



Inquiry finds incidents of inmate-staff relationships are rare

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An independent investigation into inappropriate relationships between inmates and correctional staff has found such incidents are rare with only 14 substantiated cases of physical intimacy over the past decade.

The inquiry found that this represents less than two cases a year, representing about 0.02 per cent of all prison, probation and parole employees at current staffing levels.

Corrective Services NSW Assistant Commissioner Governance and Continuous Improvement Carlo Scassera said the vast majority of staff observe the highest professional standards.

“The 322 alleged inappropriate relationship cases referred to the Task Force included only 14 substantiated cases of physical contact of a sexual nature between staff and offenders, over the decade between 2007 and 2018,” Mr Scassera said.

“While these incidents are rare, it does not mean we don’t take the issue seriously and would immediately report to police such incidents that undermine our profession.”

The Task Force was established in July last year to assess allegations of inappropriate relationships between CSNSW staff and offenders, including the investigation of the alleged relationships and any disciplinary action that was taken at the time.

In addition to the 14 substantiated cases between 2007 and 2018, there were nine substantiated cases of an intimate letter-writing relationship with no physical contact and 17 substantiated cases of non-intimate letter-writing relationships with no contact.

The investigation found staff of all levels of experience and service can be susceptible and that the breakdowns of statistics broadly accords with the makeup of our workforce.

It also found:

- 60 per cent of allegations involved men and 40 per cent women;
- 58 per cent of allegations were from Custodial Corrections, 22 per cent from Community Corrections and 16 per cent from Offender Management and Programs;
- In 86 per cent of the cases, the Task Force agreed with the disciplinary action.

Mr Scassera said a common factor leading to inappropriate relationships between staff and inmates was trauma, either at work or home, which can leave staff vulnerable.

“The best defence is a strong, supportive work culture, which provides training, skills and competencies needed for the job and we have taken immediate action to support our staff and improve practices,” Mr Scassera said.

“Last month we held mental health, wellbeing and resilience focus groups across the state and are piloting the MyPositive Workplace program to improve the fairness of conflict resolutions and address bullying and harassment.”



Legislation was passed in November last year making it a criminal offence for any CSNSW staff to engage in intimate relationships with offenders, punishable by up to two years in prison. Since then, four CSNSW officers have been charged under the new legislation.