# Sexual harassment experienced by police staff serving in England, Wales and Scotland : a descriptive exploration of incidence, antecedents and harm

**Sexual harassment experienced by police staff serving in England, Wales and Scotland: A descriptive exploration of incidence, antecedents and harm.**

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**ABSTRACT**

An on-line survey (N=1776) was conducted with support staff to explore both the type and incidence of sexual harassment within the police working environment and the explanatory value of known antecedent factors. Uni-variate results indicated highest levels of sexual harassment were associated with what has been termed sexual 'banter', reported by three quarters of those surveyed, with a diminishing level of exposure to more serious types of harassment. Respondents reported adverse impacts whether sexual harassment experienced as a target or bystander. Multivariate analyses found statistically significant associations between perceived levels of organisational justice and confidence in the organisation's ability to deal with its occurrence and two types of sexual harassment. Having established a better understanding of salient risk factors the discussion identifies implications for organisational preventative interventions.

## Introduction

### *Incidence and conceptualisations*

The World Bank (2009:9) has developed a useful and comprehensive definition of sexual harassment as:

> "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".

Much work on defining and understanding the occurrence of sexual harassment amongst employees was undertaken in the 1980s, resulting in the development of workplace policies and legislation in the following decade (see e.g., Rubenstein, 1989; Stockdale, 1996). As the 1990s progressed, empirical research reported the frequencies of occurrence across a spectrum of working environments (e.g. Collinson

and Collinson, 1996), including the police service (Jones, 1986, Martin, 1990, Brown, Campbell and Fife-Schaw, 1995). The latter study found high levels of sexual harassment experienced by both warranted police officers and non-police support staff.

In a review of research into workplace sexual harassment, McDonald (2012) shows a persistence of occurrence as evidenced by tracking data from the US Merit Systems Protection Board between 1981 and 1997. Although incidence estimates vary depending on measurement and methodologies, McDonald, Charlesworth and Graham (2015) conclude that sexual harassment at work remains an enduring phenomenon. In the UK, sexual harassment has reappeared on the public agenda recently. A 2016 YouGov poll of the general public found that one in ten individuals had experienced some form of sexually harassing behaviour in public places (of whom 56% were women and 44% men). A troubling level of sexual harassment has also been found taking place in schools (House of Commons Women and Equalities Committee, 2016). 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%) of the women questioned said they had experienced sexual harassment at work. Opportunity Now and PWC Research and Insight Team (2014) found instances of sexual harassment across all the occupations they surveyed, with those from the uniformed services reporting the highest rate (23%). The Ministry of Defence's (2015) own survey of sexual harassment in the army indicated generalised sexualised behaviours to be common amongst serving personnel, with 90% hearing sexualised stories and jokes.

Conceptual distinctions between qualitatively different types of harassment differentiate between more generalised insulting, demeaning or disdainful attitudes (gender harassment); leering, touching and pressurised requests for dates (hostile environment) and more coercive or threatening behaviours (Fitzgerald, 1990). Others such as Goodman-Delahunty, Schuller and Martschuk (2016) used a severity index to grade the harmful impact of stressors which included sexual coercion, unwanted sexual attention and gender hostility, with a sample of police officers from New South Wales, Australia. Differential impacts were reported, with the unwanted attention receiving the lowest grading, and gender hostility the highest. Giuffre and Williams (1994) discuss the boundary difficulties for determining when sexualised behaviours

or "banter," which people say they enjoy, is perceived and experienced as harassment. For example, they describe the atmosphere of "compulsory jocularity" that pertained in a restaurant setting they studied in which employees said 90% of joking was of a sexualised nature. The experiences of behaviours as harming were marked by degree or severity and the sense of perceived or actual threat. Berdahl and Aquino (2009) developed the idea that sexual banter provides fun and a jovial atmosphere that may help defuse stress in a working environment. However their empirical investigations concluded that for most employees in their sample, both men and women, sexualised behaviour at work had negative psychological outcomes regardless of whether employees said it was enjoyed or disliked.

