

Understanding and Addressing Sexual Misconduct in the Guyana Police Force: Prevalence, Organizational Culture, and Institutional Reform

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Abstract

Sexual abuse in law enforcement organizations poses ethical, operational, and reputational risks. This study was a mixed-methods exploration of the nature and extent of sexual misconduct in the Guyana Police Force (GPF), as well as the impact and institutional drivers of such behaviour. A survey was distributed to 120 officers across all divisions and ranks, addressing incidents of misconduct, reporting issues, the department's culture, and the effectiveness of current policy. Results: Patterns of misconduct were observed; underreporting was associated with distrust and fear of retribution; there was limited knowledge of policy; and important psychological and professional effects were identified. The results call for stronger accountability systems, trauma-informed leadership, improvements to reporting systems, and required training. The paper contributes to the empirical literature on police and policing in the Caribbean and provides concrete recommendations to make institutions more responsive to human rights norms.

Keywords

Sexual Misconduct, Law Enforcement, Organizational Culture, Reporting Systems, Gender Discrimination, Guyana Police Force

1. Introduction

Workplace Sexual misconduct is a significant organizational, legal, and ethical risk, especially in hierarchical and male-dominated work environments such as policing. Behaviours such as sexual harassment, sexual coercion, sexual exploitation, and gender discrimination are not merely acts of interpersonal violations. These behaviours are structural in nature and are often deeply ingrained within institutional cultures and existing power dynamics (Acker, 1990; Fitzgerald et al., 1997). Empirically, it is well confirmed that exposure to sexual harassment has negative effects on psychological health, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and performance outcomes (Fitzgerald et al., 1997; Willness et al., 2007).

Sexual harassment is loosely construed as unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, or other verbal or physical conduct of a sex-related nature which, due to its implementation or implied representation, affects any person's work status or ability to perform job duties in a manner that is unreasonably hostile (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission [EEOC], 2016). It has been estimated through meta-analysis that the prevalence of workplace sexual harassment among women is at least 30% to 50%, depending on sector and method of reporting (Ilies et al., 2003; Willness et al., 2007). Sexual harassment represents about 30% of workplace discrimination claims in national reporting systems, emphasizing the persistent and systemic nature of sexual harassment (EEOC, 2016).

Risk is also heightened in policing environments. Due to their paramilitary nature, police organizations operate within a rigid hierarchy, marked by clear rank distinctions and centralized authority. These structures continue to contribute significantly to power imbalances in relationships between superiors and subordinates and appear likely to be used for coercion or to suppress reporting (Buchanan, 2016). Further, police cultures are often portrayed as masculinized workforces/occupations where hypermasculinity, informal bonding, and loyalty norms may inhibit reporting of misconduct (Brown et al., 2020; Loftus, 2009). A hidden, informal "code of silence" also discourages reporting and accountability, promoting collective tolerance of misconduct within the organization (Skolnick, 2002).

Studies on gender dynamics in policing show that female officers regularly encounter prejudiced attitudes, sexualized work environments, and barriers to career progression due in large part to deep-seated cultural practices (Martin & Jurik, 2007; Rabe-Hemp, 2008). These are some of the experiences that lead to increased levels of stress, burnout, and attrition among women in law enforcement (Morash et al., 2006). Additionally, dismissive or retaliatory organizational reactions exponentially increase psychological injury and undermine confidence in the legitimacy of internal adjudication mechanisms (Cortina & Berdahl, 2008).

The ramifications of sexual misconduct go beyond individual injury. At the institutional level, misconduct has a corrosive effect on morale, camaraderie,

and operational efficacy ([Buchanan, 2016](#)). Organizational climate studies show that sexual harassment tolerance is related to lower productivity, less attendance at work, and greater intentions to quit ([Hulin et al., 1996](#); [Willness et al., 2007](#)). There are also governance implications, such as failure to address corruption, that could lead to severe legal liability and reputational loss, further eroding public trust in responsible institutions ([World Bank, 2017](#)). The legitimacy perspective argues that internal procedural injustice can reduce external legitimacy, with implications for community cooperation and crime control ([Tyler, 2006](#)).

