

My experience of Sexual Harassment in [REDACTED] Public Schools

Below is a chronological list of incidences of sexual harassment I have experienced in the workplace from students, and from people from the workplace. It also includes description of intimidation that I believe was done because I was a female in my particular role, and includes some but not all workplace incidents. It contains information about my compensable workplace injuries, which are a direct result of sexual harassment and other incidents in the workplace

[REDACTED]

When I started teaching [REDACTED] Public Secondary School [REDACTED], a male [REDACTED] teacher in my faculty was assigned as my first-year teacher mentor, as his subject was closely related to the one I would be teaching. The school I taught at was a very challenging school and we were told by the union representative to formally report any abuse by students.

[REDACTED]

I had a male student in my year [REDACTED] class ask me what cunnilingus was. Whilst this was a bit confronting, I thought it best to answer the question from a factual basis, like it was a PE sex Ed class question. I felt that this was the best way forward as there were only male students in the room [REDACTED]. I felt that the boys were looking for a reaction and wanted to make me feel uncomfortable. I answered the question, as I believe my role as an educator is to answer questions students raise, particularly if they are inquiring and wanting to know information. As I did not react and gave them the facts of what it was, the students did not ask me sex-based questions again.

During [REDACTED] I had to constantly fend off my male mentor teacher who kept requesting I have a sexual relationship with him. He told me he was in an unhappy marriage. I constantly told him "no", I even explained that he was 18 years older than me and I was not interested at all. He knew I was in relationship with someone unrelated to the school, but still continued to be inappropriate with me. I did not report this because as a small school the staff knew everyone, the principal in the school was ineffective (he did not support teachers with students with challenging behaviours and glossed over many incidents like they never happened). It was difficult as we shared a staffroom and I felt it would be very difficult not to "be friendly" to avoid questions. This male teacher when propositioning me would always do this when we were alone together in the staffroom, which was often as with the school timetable we had a line free at the same time.

I ended up being the only female in our staffroom during this year. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

At one stage I was made an "honorary male" (their words). It seemed to me that this was so that they could speak freely in a crude and disrespectful way about women in front of me. Prior to this initiation into the "male hood", they felt uncomfortable using crude language in front of me; I think that they decided to make me an "honorary male" to make themselves feel better, it did not seem to be about my comfort. In one particular conversation they were talking about the year 10 girls in a lewd way, about the girl's physical appearances. I felt very uncomfortable and tried to ignore it. I may have said something but it has been so long that I can't remember if I did or not.

At the work Christmas party that year one male staff member [REDACTED] [REDACTED] told me that the male mentor teacher (whom they were good friends) was "in love with me". I said "I know" and walked away. I was uncomfortable, as even though I had told the mentor teacher I was never going to be interested in them sexually or any other relationship with them, they decided to speak to another teacher about their thoughts and that this teacher thought it appropriate to discuss this with me. I did not report this to the Principal, as I felt uncomfortable with the unwanted attention, [REDACTED] and the mentor teacher were leaving the school anyway.

[REDACTED]

This year I had most colourful language directed in my direction from students, the reportable ones were:

- "fuck you"
- "tight arse"
- "fuck you" followed by "write that down you skanky dyke slut"

One of the most common forms of verbal harassment at the school was for male and female students' to call "target" female students "sluts" as a form of bullying and harassment.

I [REDACTED] to study [REDACTED]. The mentor teacher from my first school also [REDACTED] to study the same [REDACTED] course [REDACTED]

A [REDACTED] class discussion took place on power and appropriateness of relationships with power (e.g. dating your lecturer at university). The females in this class (half teachers, half youth workers) were horrified when two males in the room, which included the mentor teacher, entered the discussion by describing lewd comments made in staffrooms. One male teacher had said that it was common for male teachers to have discussions in the staffroom about, "would they tell", implying a consideration of whether the female student would tell if the male teacher made a pass or was inappropriate towards them. The females in the room were completely disgusted and a few raised their voices and gave the males a piece of their mind. As I had witnessed this first hand in my own staffroom, I was stunned silent, as my sexual harasser was in the room.

I MOVED TO A NEW SCHOOL [REDACTED]

My mentor and I had discussed catching up and discussing our [REDACTED] course at my house. I had no reason to believe that he would harass me again as he so far had not during the [REDACTED] course and I thought he had got the message. I only invited him over to my house as a friend to work on course work together. Everything was fine until the time came when he was about to leave. At the front door he turned around on the way out and groped my breast. I was furious and told him that it was not appropriate. In this instance I had wished I had not tried to maintain some sort of working arrangement at all.