## *Sexual harassment in the police service*

Much of the available research looking at the occurrence of sexual harassment within the police has tended to focus on police officers. As mentioned previously, surveys of sexual harassment in the 1990s found relatively high levels of occurrence within police organisations. More recent research suggests that it is still occurring. Lonsway, Paynich and Hall (2013) estimated that women's experience of sexual harassment in US law enforcement ranges from 53% to 77%, with sexualised or sexist remarks being the most common form. In Australia, a survey of the police service in Victoria found that 58% of staff experienced sexually suggestive jokes or comments, 39% intrusive questions about private life, 35% inappropriate leering or staring, 30% unwelcomed touching, hugging or kissing, 17% repeated requests for unwanted dates, 9% sexual gestures, 6% sexually explicit emails and 6% were pressurised for sex (Victorian Equal Opportunities and Human Rights Commission, 2015). In addition, this report indicated 68% of women and 57% of men participants witnessed sexually harassing behaviours (i.e. bystander harassment). The harasser was most likely to be a peer (28%) or a more senior colleague (26%). The survey also found targets of harassment most likely to be women of every age group, with the group aged between 25 to 34 years old having the highest percentages (34%). De Haas, Timmerman and Höing (2014) framed their investigation into sexual harassment of Dutch police officers as a health related issue, finding 64% of women and 48% of men experienced one or more forms at least once during the preceding 24 months. Not all were apparently bothered by sexual harassing behaviours but of those that were (32% of

women and 13% of men), these were associated with adverse effects on burnout and physical health.

There has been limited analysis of the rates of sexual harassment currently occurring within the British Police Service. When responding to a general question in a survey of police personnel in England and Wales, 24% of women police officers and 15% of police staff reported experiencing harassment on the grounds of their gender (Independent Commission on Policing, 2013). Indicative research by the Independent Police Complaints Commission and the Association of Chief Police Officer found a number of cases of abuse of authority by serving officers who gained access to victims of crime for sexual gain (IPCC/ACPO 2012). Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary's 'PEEL: Police Legitimacy Report', containing the Inspectorate's national overview of the way in which police forces ensure that their workforces behave ethically and lawfully, identified 436 reported allegations of similar abuses of authority during the prior 24 months, with about a third of these relating to victims of domestic abuse (HMIC,2013).

In contextualising the current study, the police service in the U.K. has, along with other public sector organisations, suffered a decrease in budgets and a corresponding loss of staff in recent years. In England and Wales, there has been a drop of 15% in police officers and 23% of police staff numbers since 2012 (see Allen and Uberoi, 2017). The Police Federation of England and Wales conduct annual national surveys of police officers up to the rank of chief inspector. Their latest survey reported two thirds of officers as indicating their workloads have increased and this has had a negative effect on their work-life balance and well-being (Boag-Munrie, 2017).

The Policing Vision 2025, published jointly by the National Chief Constables Council and the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners, notes the changing and challenging demands on the police service particularly in the areas of cyber-crime and the policing of the vulnerable. As the Vision 2025 report notes "service provided is critically reliant on the quality of its people" (p.8). There is a commitment to create a culture that values and empowers individuals to maximise their contributions. There are two relevant implications from this last statement for the present study. The first is for a working culture that values its workforce and the second is that individuals are

enabled to fully contribute, especially when resources are tight and people are under pressure.

With respect to the first, the Victorian Equal Opportunities and Human Rights Commission study (2015) named the lack of a diverse workforce, insularity, norms of toughness and resilience, adherence to masculine role modelling as aspect of the police occupational culture having implications for the occurrence of sexual harassment. The informal culture of aggressiveness, competiveness and decisiveness, being sexually confident and assertive creates an environment which minimises or excuses inappropriate behaviours as banter or joking (reminiscent of the compulsory jocularity found by Giuffre and Williams, 1994). Reiner (2000) provides a detailed account of "cop culture" whose characteristics include "old fashioned machismo" encompassing routinised sexual boasting and horseplay. Reiner says the sexual indulgences of the police are products of the force's masculine ethos. Loftus (2009) observes that there has been a conscious reform effort made by the police service in the UK to address concerns about the internal culture. Her conclusion is that undoubtedly there have been changes, but "it would be erroneous to overstate the extent to which new emerging cultures have displaced the hegemonic police culture" (p. 193), and that challenges to the bad 'old' culture are only partial. Silvestri (2017) in a recent review article considers the 'cult of masculinity' remains intact in policing.