Public debate and internal reviews in the Guyana Police Force (GPF) have cast doubt on the frequency of sexual impropriety and the effectiveness, consistency and transparency of institutional responses. Like most police organizations in the Global South and beyond, GPF was a product of larger socio-cultural hierarchies of authority and genderist norms, as well as changing accountability stakes. However, empirical investigations of sex offending within police organizations located in the Caribbean have been relatively scarce, creating a gap in knowledge for evidence-based policy development.

The purpose of the study was to conduct a systematic, data-driven exploration of sexual misconduct at the GPF. Its purpose is not just to ascertain prevalence and reporting patterns, but also to assess how organizations respond, policy frameworks, leadership accountability structures, and organizational cultural factors either facilitate or inhibit wrongdoing. Situated within the broader international literature on workplace bullying, police culture, and institutional change, this analysis aims to produce prognostic narratives consistent with the tenets of procedural justice, gender equality, and organizational integrity.

Stronger institutions are key to dealing with sexual harassment. The literature on contemporary reform, however, is clear that modern policing cannot be merely technical or involve new ways of doing things, but that we need strong internal governance and frameworks in which men and women have the rights/dignity to equal treatment in an ethical way ([World Bank, 2017](#)). A frank assessment of sexual misconduct within the GPF would positively impact professionalism, staff well-being, the reduction of legal and reputational risks, and public confidence in law enforcement organizations.

Policing and paramilitary organizations, due to their inherent hierarchical command structures and tightly bound occupational cultures, are highly prone to the emergence and persistence of workplace sexual misconduct. Existing international studies in the policing field by [Brown et al. \(2020\)](#) and [Prenzler \(2017\)](#) both confirm that organizational norms that tolerate misconduct, shield perpetrators, and stigmatize whistleblowers ultimately normalize such misconduct within workplace culture.

In recent years, the Caribbean region has seen a sustained rise in attention to gender equality, workplace rights, and institutional accountability, a trend corroborated by a report from ([UN Women Caribbean, 2022](#)). However, there remains a clear gap in empirical research on workplace sexual misconduct in the

region's law enforcement sector. The Caribbean Police Women's Association (CFPWA, 2023) notes that the modernization reforms rolled out by local policing departments, which aim to improve professionalism and public trust, still face core challenges, including lagging organizational culture and a lack of internal accountability.

This study takes the Guyana Police Force as its research subject, examining the prevalence of internal workplace sexual misconduct, its cultural drivers, and reform implications to fill a gap in Caribbean policing research. It also addresses the region's reform needs in two dimensions: advancing employee well-being and upholding institutional legitimacy and public trust.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Sexual Misconduct in Policing Organizations

Workplace sexual misconduct within policing organizations has gradually drawn scholarly attention in recent years, as it is closely tied to employee well-being, organizational legitimacy, and public trust. Unlike ordinary civilian workplaces, the hierarchical structure and strong occupational culture of policing organizations can cultivate a culture of silence that discourages victims from reporting incidents. A set of prior multi-country studies covering the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, and Australia—conducted by Brown et al. (2020), Loftus (2009), Cordner and Cordner (2011), Prenzler (2017), and Westmarland (2001)—have confirmed that problems such as sexual harassment and gender discrimination have long persisted in these settings.

These issues do not stem only from individual moral failure; they are driven by the hierarchical work environment, rigid masculine occupational norms, unequal power relations, and an organizational culture that prioritizes loyalty and collective solidarity. The academic community widely endorses systematic prevention and control strategies that integrate organizational accountability, leadership commitment, transparent reporting mechanisms, and cultural transformation. This study likewise holds that interventions must be implemented at the organizational level, rather than focusing only on holding individual actors responsible.

2.2. Sexual Misconduct and Gender Dynamics in Caribbean Law Enforcement

At present, there is a small base of local research on workplace sexual misconduct in the policing sector of the Caribbean region. The few existing studies and policy reports all point out that local police forces have long faced persistent problems of gender inequality, workplace discrimination, and insufficient institutional accountability. According to a 2022 report released by the UN Women Caribbean Office, the root causes of these issues lie in the unique organizational culture of local police forces, which is shaped by colonial legacies, paramilitary structures, and male-dominated leadership.

