

Community Development and Justice Standing Committee
Level 1, 11 Harvest Terrace
West Perth WA 6005

6 August 2021

Submission to the inquiry into sexual harassment against women in the FIFO mining industry

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the inquiry into sexual harassment against women in the FIFO mining industry, currently before Community Development and Justice Standing Committee.

360Edge is Australia's leading specialist alcohol and other drug consultancy, combining decades of academic research and clinical experience to provide effective evidence-based solutions to alcohol and drug related policy and responses.

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360Edge is led by Dr Nicole Lee, Founder and CEO and Adjunct Professor at the National Drug Research Institute, Curtin University. Professor Lee is also a member of the Australian National Advisory Council on Alcohol and other Drugs (ANACAD) and a board member of Hello Sunday Morning.

360Edge's WorkWell™ program is specifically designed to address alcohol and other drugs issues, and related mental health needs, in the workplace. We assist organisations to promote a workplace culture that values safety and wellbeing for all workers.

Our submission specifically addresses the role of workplace drug and alcohol policies on sexual harassment.

Prevalence of sexual harassment in the FIFO mining industry

Although there are no statistics that speak directly to the extent of sexual harassment in the Western Australian FIFO mining industry, there are indications that this is a structural problem for the industry as a whole.

The fourth National Survey on Sexual Harassment in Australian Workplaces,¹ undertaken in 2018 found that 48% of people in mining had witnessed sexual harassment on the job. Despite this high prevalence, only 24% of workers reported misconduct.

Sexual harassment is a gendered phenomenon, with the targets of sexual harassment overwhelmingly women and perpetrators overwhelmingly men.

Experiencing sexual harassment can severely impact the mental health and self-esteem of women, as well as the career advancement of women in the workplace.

The role of alcohol and other drugs in sexual harassment

Although most workplaces do not allow the use of alcohol or other drugs during work time, they can still play a role in workplace sexual harassment when consumed during social occasions outside work.

Most sexual harassment and bullying is associated with alcohol use.² Alcohol and other drug use can cause disinhibition and lead to poor decision making, which makes poor behaviour more likely.

However, it is too simplistic to view this as the root cause of gendered abuse. Alcohol and other drugs can increase risk of sexual harassment, but the cause of is ultimately the attitudes towards women and workplace cultures that enable inappropriate conduct.

Alcohol and other drug testing

Testing is often the first thing people think of when there's a problem with alcohol or other drugs in the workplace. However, alcohol and other drug testing is not a very effective mechanism for addressing problems that arise from workplace misconduct.³

Men are generally heavier drinkers of alcohol than women, so are at greater risk of a range of health and social problems. However, workplace alcohol

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¹ Australian Human Rights Commission, author, issuing body. (2018). Everyone's business : fourth national survey on sexual harassment in Australian workplaces 2018 Retrieved August 2, 2021, from <http://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-1955700589>

² Wall, L., & Quadara, A. (2014). Under the influence? Considering the role of alcohol and sexual assault in social contexts (ACSSA Issues No. 18). Melbourne: Australian Centre for the Study of Sexual Assault, Australian Institute of Family Studies

³ Lee NK, Roche AM, Duraisingam V, Fischer J, Cameron J, Pidd K. A systematic review of alcohol interventions among workers in male- dominated industries. *Journal of Men's Health* 2014; 11 (2): 53-63.

testing policies, which have been examined in a number of studies, do not have a measurable impact on overall drinking rates.

A more effective approach is ensuring best-practice alcohol and other drug policies are in place that are focused on fitness for work, including compliance with workplace codes of conduct.

Designing best-practice alcohol and other drug policies

A strong alcohol and other drug policy:

- Prevents harmful alcohol and other drug use among workers and contractors, and reduces risks and harms;
- Promotes a culture where wellbeing is emphasised with a universally shared perception that alcohol and other drugs at or around work are incompatible with a safe and effective workplace;
- Provides clear expectations, roles and responsibilities, and instructive procedures for reducing risks and managing issues related to workers' alcohol and other drug use if they do arise.

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Effective alcohol and other drug policies apply to every person equally in the organisation from the most senior staff member to the most junior, including contractors, without exception.

The policy and accompanying procedures should describe what is and is not acceptable in the workplace in relation to alcohol and other drug use. Documents should also indicate clearly what will happen if the policy is breached and provide detailed instruction in the steps to be taken by whom and when. The documentation should be reviewed and updated regularly to reflect any organisational change.

Lack of awareness of an alcohol and other drug policy is a recipe for disaster. A policy can only be effective if it is integrated into day to day operations, therefore effective dissemination of the policy and procedures to the entire workforce is crucial for success. This means training and dissemination of supporting information to managers and workers.

With a focus on worker and contractor health and wellbeing, referral options for those needing assistance or those identified as unfit for work is a necessary component of effective policy. Ideally, each workplace would have a list of local support services that can assist workers and contractors with a range of issues including physical and mental health and problems related to the use of alcohol and other drugs.

Alcohol at work functions

Work functions where alcohol is served are a high-risk environment for misconduct, including sexual harassment.

Providing guidance on the service of alcohol at work functions is an essential part of effective alcohol and other drug policy.

Workers serving alcohol at work-related events may be required to hold a current responsible service of alcohol certificate. Those serving alcohol are required to adhere to the principles of harm -minimisation.

Considerations include:

- Availability of an adequate variety and supply of non-alcoholic beverages
- Availability of food such as non-salty snacks and hors d'oeuvres
- Specification of serving guidelines for bartenders, including measuring correct amounts of liquor in drinks (no doubles), refusing service of individuals who appear intoxicated or impaired and refusing service to minors
- Specification of serving guidelines for organisers, including how long alcohol will be served and at what time the function will cease.

Guidelines and training should apply to:

- Licensees
- Approved managers
- Staff, including promotional staff, involved in the sale, supply and service of alcohol
- Volunteers, including club directors, who have liquor service responsibilities
- Security officers with crowd control duties.

Conclusion

Alcohol and other drugs are a risk factor for sexual harassment and risk can be reduced by implementation of best practice alcohol and other drug policies that go beyond just testing regimes and take a fitness for work approach to health and safety of the workforce. Policies should include

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activities during work time as well as employer-sanctioned activities outside normal work time.

360Edge is grateful for the opportunity to comment on these issues to improve the workplace cultures of FIFO mining industries in Western Australia and is available for further consultation in the development of appropriate workplace alcohol and other drug policies for the industry.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Nicole Lee', enclosed in a thin black rectangular border.

Professor Nicole Lee

CEO at 360Edge and Adjunct Professor at the National Drug Research Institute, Curtin University

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