The second implication that of encouraging fully contributing individuals requires workplace engagement. Statistically significant associations have been established between a police officer's willingness to engage in discretionary effort and their sense that their force was procedurally just, i.e., being fair and valuing of its workforce (Bradford et al., 2014: Qureshi, Frank, Lambert, Klahm and Smith, 2017). As Brough, Brown and Biggs, (2016) report, engaged employees exhibit greater willingness to invest more energy into completion of tasks, persevere in the light of challenges and to 'go the extra mile' (i.e. discretionary effort). Importantly, emerging research shows a relationship between well-being, engagement and discretionary effort on behalf of police officers (Hesketh, Cooper and Ivy, 2016). In summary, the Hesketh et al. research shows that where police officers feel they have better job conditions, they are prepared to increase their discretionary efforts. De Haas, Timmerman and Höing (2009) concluded sexual harassment in the police environment is a workplace hazard having powerful adverse effects. Their results showed mental and physical health

outcomes were experienced by men and women. Moreover, not only the bothered victims reported health problems but also amongst victims were those who said they were not bothered by sexual harassment. Thus improving the workforce's well-being offers potential productivity dividends, especially under conditions of stress created by decreasing staff numbers and changing workload demands.

### *Impacts and Antecedents*

Meta-analyses by Chan et al. (2007) and Willings et al. (2007) confirms that the presence of sexual harassment in the workplace has been associated with adverse outcomes, both at the individual and organisational levels, disrupting wellbeing at work. Individual adverse outcomes include symptoms of depression, anxiety, general psychological distress as well as decreased job satisfaction, lower productivity and increases in intentions to leave the organisation. In addition, Merkin and Shah (2014) suggest that sexual harassment is related to general incivility and contributes to diminished employee well-being, whilst Glomb et al. (1997) show that bystander sexual harassment (i.e. being a witness to rather than a target of) has a negative impact on job satisfaction and performance.

McDonald (2012) charts the salient features that have been empirically associated with the occurrence of workplace sexual harassment as:

- workplace culture (i.e. an organizational climate tolerating sexual harassment);
- gender distribution in work groups (i.e., gender ratio of workers);
- power distribution (i.e., gender of senior staff in an organisation);
- demographic vulnerability (e.g., gender, age, sexuality, ethnicity, disability).

O'Connell and Korabik (2000) report from a large sample of Canadian University staff (N=905) that the critical age category for greater likelihood of experiencing sexual harassment was being 35 or under.

## Rationale for the present research

Relatively little empirical research has been conducted on current rates of sexual harassment within the police service in the UK of either serving officers or support staff. The present study redresses this omission in respect of the latter-the non-

warranted (sworn) personnel. McDonald, Charlesworth and Graham (2015) place sexual harassment within a framework of organisational injustice. In order to construct preventative policies, they identify the importance of having a clear understanding of the nature and frequency of the problem. The current survey seeks to tease out more information about the nature of sexual harassment, the incidence of its different types, its key antecedents with a view to underpin preventative strategies.

Building on the body of available scholarship, the present study addresses the following research questions:

1. What is the frequency of occurrence of sexually harassing behaviours experienced by police staff?
2. What predictive factors are related to the perceived frequency of sexual harassment including socio-demographic characteristics and organizational features such as perceived organisational commitment and organisational justice?
3. Can the conceptual distinctions noted in the research literature in differentiating types of sexual harassment be supported empirically?
4. What harms are associated with the experience of different types of sexual harassment?

## Methodology

### *Participants*

UNISON is the main Trades Union looking after the non- warranted staff within the police service in the U.K. The Union's data base of members working for the police in England, Wales and Scotland was deployed to contact respondents for their voluntary participation in the survey. The total sample returning questionnaires was 1,776. This represents 5.3% of UNISON's Police staff membership and 2.1% of all Police staff employed in England, Scotland and Wales.

The current estimates of the percentage of women police staff is 61%, and BAME representation is 7.1% (HMIC, 2016). The present survey reflects the gender distribution but under-represents the numbers from BAME communities. The age distribution of police staff in the survey is characterized by underrepresentation of those aged 26-40 (there are 34% in this age category in the workforce and 29% in the present sample) and overrepresentation of older police staff (17% of actual police

staff are aged over 55 and there are 23% in this age band in the sample). It is not possible to establish the percentages of disabled staff currently serving in the police service in these jurisdictions. Overall, some cautions must be thus exercised in generalising from the survey.

Finally, the occupations of police staff were categorised in line with the two broad occupational classifications set out in the 2011 HMIC Report 'Demanding Times: the Front Line and Police Visibility, as either public facing (visible and specialist), or as supporting processes.

**TABLE 1 about here**

## *Survey Questionnaire*

The survey was developed in consultation with UNISON and piloted with a small sample of UNISON members to adjust and clarify instructions and question format.