To date, two categories of improvement measures have been implemented locally. First, the Caribbean Federation of Police Women's Associations (CFPWA, 2023) has led advocacy for gender-sensitive policies and fair treatment and has upgraded welfare and protection mechanisms for female police officers. Second, a region-wide police reform project has listed professionalism, ethical conduct, and accountability as core elements of modern policing, explicitly noting that internal misconduct undermines organizational performance, staff morale, personnel recruitment and retention, and public trust in law enforcement agencies. However, critical research gaps remain prominent: there is a clear gap in empirical research on the prevalence, causes, and organizational impacts of workplace sexual misconduct in Caribbean police forces, particularly the Guyana Police Force.

There is an urgent need to conduct context-specific local research to support evidence-based policy and organizational reform. At the international level, the 1986 U.S. Supreme Court ruling in *Meritor Savings Bank v. Vinson* first recognized workplace sexual harassment as gender discrimination under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act, laying the foundation for a regulatory framework. In 2016, the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) released guidelines that expanded employers' responsibilities to prevent and address hostile work environments proactively. Woods (2017) proposed three core pillars of this framework: prevention mechanisms, accessible reporting channels, and organizational accountability.

However, formal policy alone is insufficient to drive substantive change. Buchanan (2016) and Dobbin and Kalev (2019) both note that the existence of regulations does not necessarily translate into safer workplaces or reduced misconduct. McDonald (2012) adds that formal policies only deliver real effects when they are aligned with supportive organizational norms, credible enforcement mechanisms, and appropriate penalties for violations. Therefore, scholars in the global field of workplace sexual misconduct governance generally hold that such issues cannot be treated merely as compliance matters and must be governed through dimensions including organizational culture. The hierarchical structure, professional solidarity, and power gaps within police agencies can influence the occurrence and reporting of these behaviors.

2.3. Law Enforcement Context

Existing studies note that the structural and cultural attributes of policing organizations significantly raise the probability of workplace sexual misconduct. Skolnick (2002) and Loftus (2009) identified two core organizational factors: the high risk of reporting offenses that arises from the concentration of power within a hierarchical system, and the accountability barriers created by the "blue code of silence". Brown et al. (2020) and other scholars found that female police officers face three additional dilemmas: exclusion from informal social networks, unequal promotion opportunities, and long-term exposure to a gendered workplace environment.

This predicament is corroborated by [Morash et al. \(2006\)](#) and [Rabe-Hemp \(2008\)](#). The intersectionality theory proposed by [Crenshaw \(1991\)](#) can explain the amplifying effect of overlapping identities on individuals' experiences of discrimination, correcting the one-sided logic that incorrectly attributes such issues solely to individual problems. There remains a gap in relevant empirical research on the Caribbean region. This paper uses the Guyana Police Force as its research setting. It aims to explore the relationships among organizational culture, leadership, accountability systems, and reporting behavior to address this gap in regional research.

2.4. Impacts

Sexual misconduct gives rise to three core categories of negative impacts spanning the psychological, professional, and organizational levels. At the individual level, victims often experience symptoms of anxiety, depression, reduced self-esteem, and post-traumatic stress disorder, which impair their physical and mental health as well as their job performance; these conclusions are drawn from classic studies by [Fitzgerald \(1993\)](#), [Koss et al. \(1987\)](#), and [Cortina & Berdahl \(2008\)](#). In general workplace settings, sexual harassment is linked to reduced productivity, absenteeism, work alienation, and elevated turnover intention, a correlation supported by the research of [Hulin et al. \(1996\)](#) and [Willness et al. \(2007\)](#).

At the organizational level, sexual misconduct lowers job satisfaction and brings legal and financial risks, a finding corroborated by studies including [Buchanan \(2016\)](#). In policing contexts, perceived internal fairness is associated with employee commitment and public trust, and the improper handling of related issues can undermine institutional legitimacy; this conclusion is supported by authoritative research by [Tyler, 2006](#).