He ended up leaving the course before the first year of the course had finished and I was relieved that I would not have to see him again.

He then sometime later sent me one day out of the blue an explicit email at work from his work email; it was a series of pornographic Simpsons cartoons. I didn't know how to respond, I hoped that the filters on the email system would catch him out. Who could I show? I was embarrassed; I didn't want to show my new male faculty head, [REDACTED]. I deleted the email, ignored it and I did not receive one again. I even black listed/created an email ruling, to trash the mentor teachers' emails.

I had spoken to two male students at recess on appropriate dress at school. They were wearing their jeans so low that the waistband of their jeans were under their bottoms, and their boxer shorts were on full view front and back. I asked them politely if they could please raise their pants as students and teachers did not want to see their underwear. All of this conversation was within school guidelines on student dress code; I was respectful about this discussion. I did not report this as a violation of appropriate dress as they complied and we left it at that, or so I thought.

The following lesson I was in my staffroom preparing for classes, the door was open as we had no air circulation and the way the staffroom was set up which meant my back was to the door. The students from the incident silently entered my staffroom, they were truanting from class. My back was to the door. One spoke to me and I turned around, the other student was silent and watched. The student who spoke pulled down his jeans to his knees to expose to me his full underwear and continued to speak to me as if nothing had happened. It struck me that this was a very passive aggressive action, and retaliation for me speaking to them at recess regards their clothing. To defuse the situation and as I was cornered with no exit, I sat there looked him in the eye and told them they needed to go to class. I was unable to reach the telephone to seek support. When they left, I called student services and reported both incidents. Student services came to assist and caught them smoking out the back.

Later that day I went to student services with my written reports of the incidents. The student who had exposed himself was there and directed aggressive behaviour towards me (I presume for reporting the incidents). The school had a restorative justice system. However, despite the presence of such a system, the school at no stage worked through these steps for my benefit. I was furious about what had happened; there was no follow up with me about what had happened in the school or how I felt. The only thing any schools ever did was say go speak to the Employee Assistance Program (EAP). I didn't find that an acceptable solution because that didn't stop what happened at school or change the student behaviours.

I MOVED TO A NEW SCHOOL [REDACTED]

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I had been at my new school placement for a term when I went into the staff common room to be greeted with my previous male mentor teacher who had sexually harassed me. █
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At one point I confronted him about the incidents at our previous school, in particular the breast groping. He completely denied that any of this had ever occurred. He did not harass me again.

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In a class a group of male students had a discussion along the lines, we should tell her, no we shouldn't, yes we should. I asked what it was they wanted to tell me, and should I know? One student told me (and the whole class) that another student was telling other members of the student body that they were "poking me", implying that I was having a sexual relationship with this student. I did not teach the student who made the false allegation and had no idea why it was being said, or how long it had been said. I immediately left the classroom and reported this incident to the year coordinator and my executive teacher. I then went on an excursion for the next three hours I was concerned about what had been said but the excursion had to continue. On my return, I was then further informed that this was a rumour being spread around the school population by students █ for a few weeks.

What had occurred was the student who had made the statement of the sexual nature had been bullied in the sex Ed class they were having. For reasons unknown they decided to say they were having a sexual relationship with me, which was untrue. The other students knew this was false but nonetheless thought it would be hilarious to spread this rumour around the school. █
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█ I was worried that I would lose my job, or a parent or media would find out about this rumour, and take it as fact. I worried that my teaching career was over; all because some students thought it would be funny to bully another student and spread a false rumour. I had a mental break down (my first) over this incident that afternoon. █
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The following Tuesday at the end of recess whilst on yard duty, two year █ male students were playing chase on the playground. One ran behind me, pinned my arms to my side and used me as a human shield from his chaser. I asked repeatedly for him to "let go" and "not touch me" but this continued for some minutes. This student was in the class that the rumour had started in. I wondered if the rumour had not happened would he have held my arms at my side? I stood on the playground watching the rest of the school go into class, as the bell had rung moments before this incident started. Not one person looked in my direction; if the teachers did, they would have seen what was happening. Never before in my life had I been held against my will.