Preliminary questions asked about the general levels of work related stress, and whether this interfered with the quality of personal life. Additionally, a question was asked about organisational commitment and seven questions measured organisational justice[1]. In the present survey Cronbach's alpha reliability for a scale of these items was 0.89.

Two questions were related to the gender distribution in respondents' forces through the ratio of men and women employees, and the gender of their boss.

The questions about being exposed to sexually harassing behaviours were posed in line with the conceptual distinctions identified in the preceding literature survey reflecting severity: banter (3 items; Cronbach Alpha 0.89); hostile environment (5 items; Cronbach Alpha 0.88); and sexually explicit (6 items; Cronbach Alpha 0.9). Respondents were asked to say whether they had been exposed to these behaviours over the last 12 months with a response range of never (0), rarely (1), sometimes (2) and often (3).

[1] These items were taken with permission from a questionnaire designed by Paul Quinton from the College of Policing, and used in a study of police attitudes towards organisational justice; see Bradford et al., 2010.

After responding to the individual items making up the three types of sexual harassment, respondents were then asked whether they experienced the type as a target, bystander or initiator (they were invited to respond yes or no to each of these experiencing roles), how stressed they were by these types of behaviours and whether they helped or hindered them undertaking their work. Respondents were also asked to say who initiated the types of behaviours, police or support staff colleagues and whether they were senior, peer or junior.

They were finally asked a series of questions about the consequences of such types of behaviour for the organisation, along with their socio-demographic characteristics.

### *Procedure*

The questionnaire was framed in terms of well-being of staff, and the construction of an organisationally just working environment. Participants were invited to comment on behaviours which may have a sexual content. It was explained that UNISON had commissioned the survey, and that it was being analysed independently. Participation was confidential, anonymous and voluntary.

To develop the electronic version of the questionnaire, the Qualtrics software was used, which is a platform that enables users to collect research data on line. The URL to the on-line version of the questionnaire was sent to each police force's UNISON representative, who circulated it to the union's members in that force. Data collection took place between March and May 2016.

### *Analytic strategy*

Data were analysed by SPSS firstly by providing a descriptive account of frequencies in line with the research questions and secondly multi-variate analyses were conducted to permit second order level analysis in line with conceptualisations from the research literature.

## Results

### *Descriptive analyses*

This section addresses the first research aim of indicating the perceived frequency of incidence of sexual harassment. Overall, most respondents had experienced what has been labelled as 'sexualised banter'. Thereafter, as severity of types of behaviours increased, frequency decreased (see Table 2).

**TABLE 2 about here**

In an elaboration of frequency of occurence we explored the patterns of the sexual harassment in terms of whether police staff experienced the different types of harassment in one or several ways simultaneously (Table 3). Participants were coded in terms of how they answered the question about the type of exposure, i.e. as a target, a bystander or an instigator. It is possible that they could have experienced sexual harassment in any combination of ways. This coding was done for each of the three types of harassament, namely, banter, hostile environment and explicit. We found that if sexual harassment is experienced, this is mostly as a bystander or as a bystander and target for each of the three types.

**TABLE 3 about here**

It was also found that if a police staff member indicated they had been a target of any of the types of sexually harassing behaviours that were explored, it was most likely that the instigator had been a colleague (either police or support staff), followed by a supervisor or by someone junior to themselves (see Table 4).

**TABLE 4 about here**

The second research aim was to provide an overview of the factors considered to be antecedents of sexual harassment. Before reporting the multivariate analyses, the frequency distribution of relevant factors are described here. Starting with the gender balance of police staff, as indicated earlier, it is 61:39% in favour of women. In the present study, more women worked in environments where the majority of their colleagues were women, i.e. 27% indicated that there were more men than women in their immediate working environment, while 45% said there were more women than men. It is interesting to note that nevertheless, the balance of men to women bosses favours the former, i.e. 55% said their immediate boss was male.

Table five shows the results of organisational fairness (procedural justice) items. Most respondents felt that their work was fairly distributed, that their manager or supervisor explained decisions, that they were given recognition for their contribution, and that

they were involved in decision making. However, police staff in the survey were more sanguine about how much they were helped to advance their careers.