2.5. Reporting Barriers

The long-standing underreporting challenge in workplace sexual misconduct cases has long been a well-recognized consensus in the field. Existing research [Buchanan, 2016; McDonald, 2012](#)) outlines four core barriers to reporting such misconduct. When the scope is narrowed to hierarchical institutions such as law enforcement, it becomes clear that rank-derived power prevents frontline staff from reporting misconduct by their superiors or influential colleagues.

Additional research [Hulin et al. \(1996\)](#) indicates that managerial tolerance of improper behavior and inconsistent enforcement of accountability reduces the willingness to report, whereas establishing mechanisms for credible investigations, confidentiality, open accountability, and anti-retaliation protections can boost trust in the reporting process. Effective reporting mechanisms in law enforcement settings must address both core problem types: procedural barriers and power dynamics.

2.6. Bystander Intervention

Bystander Intervention Theory is a core third-party intervention theory for addressing various types of misconduct in workplace settings. In 1970, [Latané and Darley](#) proposed three core barriers that hinder bystander intervention. In 2004, scholars, including Banyard et al., identified three preconditions for individuals to implement intervention behaviors successfully. In 2011, [Coker et al.](#) further clarified the cultural conditions required for this intervention to take effect within organizations. This paper holds that this theory has become an important part of comprehensive prevention strategies for workplace misconduct.

2.7. Research Gap

Although a large volume of international research currently exists in the fields of workplace harassment and police culture, there is a severe shortage of empirical studies focused on sexual misconduct within Caribbean police institutions. Most existing research findings are concentrated in North American and European contexts and cannot be readily applied to the unique local sociocultural and governance environments of the Caribbean region. This study conducts a context-specific empirical analysis of the Guyana Police Force as its research subject, filling gaps in the regional literature and supporting evidence-based institutional reform.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This study examines sexual misconduct within the Guyana Police Force (GPF) using a convergent parallel mixed-methods research design, as proposed by [Creswell & Plano Clark \(2018\)](#). The primary objective of this design is to investigate the prevalence, organizational drivers, and impacts of sexual misconduct within the GPF by integrating quantitative and qualitative evidence.

The rationale for selecting a mixed-methods approach is grounded in the complexity of the research problem. Quantitative data is necessary to measure the prevalence and patterns of sexual misconduct, while qualitative data provides insight into participants' experiences, perceptions, and recommendations for organizational improvement. This approach is consistent with the principles of methodological triangulation advanced by [Denzin \(1978\)](#) and further developed by [Tashakkori and Teddlie \(2010\)](#), enabling a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon while reducing the limitations associated with reliance on a single research method.

The study was implemented through five sequential phases. First, a structured survey instrument was developed incorporating both closed-ended questions for quantitative analysis and open-ended questions for qualitative inquiry. Second, data were collected concurrently via an anonymous online questionnaire distributed to sworn members of the Guyana Police Force, yielding 120

completed responses. Third, the quantitative and qualitative datasets were analyzed independently. Quantitative data were examined using descriptive statistics and cross-tabulation techniques, while qualitative responses were coded and analyzed using the thematic analysis framework developed by [Braun and Clarke \(2006\)](#). Fourth, findings from both datasets were compared and triangulated to identify areas of convergence, complementarity, and divergence. Finally, the integrated findings were interpreted to inform evidence-based conclusions and recommendations regarding organizational culture, reporting barriers, leadership accountability, policy awareness, victim support, and institutional reform.

Table 1

Convergent Parallel Mixed-Methods Research Process

Phase	Activity	Purpose
Phase 1	Instrument Development	Design a structured questionnaire containing quantitative and qualitative items aligned with the study objectives.
Phase 2	Concurrent Data Collection	Collect quantitative and qualitative data simultaneously through an anonymous online survey.
Phase 3	Independent Data Analysis	Analyze quantitative data using descriptive statistics and cross-tabulations; analyze qualitative data through thematic analysis.
Phase 4	Triangulation and Comparison	Compare findings from both datasets to identify convergence, complementarity, and divergence.

