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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.

I found the workplace culture to be really full on - dynamic and high pressured, but my personal experience was that it was ultimately respectful in terms of the way I was treated as a woman on a day to day basis. However, the workplace culture was very specifically suited to a particular demographic of young, high achieving, ambitious individuals who had a lot of freedom in their personal lives to be able to work extended hours and undertake significant travel and networking after hours. There was a sense that it is a privilege to work in that environment, and that the pressure and hours that come with that are therefore accepted. I worked with very few people who had school-aged children (or any caring responsibilities) and I think this is potentially quite problematic. It can create an environment where men (especially men with no caring responsibilities) have more power and influence.

A specific weakness is the way the parliamentary offices and the MOP(S) Act deals with pregnancy and parental leave. If, while a staff member is pregnant, there is a ministerial reshuffle, that individual will lose their job and therefore all access to parental leave (even if they are only weeks away from accessing that leave). It makes the position of prospective parents working in that environment really tenuous. I am also aware of quite a few examples of parents not being able to return to their position post-parental leave (ie due to an assumption that they will no longer be focussed on the role or have the time and energy to devote to it). The same protections that exist in other workplaces in relation to return to work don't apply - it is at the Member of Parliament's discretion.

I think an environment where working parents, and specifically working mothers, are not welcomed and accepted, is problematic in an environment that is meant to be representative. This is especially the case for pregnant women / mothers who are themselves Members of Parliament - we have to do better for the incredible women of all political backgrounds who enter politics so that they can manage family / caring responsibilities and parliamentary responsibilities (in fact all working parents). I think this would go some way to rectifying the gender imbalance and power structures that may have contributed to the development of a culture that normalises the poor treatment of women.

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?

- Amendments to the MOP(S) Act to provide better protections to pregnant women in relation to their ability to access parental leave (ie in case of a ministerial reshuffle or election).
- Removing the requirement for Members and Senators to travel to Canberra for every sitting week.

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

Power structures

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.

See above re MOP(S) Act and pregnancy / parental leave

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, I didn't receive any

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.

You could let your Chief of Staff or MP/Senator know noting their primary goal would likely be to avoid a scandal or disrepute.

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.

No

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?

Any changes that rectify the gender imbalance will help

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

Good luck with this challenging inquiry

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