**TABLE 5 about here**

Survey participants were asked how confident they felt in their force's ability to deal effectively with matters of sexual harassment. By and large respondents had greatest confidence (i.e. very confident) in either support groups such as Lesbian Gay Bi-sexual and Trans-sexual networks (LGBT) (39%), Black Police Association (BPA) (33%), British Association of Women in Policing (BAWP) (32%). Of available organisational processes, participants expressed greatest confidence in their force's Professional Standards Department (PSD) (39%), thereafter a line manager (29%), a senior manager (25%), and Human Resources Departments (20%). A scale was constructed of the four organisational mechanisms to deal with sexual harassment (line manager, senior manager, PSD and HR) to be used in subsequent multivariate analyses. Its Cronbach's Alpha reliability score was 0.9.

Research aim four addresses the harms arising from exposure to sexual harassment. As mentioned above, police staff were asked about their overall work-related stress, and whether this interfered with their personal life. This was in order to provide a benchmark to gauge their general stress levels. Eight out of ten (84%) said they were currently stressed and 58% that job pressures interfered with their personal life.

In addition, police staff were asked how stressed they were by each type of sexually harassing behaviours, and also whether such behaviours, if experienced, helped or hindered their work (Table 6). Being exposed to the 'banter type' of harassment was found to act as a stress "buster" for some, but overall a fifth reported feeling stressed. Even if not stressed, very few staff said that such behaviours actually help them complete their work and about one in ten indicated that this was not conducive to their productivity. In terms of 'hostile environment behaviours', higher percentages of police staff reported that this increases their stress levels compared to 'banter' behaviours. Correspondingly, the percentage of those saying that 'hostile environment behaviours' decreases their productivity was higher compared to 'banter. Finally, a higher percentage of those experiencing 'explicitly sexually harassing behaviours' reported related stress compared to 'hostile environment' or 'banter. Differences in

reported stress levels and work facilitation between the types of sexual harassment were statistically significant.

**TABLE 6 about here**

Fewer than 7% of those affected said they had informally complained and only 2% indicated they had taken out a formal complaint. Most (40%) said that it was just easier to keep quiet and 37% thought nothing would be done. Participants were asked about the potential consequences that there would be for their force, should a formal complaint be lodged. Police staff respondents did appear optimistic that some positive changes may occur as a consequence of cases of sexual harassment coming to light, such as development of policies and training (21% and 22%, respectively). There were, however, those who expressed concerns about possible negative consequences, including loss of reputation (21%) and decreases in internal confidence (15%). One in ten thought their force would attempt to cover up the complaint.

## *Multivariate analyses*

This section focuses on the factors that the research literature has established explain variation in the perceived frequency of, and explores the conceptual distinctions between, the different types of sexual harassment. Before presenting the results from the regression analyses, it is worth mentioning that the three different types of sexual harassment as conceptually differentiated were found to be significantly correlated with each other. The highest correlation was found between the 'hostile environment' type of harassment and the 'explicit' type of harassment ($r$= .79, p<.001), followed by the correlation between the 'hostile environment' type of harassment and the 'banter' type of harassment ($r$= .63, p<.001), and between the 'explicit' type of harassment and the 'banter type' of harassment ($r$= .52, p<.001). As a result of this observation and in line with research aim three, an exploratory factor analysis was conducted of all the sexual harassment items, which indicated that there were two discernible factors. The first was made up of the more serious items and accounted for 76% of the variance, whilst the second loaded on the banter items accounting for 13% of the variance.

**TABLE 7 about here**

Moving on to the regression analyses (Table 8), possible predictors of the different types of sexual harassment were analysed. As the factor analysis did not differentiate between the two types of more serious harassment, it was decided to combine the hostile environment and explicit items into one scale (Cronbach Alpha 0.89). The explanatory variables that were included in the models represent demographic risk characteristics (gender, ethnicity, sexual identity, disability, age), organisational role (supporting or front facing) and organisational factors (procedural justice, confidence in the organization, perceived tolerance of the organization towards sexual harassment, and gender of supervisor).

**TABLE 8 about here**

Starting with the 'banter' type of harassment, it was found that, after controlling for all the other variables in the model only disability was significantly related to this type of behaviour among the individual-level antecedents. Participants who reported a disability status were more likely to have experienced, directly or indirectly, the 'banter' type of harassment compared to those who did not report any disability. Beliefs in the force's fairness (organisational justice) and confidence in the organisation to deal with sexual harassment were the two institutional-level factors that were found to be significantly related to this type of behaviour. Higher levels of perceived organizational justice and lower levels of confidence in the organization were related to higher perceived frequency of perceived occurrence of the 'banter' type of harassment.