The convergent parallel mixed-methods design enhances the validity, credibility, and comprehensiveness of the study by integrating statistical trends with participants' lived experiences. This methodological approach deepens the analysis and provides robust empirical evidence to inform policy development, organizational reform, and the prevention of sexual misconduct within the Guyana Police Force.

3.2. Population and Sampling

This study uses the Guyana Police Force as its research setting and recruits 120 sworn police officers from four departments within the force—operational, investigative, administrative, and professional—as its research participants. This study adopts the stratified sampling method proposed by [Bryman \(2016\)](#) and controls the representativeness of core variables, including rank, assigned jurisdiction, gender, and length of service. Simple random sampling was not feasible due to practical constraints of police operational duties, so the study's recruitment strategy was designed to prevent overrepresentation of staff from any single department, unit, or rank. Drawing on [Loftus's \(2009\)](#) conclusions, this study specifically includes frontline police officers. The sample size of this study meets the requirements for descriptive analysis and cross-tabulation in a single-institution research setting. However, it is not sufficient to support large-

scale multivariate modeling. While the principle of voluntary participation reduces the risk of coercion, it also introduces self-selection bias, as noted by (Tourangeau & Yan, 2007).

3.3. Data Collection

This study develops a research framework to investigate workplace sexual harassment in the policing sector, with core work organized into two major modules. The first module focuses on survey instrument development. For this module, the study adapts the Sexual Experiences Questionnaire first proposed by Fitzgerald et al. (1997) and draws on the 2007 empirical study of workplace harassment by Willness et al.

To adjust questionnaire items to fit the context and terminology of policing settings. It establishes five core measurement dimensions: Prevalence and Exposure: This dimension measures respondents' experiences of harassment (including inappropriate remarks, sexualized jokes, and other similar conduct) encountered over their lifetime and in the 12 months prior to the survey. Policy Awareness and Institutional Knowledge: This dimension measures respondents' level of understanding of organizational policies, reporting procedures, and disciplinary processes related to sexual harassment. Reporting Confidence and Organizational Trust: This dimension measures respondents' confidence in the confidentiality and fairness of investigations, as well as their concerns about retaliation for reporting. Emotional and Occupational Impacts: This dimension measures psychological impacts, such as stress and anxiety, as well as job satisfaction and willingness to resign or transfer to another position. Bystander Roles and Institutional Culture: This dimension measures respondents' willingness to intervene if they witness harassment, their observations and feedback on inappropriate conduct they have seen, and their perceptions of leadership's commitment to addressing sexual harassment.

The second module focuses on bias prevention and control, whose core goal is to guarantee data reliability and protect participants' rights and interests. Specific measures implemented include collecting questionnaires anonymously, conducting all data collection activities without supervisor oversight, excluding combinations of demographic characteristics that could identify participants, and adopting secure data collection protocols. Participation in the study is completely voluntary, and non-participation carries no employment-related penalties. All measures align with the recommended standards for sensitive organizational research proposed by (Tourangeau & Yan, 2007).

3.4. Ethical Approval

This study focuses on workplace sexual misconduct. The entire research process involving human subjects strictly adheres to four core ethical principles: respect for individuals, beneficence, non-maleficence, and justice. All stages, from ethical review and approval, protection of research subjects' rights and interests, data security, to research integrity, meet the ethical disclosure requirements for academic publication.

Before launching any data collection for this study, ethical approval was obtained from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Texila American University under approval number [W#038/2025](#). All research operations strictly adhere to the approved protocol and to three sets of compliance requirements issued by the university: ethical norms, data protection policies, and research governance.

Given the sensitive nature of this study's topic, we implemented a series of dedicated ethical safeguards. First, we enforced a fully voluntary participation rule: we fully disclosed the study's purpose, procedures, risks, and all participants' rights to all potential participants in advance, only granted access to the survey after obtaining electronic informed consent, and allowed participants to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Second, we established a strict anonymous and confidential mechanism: we did not collect any identifying information that could identify individual participants or their affiliated organizations, and all research results are published only in an aggregated form.

We adopted an encrypted, password-protected data storage system accessible only to the principal investigator, and all data will be securely destroyed in accordance with university policies once the study is completed. We also informed participants in advance of the risk of psychological discomfort the study may trigger and provided professional mental health support resources, prioritizing their well-being throughout the research process.

