

CPD #metoo beyond the hashtag:

On 22 June 2018 the NTWLA Committee was delighted to present the first in our series of CPDs designed to provide support and assistance to female lawyers. Unfortunately, when NTWLA commenced planning for events this year it became clear that one of the most important issues that needed to be addressed was the issue of female lawyers experiencing sexual harassment in or around their work.

Sadly, when research was done by investigative journalists about #metoo, other than in the entertainment industry, another area where women raised significant concerns or reported sexual harassment and assault was the legal profession. This accords with issues raised with members of the NTWLA Committee and some of our personal experiences in receiving unwanted sexual attention, pressure or assault in legal practice. These stories are also supported by previous research, such as the National Attrition and Re-engagement Study (NARS) Report published in 2014 by the Law Council of Australia. The NARS Report found that 24 per cent of females and 8 per cent of males had experienced sexual harassment in the workplace. Rates were even higher among female barristers who were twice as likely as those in private practice or in house to have experienced sexual harassment at work.

The CPD was well-attended by practitioners from Darwin with lawyers also attending by telephone from Katherine.

Sally led a practical discussion of the #metoo movement. The social media campaign started in the USA but has since been taken up in Australia. With stories appearing on social and main stream media supporting the statistic, agencies like the Anti-Discrimination Commission (ADC) and womens legal services have known for years that sexual harassment is prevalent and pervasive in Australian workplaces.

The question this raises for us as women lawyers is why women do not report sexual harassment or assault but are now discussing that it has occurred. Opinion and antidote seems to strongly suggest that women have historically feared complaining because of the belief that complaining might cause significant damage to their careers.



argue for improvement; and using the skills she had to use give other people opportunities.

I asked Sally what she thought about the changed laws for marriage equality and she replied: "You know ... I never thought it would happen in my lifetime, perhaps my children's or grandchildren's lifetime but not mine." I feel a deep sense of satisfaction that over the course of her career that some things have changed. We thank Sally for her great contribution and braveness in the face of adversity. We look forward to hearing about what will come next in her remarkable legal career.

We also thank the Administrator for attending and Alistair Wyvill SC and Marie Turnbull, together with William Forster Chambers, for the recognising the significance of the NT's first female and lesbian barrister. The artworks are now on display in William Forster Chambers.

