she did not formally report the matter until the Detective Senior Sergeant was no longer working with the Queensland Police Service.

The Detective Senior Sergeant was the subject of a Juniper investigation which identified 26 junior female Queensland Police Service members who had been subjected to his sexual harassment, sexual assault, bullying and predatory behaviour over around a three-year period. Eighty of the 84 allegations the subject of the investigation were substantiated. The Detective Senior Sergeant's behaviour has been summarised by the Commission in Case Study 8.