This study was conducted independently with no external interference. All authors have no financial or non-financial conflicts of interest. The full set of measures implemented throughout the research process collectively protects the rights, dignity, privacy, and well-being of all research participants.

3.5. Data Analysis

3.5.1. Quantitative Analysis

This study first complied with the methodological requirements outlined by [Field \(2018\)](#) for conducting descriptive statistical analysis of all quantitative data, including frequency distributions, percentage calculations, and measures of central tendency. This analysis was used to generate baseline prevalence estimates and analyze the overall institutional climate. Next, we applied cross-tabulation techniques to analyze associations between categorical variables; the validity of this method is corroborated by [Agresti \(2018\)](#) and [Bryman \(2016\)](#). We specifically explored the relationships among four sets of variables: gender and exposure to misconduct; job level and confidence in reporting misconduct; length of employment and policy awareness; and department and perceived risk of retaliation. Restricted by the sample size, we did not conduct inferential statistics. All findings are only descriptive observations and cannot prove causality. We strictly adhered to the boundaries of conclusions specified in [Field \(2018\)](#) to avoid over-inference.

3.5.2. Qualitative Analysis

This study conducted a full-process analysis of the collected qualitative feedback. Adopting the thematic analysis framework proposed by [Braun & Clarke in 2006](#), the study sequentially completed the following research procedures: familiarizing and immersing with the data, inductively generating initial codes, forming theme clusters, iteratively refining emergent themes, and integrating qualitative and quantitative findings. In the end, it sorted out four core analytical categories and their corresponding sub-dimensions. Meanwhile, it compared the two types of data and cited [Denzin's 1978](#) study to support the idea that this strategy can improve the credibility of the analysis.

3.6. Limitations

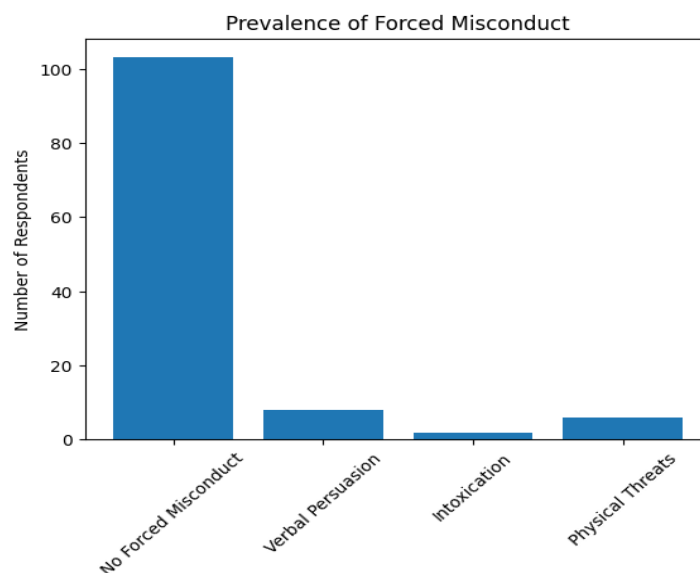
This study first explicitly discloses five core research limitations: First, self-reported data may present response bias stemming from underreporting due to stigma and overreporting of highly salient perceived issues, and the validity of this bias is corroborated by the study of [Tourangeau and Yan \(2007\)](#); second, the cross-sectional design can only capture participants' perceptions at a single time point, and cannot be used to infer causal relationships or temporal changes; third, the study's sampling rule of voluntary participation introduces self-selection bias, as participants with strong opinions or relevant experiences are more likely to take part; fourth, the sample size is only sufficient to support descriptive analysis and subgroup comparisons, and is inadequate to support advanced multivariate statistical modeling; fifth, organizational cultural norms of the study's research setting, the Guyana Police Force, such as its hierarchy and authority system, may have influenced participants' willingness to disclose information. Despite the limitations outlined above, the convergent mixed-methods approach adopted in this study integrates quantitative and qualitative evidence to enhance internal validity, and the conclusions drawn provide a solid evidence base for measures to strengthen the organizational culture of the Guyana Police Force, including policy development, training reforms, and accountability mechanisms.