When the male student let me go, I immediately walked into the acting principal's office and broke down. She told me to go home. I saw the EAP. The acting principal offered me time away from work; I chose to work only three days a week (due to the nature of my classes I needed to at least have some days at work to contain the chaos my classroom would be from relief teachers). It took me two months to regain my mental health sufficiently to enable me to return to full time hours again. The incident was not spoken of again and I was never asked again at work how I was going, nor followed up on once I was back in full time hours. There was never a comment made at staff meetings about staff on yard duty looking out for teachers. These two incidents have had a profound effect on my health and wellbeing and were the starting point for a severe mental health condition, an adjustment disorder. I can recall these events like it was yesterday.

These two incidents above were accepted as a compensable work injury. Despite a medical report recommending follow up, there was never any by the school or department during the next two years on how I was travelling, reducing any stressors in my employment and so on.

█ & █
During my time at this school the female █ teacher was my secret Santa one year. We already had a tense relationship. She bought me some plastic sex toy handcuffs and sex game dice. Secret Santa gifts were given out at our staff Christmas lunch by a staff member dressed as Santa, and everyone opened these so all staff could see what they were given. The █

teacher knew this as she had been at the school longer than me. I was embarrassed, humiliated and shocked that she thought that this “gift” would be appropriate. It was very amusing to her. The executive teachers did not speak to her or me about this incident. I didn’t report it as I thought it was pretty obvious how inappropriate this was. My fellow staffroom colleague who I was sitting next to was equally horrified.

Again, students directed inappropriate language towards me including:

- “fucking bitch, I hope you die”
- “fucking cow”

On a few occasions I would be asked by male teachers to talk to female students about appropriate levels of dress for school; as they were either not wearing uniform, or appropriate clothing (as in too much cleavage being shown). It was uncomfortable for me and the students. I tried to do this in a respectful way. I was given this role [REDACTED], so they thought I would be the best person to discuss clothing with female students and also that I was female. This also happened in my previous school on one occasion.

The start of this school year became increasingly more stressful. The workload and the continued placement of disruptive students into my year [REDACTED] class, during term 1 by my Executive teacher had made it challenging for me. I had told my executive teacher I was not coping with the extra students [REDACTED] who were all challenging. I was told by my executive teacher “but you’re so good with the students” and “it is a week trial” and when I said they could go back to the class they were initially in, I was told “they were causing problems there”. I replied that they were causing problems in my class as well.

I then went to my staffroom shut the door, walked out of the classroom into my executive teacher’s staffroom which included all the male teachers in our faculty. I said “I can’t do this anymore” as I walked past him, went to the back of the staffroom sat on the floor in a ball and cried. The executive teacher organised someone to take my class, he called the deputy principal (whom I had not given the incident report from earlier in the day) down to talk to me. I had a day or so away from work.

I made contact to see my executive teacher in stand down to inform him that I was unable to continue teaching the following term as I was exceptionally distressed at the incidents that had occurred. [REDACTED] My executive teacher was aggressive and abusive in public, when I informed him of my need to be away from work. He said that it would be difficult to replace me; I burst into tears in public. I went back the first week of the school term as I was told I needed to prepare my lessons for the relief teacher who would take my role for the next 8-10 weeks. I was never given the option of not going back at this stage and someone else preparing the relief work.

In May [REDACTED] my GP requested a rehabilitation provider to be provided to me. This did not occur until December [REDACTED].

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Near the end of my time away from school I had to pop back in to complete leave paperwork. If someone asked me how I was, I cried and had to leave.

My executive teacher demanded that I return to school to write reports. I was unwell and was forced to do this under obligation to the school and my role as a classroom teacher. He didn't care that I was unwell and distressed, nor that I had a medical certificate stating I was not working. I was so mentally distressed that I was unable to fight this and say no. My executive teacher then told me that he had a teacher lined up to do my classes at the school for the following year, which at this point was an unknown situation. He had basically decided that he would give my job to this other person, [REDACTED]

I was then sent for a medical exam and told that I was unable to teach in a high school and the department forced me to apply in the school transfer round for zero positions, so that they could fill my position at the high school. I was distressed as I did not know what the outcome and my work situation would be as no one told me. The following year I still had my position number, in fact the school could have had my position advertised as a yearly contract (like maternity leave) until I was afforded time to recover and teach again, should I then be fit to teach in a high school.