For the more serious sexual harassment, there were three significant institutional-level predictors of its occurrence, namely organisational tolerance, organisational justice and confidence in the organisation's ability to deal with sexual harassment. Participants who reported higher levels of perceived organizational tolerance to harassment, higher perceived organizational justice, and lower levels of confidence in the organization were more likely to report higher frequency of perceived occurrence of the more serious sexual harassment. The only individual-level factor that was significantly related to this type of behaviour was having a publicly facing role, in that participants with a role most similar to operational policing were more likely to report higher frequency of occurrence of the more serious sexual harassment compared to those working in back office functions.

## Discussion

Overall the frequency of occurrence of sexual harassment reported by U.K. police support staff is at the higher end of that reported in other work environments (TUC, 2014) and within the range of that experienced by police personnel in other jurisdictions (Victorian Equal Opportunities and Human Rights Commission, 2015; Lonsway, Paynich and Hall, 2013). As with De Haas, Timmerman, and Höing's, (2009) research, sexual harassment was found to be harmful to personal well-being. Aspects of the occupational culture are implicated in its occurrence and including a cultural inhibition from formally reporting these behaviours when they occur.

Within this study, the workforce made a distinction between what has been termed banter in the research literature (Giuffre and Williams, 1994), and classified all other behaviours as being contained within one, more serious, form of sexual harassment. The factor analysis results indicated that items such as sexual joking, gossiping and commenting on workmates' appearance or private lives were differentiated from more serious forms of hostile environment and threatening behaviours as identified by Fitzgerald, (1990). As in previous studies (O'Connell and Kotabik, 2000), the present research found the less severe banter items were reported more frequently (by about three quarters of participants) than the more severe (by between a third and a fifth of respondents). Importantly, the more severe behaviours resulted in greater reported stress, and were more likely to impede employees doing their work effectively.

The police occupational culture research suggests the male majority in the workforce creates a masculinised environment of sexualised joking and boasting often to the detriment of women (Loftus, 2009: Reiner, 2000; Silvetrsi, 2017). There has been some suggestion in the literature that much is of this is ‘banter’ type of behaviour and is perceived as ‘harmless fun’, thus relieving some of the workplace stress (Giuffre and Williams, 1994; Berdahl and Aquino, 2009; TUC, 2016). The present results showed that 18% of participants indicated that this type of sexual harassment did indeed decrease their stress levels. However 22% said banter increased their stress. Notwithstanding those who apparently enjoyed the ‘banter’, only 2% said it helped them complete work (compared to 13% who indicated this hindered them completing

work). The more severe forms resulted in elevated numbers of respondents (about a third) saying these behaviours increased their stress levels, and a fifth suggesting that their work was hindered by the presence of these behaviours with only a tiny minority (fewer than 5%) saying that they experienced decreases in stress or facilitation in doing their work.

Two further aspects of the results help to amplify these findings and point to the adverse working climate that the presence of sexual harassment can produce. Firstly, it was evident that the presence of 'banter' increased the likelihood of occurrence of the more severe forms of behaviour in the workplace. Secondly, participants experienced sexual harassment not only as direct targets, but also as bystanders. Richman-Hirsch and Glomb (2002) refer to the "sympathetic" stress hypothesis, where witnesses to harassment of others invoke feelings of concern and also a sense of powerlessness when others are targets. There is some indicative evidence to support this hypothesis. When further examining the views of bystanders, a greater percentage report fearing nothing would be done by their organisation in the event of a harassing incident compared to those who were targets of the behaviours. Whether as bystanders alone or bystanders and targets, participants reported being stressed both by 'banter' and sexual harassment in its more severe forms.

The general levels of stress reported by respondents were higher than that indicated by police officers from the Police Federation survey results (Boag-Munroe, 2017). As indicated in the introduction, the cuts in staffing numbers have been higher amongst support staff than their police officer colleagues. It is probable that work demands have increased accordingly. The presence of sexual harassment and its potential inhibiting effect on productivity adds to the stress load in an already pressurised working environment (Brough, Brown and Biggs, 2016).

An examination of the antecedents associated with the perceived presence of the 'banter' type of sexual harassment revealed that in this study for the most part demographic risk factors were not relevant, except for the greater likelihood of those with a self-declared disability to report experiencing sexualised 'banter' in the workplace compared to those without this characteristic. It is difficult to propose an explanation for this latter finding other than to suggest a double bind hypothesis. In other words, staff may be sensitised to treating those with disability on a par with non-

disabled colleagues who paradoxically includes them as targets of the ambient sexualised banter in the workplace. The disabled worker might expect to be treated with greater consideration because of their disability and being similarly exposed to sexual harassment they react more acutely.