4. Findings

4.1. Prevalence and Observed Misconduct

A. Direct Victimization (Forced Misconduct)

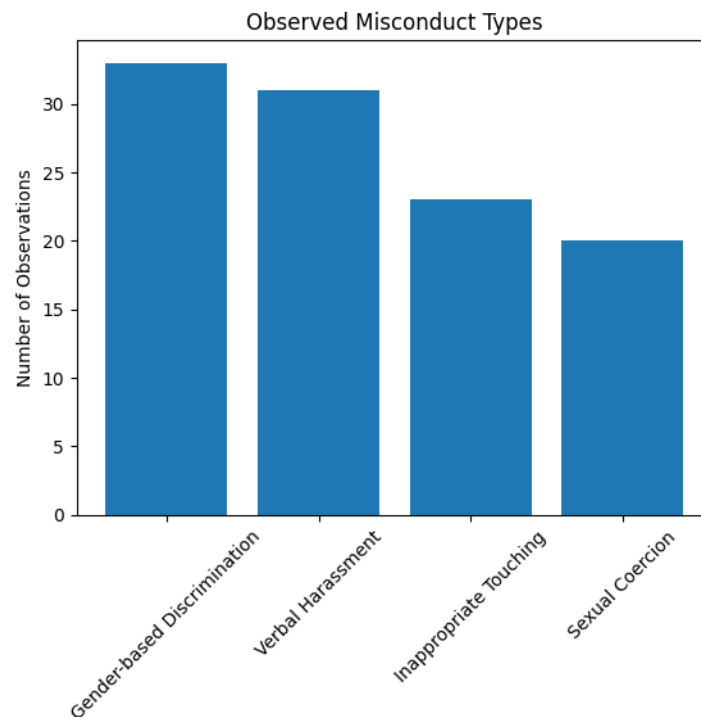
This study conducts a statistical analysis drawing on a survey sample of 120 respondents. First, the findings reveal that 80% of female respondents did not experience any form of coercive misconduct. Subsequent statistics show that 8 respondents (6.7%) encountered verbal coercion, 6 (5.0%) faced threats to their personal safety, and 2 (1.7%) were subjected to coercion under the influence of substances such as alcohol. Although most respondents were unharmed by such incidents, relevant institutions still need to attach sufficient importance to such coercive behavior.

Figure 1*Distribution of direct victimisation among respondents***Interpretation**

The survey of this study shows that the proportion of directly reported cases of coercive inappropriate behavior is relatively low, yet three categories of serious coercion still exist; the observed incidence rate of such behavior is higher than its official reporting rate, which leads to the conclusion that issues including underreporting are present, and it is necessary to strengthen mechanisms for reporting, accountability, and preventive intervention.

Table 2*Observed Misconduct: Frequency of Witnessed Behaviours***B. Observed Misconduct (Workplace Climate Indicators)**

Type of Misconduct	Frequency	Percentage (n = 120)
Gender-based discrimination	33	27.5%
Verbal harassment	31	25.8%
Inappropriate touching	23	19.2%
Sexual coercion	20	16.7%

Figure 2*Frequency of observed workplace misconduct behaviours***Interpretation**

This study's survey of workplace misconduct finds that the actual prevalence of such behaviors is far higher than estimates based solely on reports from direct victims. The proportion of respondents who self-reported personally experiencing coercive types of misconduct is extremely low, but the witness rate for every category of these behaviors is significantly higher. Among these, the witness rate for gender discrimination reached 27.5%, verbal harassment 25.8%, inappropriate physical contact 19.2%, and sexual coercion 16.7%.

When ranked by occurrence frequency, the high incidence of gender discrimination and verbal harassment may reflect that disrespect and unequal treatment have become normalized in some workplaces. Previous studies have confirmed that repeated exposure to these behaviors reduces employees' organizational commitment, triggers psychological stress, and weakens workplace morale. The high witness rates of the two serious boundary-crossing behaviors—inappropriate physical contact and sexual coercion—are particularly worthy of vigilance.

