

Submission 258

I was sexually harassed by a male colleague about 10 years older than me at a farewell drinks for another colleague. He told me that my only value in the workplace was 'someone to fuck' and that the only reason any men ever spoke to me in the workplace was because they wanted to fuck me. Any men who I considered to be my friends were not actually my friends but just wanted to fuck me. Any of them who had partners also only spoke to me because they wanted to fuck me and if they thought they could get away with it would have done so. His barrage was relentless and I eventually left the event in tears and completely distraught. I went home and took out enough medication to end my life. I didn't take it. There was a witness to the event another younger male colleague. The next day the perpetrator sent me a text message asking if I got home safe and requested to follow me on Instagram. The following week the perpetrator cornered me at work and apologised if he had said anything to upset me and that he hadn't realised it was 'heading in that direction'. I made a complaint at work and HR conducted an investigation and issued the perpetrator with an official warning. He had admitted to the behaviour and the witness had also confirmed the events. The perpetrator's contract was finishing within a month of the harassment and was renewed for another six months following the incident. There was then a restructure and the perpetrator was given a permanent contract. To me this was of great concern

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HR and my manager agreed I should not have to work with the perpetrator anymore and offered that I could work from home as much as I liked. No one explained the severity and impact of what had happened to the team and as a result I was then subjected to other team members telling me that they weren't sure if it was harassment or not, that it was a hard situation because they didn't know the full context of what he was saying, and that they were supporting the perpetrator through what was really a very hard time for him too. This caused me immense amounts of distress and anxiety. Eventually the perpetrator resigned from his position and I was subjected to team members telling me how sad they were that he was leaving and how great he was. I was then invited to his farewell drinks and when I complained about this as I should not have been invited but also the organisation should not have held farewell drinks for someone who sexually harassed a colleague at farewell drinks I was told off for not answering my phone outside of business hours.

On the first day that the perpetrator was no longer working at the workplace I arrived at work to find an email saying that his contract had been extended by a week as he hadn't finished all his work yet. I responded to the email that had 3 managers and an HR rep cc'd in saying that I was feeling very anxious as a result of this news. I was told that he was working from home. I then began to feel much more anxious and sent another email to the same group letting them know. No one responded and I ended up having an anxiety attack in the park near work and had to go home for the day. My manager called me up the next day and yelled at me saying that no one expected me to have that

response and that I may not be able to do that travel that was required of me for work as I might just have an anxiety attack at any moment. I explained that I had spoken to two psychologists (one EAP, one private) following the attack who had both indicated that they felt my heightened anxiety as a result of the situation at had was not surprising at all. I asked her repeatedly to end this discussion as I needed a support person present and I was feeling very anxious, however she pressed on regardless. I told her she would need to contact me if they were planning on rehiring the perpetrator again and she argued that that would be difficult - as I hadn't answered my phone the last time she had tried to call me (immediately following the anxiety attack).

The perpetrator left at the end of that week and then the manager of the team announced that she wanted to change the reporting lines in the team. The person I would be reporting to would be a man who I knew had a history of sexually harassing women at work. He was also the person who had said that the perpetrator was having a really hard time following the harrassment. I argued that I should not be placed in such close proximity to this man as I had barely come out of the last horrible situation. I was told that the team manager did not know about the man's history of harassment and she would not be investigating it, however she would be telling the man that we were not changing reporting lines because I thought he had sexually harassed someone. I argued that this was putting us both in a terrible position and she should not do this and she argued that actually if we were both mature we would be able to work through it. I sought advice from the union and again urged her to not proceed with this course of action. The next day she told me that her manager had said he didn't want the reporting lines to change and the whole thing was abruptly called off. That team manager then went on maternity leave.

A few weeks later I was asked to work on a report that the perpetrator had not finished and when I did finish it the man in my team who had a history of sexual harassment decided to send it to the perpetrator for his feedback despite him no longer working at the organisation. This caused me great distress and I complained to HR and my manager. Eventually the man agreed to recall the report from the perpetrator. At this point I decided to make a WorkCover claim as I was regularly seeing a psychologist to assist with the trauma and constant re-traumatisation these events were causing me. I was successful in my claim and my employer now pays my psychologist bills. Unfortunately it took my employer and the insurer six months to get their act together to pay the psychologist so he was effectively treating me for free for an extended period of time, during this time I had to keep chasing his fees which included making phone call after phone call to the insurer and various HR staff at my workplace. Explaining my story over and over again to complete strangers was horrible and another re-traumatising feature of the way my workplace dealt with the harassment.

Not long after my claim was granted the perpetrator applied for a consultancy with the employer and as there was a new head of HR who knew what he was doing the perpetrator was not considered for the consultancy. It saddened me to know that colleagues from my team had encouraged him to apply.

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[REDACTED] I decided to address the way the whole thing was dealt with with HR directly and made an appointment to speak to the Head of HR. She set a time for us to go for coffee to talk about what happened. This was completely inappropriate as recalling these events was very traumatising and to do so in public was even worse. The woman promised to take action on the organisation's approach to addressing harassment. She was made redundant 3 weeks later and no follow up occurred.

As I was getting very frustrated following up payments and constantly fighting for my rights and recognition I then took up the issue with the new head of HR. I asked that I would not have to report to the woman manager who had treated me so badly during the fall out of the harassment as she was returning from maternity leave. I was granted this but then asked to report to her manager. Her manager was very supportive however I was then completely siloed from the team with no long-term solution in sight. The situation was incredibly stressful and I decided that after an 18-month struggle enough was enough so I found a new job and resigned. I was told it would be too difficult to have a farewell for me given the tensions in my team with my manager and was asked to organise my own farewell where usually it was organised for you. I was then called on my second last day to have a meeting with HR just to 'tie a nice bow' around the HR issues I had encountered. The interview was with the HR representative who had mismanaged the entire case and so I declined to participate. The workplace in question continues to pay for my psychological treatment, which has now been going for almost 2 years since the event. My psychologist and I agree that the way the case was handled caused significant trauma.