The lack of gender as a risk factor is also a puzzle. Previous research has shown differences in exposure to sexual harassment by gender of police officer (de Haas, Timmerman and Höing 2009), whilst Gruber (1998) found that male dominated environments were more physically hostile to women employees and were ones in which men were apt to sexually objectify their workplace. In the present case, the absence of gender differences in reported exposure to the types of sexual harassment that were studied could be attributable to the police support staff working environment. It might be, for example, working within a female majority, back office functions are experienced as a more traditional women's work. Lach and Gwartney-Gibbs (1993) suggest that women working in more traditional ways can experience sexual harassment as subtle compliments, or playful jokes and teasing (i.e. what we call 'banter'). Where men tend to be bosses (as is more likely in the case of the present study), women may feel coerced into accepting such behaviours. Lach and Gwartney-Gibbs further suggest that women working in non-traditional roles are more likely to suffer hostile behaviour (i.e., what we call the 'more severe forms of sexual harassment'). There is partial support for this explanation in that fewer women working in the administrative support roles report sexual harassment of all kinds compared to those working in front facing visible roles. These latter roles often require the wearing of uniform and are the closest to the operational policing role. This variable was a significant predictor of exposure in our regression analysis. Women were not only less likely to have these roles, but also if in them, they faced greater exposure to sexual harassment than their male colleagues. This is consistent with findings in the research literature that policewomen suffer more sexual harassment than policemen, and implicate aspects of the police occupational culture as contributory factors.

The other documented antecedents that were significant predictors of perceived occurrence of sexual harassment in the workplace were organisational tolerance and confidence in the organisation's ability to deal with sexual harassment. The participants' perception that their organisation is procedurally just is also a significant

factor, but in a somewhat counter intuitive direction - the more procedurally just the greater the reported exposure. This may be through an enhanced awareness of counter cultural normative behaviour and a belief that the organisation will justly deal with unacceptable conduct. A subsequent correlational analysis found a statistically significant positive correlation of 0.4 between procedural justice and confidence in the ability of the organisation to handle complaints of sexual harassment.

Participants experience sexual harassment in several ways simultaneously, i.e. as bystanders and targets and a significant minority also admitting to being initiators as well as observing and/or being the target. Moreover a significant proportion of those in supervisory roles are said by police staff to be the initiators of the harassment. This has implications for the role modelling aspects of effective preventative interventions.

Both the National Chiefs' Council and Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary note the challenging demands that austerity and changes in the patterns of crime present to police forces in the UK. They also both place critical importance on the welfare and well-being of staff in effectively responding to these pressures. Sexual harassment in the workplace has an acknowledged detrimental effect both on personnel (de Haas, Timmerman and Höing 2009; Holland and Cortina, 2016) and productivity (Dansky and Kilpatrick, 1997). The Police Federation's commissioned surveys find staff noting increased workloads and greater stress burdens. Given that police research demonstrates relationships between organisational commitment, and the belief that one's organisation is a fair environment in which to work (Qureshi et al., 2017, Bradford et al., 2014), this is particularly relevant under conditions of stress.

In the present study, eight out of ten participants reported that they suffered work-related stress and over half indicated that job pressures spilled over into their family life. Whilst police organisations have little control over the external funding arrangements or societal trends in crime, they can exercise their duty of care in the well-being of their staff. The relatively high levels of sexual harassment reported in the present study, and the adverse impacts experienced both by the direct targets and the bystanders, represent avoidable additional sources of stress for the police support workforce.

Notwithstanding some weaknesses in the present study, namely the incomplete demographic details of the sample, the recruitment from a union membership rather

than the totality of the workforce and the under representation of BAME and younger respondents, the present authors offer some considerations to develop remedial interventions based on the current findings and the suggestions made by McDonald, Charlesworth and Graham (2015).

Having established the incidence and patterns of sexual harassment there should be an honest admission of the extent of the problem in the police workplace, recognising that the behaviours are personally damaging to those who are the subject of, or witness to them, inhibiting productivity and potentially damaging public confidence. Alongside this admission there should be a clear statement of intent to prevent sexual harassment. As part of this, the present findings suggest that all members of staff may potentially be the targets of sexual harassment but that those with a disability or those in publically facing occupations may be a greater risk. Moreover, it is evident that the presence of sexual harassment in the workplace may be experienced as harmful by bystanders so where there are reported instances, support should be provided to cover collateral damage.