I was never contacted by the principal about what happened. I was not contacted by the school again, unless I had to call for paperwork. I was never given a farewell like other staff, my work email account, my only connection with work, was cancelled, and I had to call the department to have it reinstated (when this happened I was still technically a member of staff at that school). The school did not enquire into my health and wellbeing. I was away from work for ¾ of the working year.

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

I had contact with the Education Union to help me with a placement for my graduated return to work as the department had not contacted me about what would be happening with my work placement.

A NEW SCHOOL WITH GRADUATED RETURN TO WORK — The outcomes from my work injuries from sexual harassment [REDACTED]

I was put on a graduated return to work in a primary school. I was told that this was because when little kids tell you to "fuck off" (department staffing officer said this) it isn't as traumatic. I was distressed every time I walked in or near a classroom and it took a whole term before I could walk into a classroom and speak to students without crying.

During my graduated return to work the rehabilitation provider could see that I was not best suited to a primary school. It was decided to place me [REDACTED] as I could no longer teach in a High School and a Primary School was not utilising my knowledge set to its best advantage. I was placed in [REDACTED] for a few days a week [REDACTED]. I had a breakdown when I saw a former high school student whilst on the first day of the graduated return to work program, and was sent home for the day.

I had to apply twice in the transfer round for a position. I was not afforded any help or special consideration to obtain a position I was deemed medically fit for. I was not placed in either of the two positions I applied for. I was however approached for a position at a very challenging high school, that I was not medically fit to teach at, as I was told I was an excellent teacher and the principal of that school, whom had worked with me before was interested to have me work at their school. I was later on called for a position at [REDACTED], as they had no one who could teach a subject area that I was trained to teach. It was not a location I had wanted to teach at, however, as it was well away from my sexual harasser and former students, I took it as I thought I had no other option.

A NEW SCHOOL WITH GRADUATED RETURN TO WORK
[REDACTED]

In my permanent placement at this school, I was sat in the male staffroom again for our faculty but this time did not experience any harassment.

[REDACTED]

I found being back at work challenging and my compensable injury made it difficult to function. I received little assistance from my School.

[REDACTED]

I knew by the Easter school holidays I was unable to continue working but I soldiered on, as I knew the work we were doing was too difficult to have a relief teacher come in and take over.

[REDACTED] I walked into my staffroom in the morning looked around and cried, I could do it no more, my teaching career effectively was over. The ramifications of my compensable workplace injuries were killing me, it was making me sicker, and it was affecting my family. I had two weeks off (as students were still there) and came back to complete reports; by this stage no students would be at work to trigger me. When driving to work for these last two weeks I suffered heart palpitations and panic attacks every time I got close to work.

[REDACTED]

I currently no longer work as a teacher; in fact I have applied for and been granted invalidity retirement.

I have been asked numerous times over the past [REDACTED] years about the sexual harassment incidents in my workplace, my workplace trauma, the catalyst of my compensable workplace injury and mental health condition and continually have to justify that my initial workplace injury was significantly contributed to by employment.

The incident in [REDACTED] with the false allegation affected me; the incident in [REDACTED] changed me permanently. I have never been myself since the [REDACTED] incident at work. Simple things can cause me anxiety now, something I never had before. I can cry recalling the [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] incidents mentioned above, I was never a crier before. It hits me suddenly, the memory will just recall back into my conscience.

I suffer from anxiety regularly, which manifests in heart palpitations, disturbed sleep, reflux, mental fatigue, agitation on issues, anger, depression, weight gain, headaches and lethargy to name a few. Simple activity can leave me crushed for the rest of the day. My psychological health is the reason that I have decided not to have any more children.

I've had people say, "oh so nice to stay at home and not work", "everyone is stressed in their workplace", like I'm some sort of softie for having a work injury due to the abuse and sexual harassment. "You couldn't hack it", like it is some expectation that this abuse is a given for teachers. I've been sent to numerous psychiatrists, one said in their report that what I had experienced was "normal" for teachers, implying that an expectation of the job was this abuse and sexual harassment. Another said I was not suited to teaching. Those who know me, my peers, students, parents and supervisors have always said otherwise.

It hurts that over the years it has been assumed that the problem somehow lies with me and not my abusers. My employer didn't take precautions in how it addresses sexual harassment in schools, and didn't provide adequate ways to report sexual harassment in the workplace in a safe and confidential manner (only an body external to the workplace could effectively do this).