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PART C: Submission

1. How would you describe the workplace culture(s) of the Commonwealth parliamentary workplace(s) where you work/have worked? Please outline specific strengths and/or weaknesses in terms of workplace culture(s), based on your experiences, as appropriate.

The culture inside Parliament House is unequivocally one of entitlement. This is not limited to MPs, though it is most readily seen in MPs. This manifested itself during my time as a staffer as a range of MPs openly shouting at their staff in front of visitors within their offices, or as was my case, being berated within the [REDACTED] for [REDACTED]. In [REDACTED]. In another instance, I was called oblivious and unprofessional in front of a number of [REDACTED]. I believe they got an honest view of what it is like to not only work for the MP I was employed by but for what it is like to work for most MPs. Other staffers, particularly those of MPs who were employed by [REDACTED], the majority party of the time, felt that other MP staff were beneath them an unworthy of common courtesy. I personally witnessed a number of staff being belittled by their employing MPs and subsequently feeling inadequate and often times driven to high alcohol consumption to help them cope. The enormous amount of "free" alcohol available in Parliament House is beyond problematic. Actively encouraging your staff to attend parties with strangers and "enjoy the free booze" is not complicit with a safe workplace. Additionally, the gossip in Parliament House about which MP was having an affair and who was too old to be getting married again was horrendous. There was more talk about their personal choices that their ability to perform the duties they were elected to perform. I have very few fond memories of my time working at Parliament House.

Having a daycare centre in Parliament House was the most heartening thing i saw during my time. It was fabulous to know that the largest employer in Canberra had at least made provisions for parents, particularly mothers, to complete their jobs more easily.

2. Based on your experiences, what are the factors that already do, or could contribute to a safe and respectful environment in Commonwealth parliamentary workplaces?

Having male journalists hanging around in corridors waiting for "a scoop", especially near the female toilets was unnerving. It was particularly disappointing to be in an elevator with anyone who works within Parliament House and be in silence for the entire trip. It was even more disappointing that people would not hold the elevator doors open when they saw you walking towards the elevator, often with an armful of papers and other belongings.

It was nice to see a large number of security guards at the entrances and exits to the buildings who were always willing to escort you safely to a car or down a corridor if you felt lost in the large halls.

3. Based on your experiences, what are the factors that may contribute to workplace bullying, sexual harassment or sexual assault in Commonwealth parliamentary workplaces?

There is no code of conduct. MPs are able to write their own workplace mandates and staff are expected to put in hours well above their pay grades and often times perform duties that are well outside their line of work. MPs seem to feel above the law - I have personally witnessed several MPs and their staff use mobile phones while driving a vehicle, for instance.

4. Are you familiar with any Commonwealth parliamentary workplace policies, processes and/or practices in relation to staff and worker safety and wellbeing, workplace bullying, sexual harassment or sexual assault? If so, please outline your understanding of how these policies, processes and/or practices operate.

I knew there was a HR of sorts but it was not well advertised. It was advised that complaints or issues be dealt with in house; (within the MPs office). Other staff I worked with said it was best to simply just accept it as part of the job and get on with it.

5. During your time working in a Commonwealth parliamentary workplace(s), have/did you receive any education or training in relation to worker safety and wellbeing, and/or how to prevent or respond to workplace bullying, sexual harassment or sexual assault? If yes, please outline your experience of the training and whether it was useful in increasing your knowledge and/or skills in relation to preventing and responding to workplace bullying, sexual harassment or sexual assault.

No.

6. Are you aware of how you and/or other people working in Commonwealth parliamentary workplaces can report workplace bullying, sexual harassment or sexual assault (either formally or informally)? If yes, please specify what reporting options exist, and outline your experience with accessing and/or using those reporting options if applicable.

I know there was a way of reporting it. I believe i was told to look at the MP staff website to find out more information. I disclosed my personal mental distress at being regularly belittled by my MP to my GP in order to keep it confidential. I didn't believe confiding in someone within the Parliament House HR department would be beneficial to my career.

7. Are you aware of any supports available in Commonwealth parliamentary workplaces to people who experience workplace bullying, sexual harassment or sexual assault? If yes, please specify what supports exist, and outline your experience with accessing and/or using those supports if applicable.

As above.

8. Based on your experiences, do you have any suggestions or recommendations on how to improve the prevention of and responses to workplace bullying, sexual harassment and sexual assault in Commonwealth parliamentary workplaces?

There needs to be managerial training for MPs. Many of them have not managed a staff before they enter politics and as such have very little understanding of people management, fostering a safe work environment and maintaining workplace boundaries. I was told by a female colleague that being a young, attractive and intelligent young woman would make me a target and would likely make people want to tear me down.

9. Is there anything else you would like to tell the Commission?

I am so pleased that this commission is going ahead. It is beyond time that the inner workings of Parliament House and the policies and frameworks of individual MP offices need to be overhauled.

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