The findings of the present research strongly suggest that there needs to be a strengthening of the belief in and the will of the organisation not to tolerate sexual harassment. Given the greater confidence in trade unions and other special interest bodies, such as the BAWP, BPA and LGBT networks the police service needs to develop a more consultative approach to develop an action plan and support mechanisms for people suffering sexual harassment.

There remains an apparent unwillingness to report incidence of sexual harassment, and a belief by a considerable majority that procedures are ineffectual. The establishment of multiple channels for reporting, better training for informal resolution by line managers and third party mediation have been found to bolster organisational confidence (McDonald, Charlesworth and Graham, 2015). Training could improve the receptivity of complaints of sexual harassment by line managers and HR departments, and more robust investigations by PSD and proportionate discipline sanctions for perpetrators.

Given the significant numbers of police staff reporting that supervisors are responsible for initiating sexually harassing behaviours, interventions with senior staff

to improve modelling and build incentives to line managers for taking effective action.

A commitment to a broader philosophy of organisational justice eliminating sexual harassment will reap its own rewards of a more motivated and productive workforce, and a more convincing offer to the diverse recruitment pool. This is considered to be the ultimate way to deal with the big challenges that all forces face in the years to come.

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**Table 1: Participant details**

| Demographic characteristics (Nos in brackets valid responses) | % Valid Responses | % Total Sample |
|---|---|---|
| **Women (N=713)** | 66% | 40% |
| Men (N=370) | 34% | 21% |
| **Under 35 years of age (N=186)** | 19 % | 10% |
| Over 35 years of age (N=788) | 81% | 44% |
| **Disabled (N=140)** | 13% | 8% |
| Not identify as disabled (N=945) | 87% | 92% |
| **Alternative sexual orientation (N=69)** | 7% | 4% |
| Heterosexual (N=875) | 93% | 56% |
| **BME (N=44)** | 4% | 2% |
| White (N=1023) | 96% | 58% |
| **Occupational details** | | |
| 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) | 18% |
| Asking people for dates when clearly not interested (HE) | 12% |
| Hinted that giving a sexual favour may lead to preferential treatment (E) | 11% |
| Circulation of explicit posters/photos (E) | 8% |
| Pressurized to have sex (E) | 6% |
| | 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**

| *Target* | *Bystander* | *Instigator* | *Banter % (N)* | *Hostile Env % (N)* | *Explicit % (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**

| Impacts | *Banter* | *Hostile environment* | *Explicit* |
|---|---|---|---|
| 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

**Table 7: Factor Loadings of the Sexual Harassment Items**

| Items | Component 1 | 2 |
|---|---|---|
| Unwelcomed cornering, touching hugging or kissing | **1.014** | -.083 |
| Being pressurised for sex or sexual acts | **1.014** | -.086 |
| Circulation of sexually explicit pictures postures or gifts | **1.012** | -.085 |
| Inappropriate staring or leering | **1.007** | -.082 |
| Explicit sexual gesturing | **1.003** | -.084 |
| Intrusive questioning about your private life | **.990** | -.068 |
| Being hinted that giving a sexual favour may lead to preferential treatment | **.713** | .308 |
| Persistently being asked out on a date when clearly not interested | **.711** | .307 |
| Touching to make you feel mildly uncomfortable | **.708** | .319 |
| Forwarding text with sexualised joke | **.693** | .329 |
| Repeatedly telling dirty jokes | **.688** | .330 |
| Gossiping about a person's private sex life | .007 | **.960** |
| Making comments about people's appearance | .007 | **.960** |
| Telling risqué jokes | .047 | **.913** |

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Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.
Rotation Method: Oblimin with Kaiser Normalization

**Table 8: Multiple Regression Models**

| | Banter | Hostile Environment + Explicit |
|---|---|---|
| Tolerance | -0.15 | 0.53*** |
| Male gender | -0.05 | 0.004 |
| Male manager | 0.06 | -0.07 |
| Organizational justice | 0.41*** | 0.36*** |
| Organizational confidence | -0.22*** | 0.47*** |
| Non-heterosexual | -0.11 | 0.04 |
| Non-white | 0.20 | -0.05 |
| Disability | 0.26** | 0.04 |
| Public facing role | 0.06 | 0.22*** |
| Cons | -0.04 | -0.26*** |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| $r^2$ | 0.19 | 0.53 |

* p<0.05; ** p<0.01; ***p<0.001