Based on these findings, this study proposes that workplace misconduct exists along a continuous spectrum ranging from minor disrespect to severe coercion. The gap between witness rates and self-reporting rates stems from underreporting, and the three underlying issues behind this gap: organizational culture, policy awareness, and confidence in filing reports, will be explored in subsequent sections 4.3 and 4.4. Workplace misconduct remains a core

organizational issue that requires sustained attention and continued advancement of institutional reform.

4.2. Psychological and Professional Impact

The individual psychological and career impact results also offer valuable insight into the internal effects of the previously identified police organizational climate of misconduct. Whereas Section 4.1 emphasized adoption behavior, Section 4.2 demonstrates the toll on humans (lower performance, emotional stress, organizational detachment).

Table 3

Perceived Impact of Workplace Misconduct on Job Performance

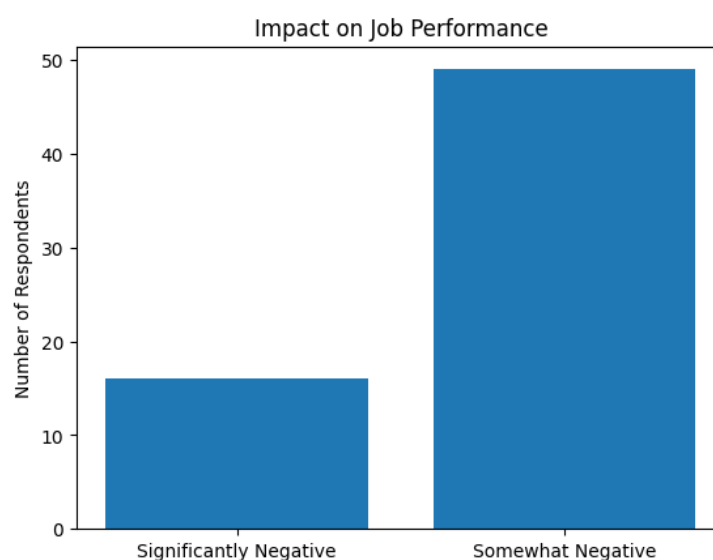
A. Job Performance Impact

Impact Level	Frequency
Significantly negative	16
Somewhat negative	49

Note. Total reporting negative impact: 65 respondents (54.2% of sample)

Figure 3

Perceived Impact of Workplace Misconduct on Job Performance

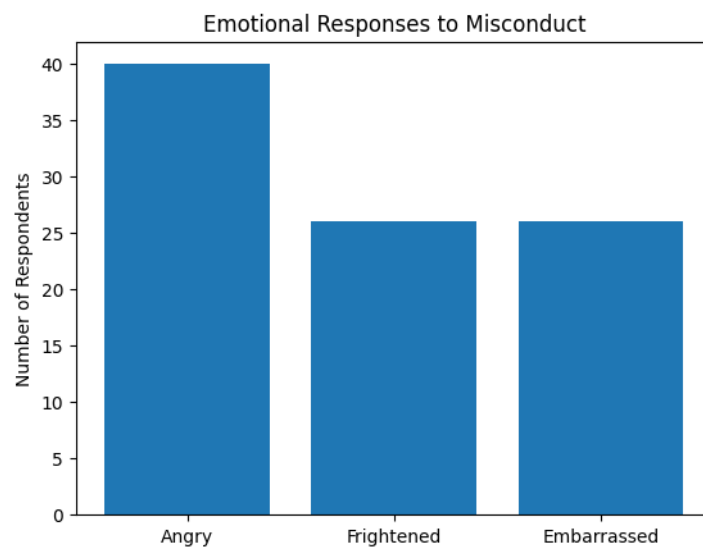


Interpretation

This survey finds that more than half of respondents report that workplace misconduct undermines their job performance, with the most common emotional responses being anger, fear, and embarrassment. Existing research on workplace harassment corroborates this harmful effect, which simultaneously erodes individual well-being, institutional effectiveness, and team morale.

Table 4*Emotional Responses to Workplace Misconduct***B. Emotional Responses**

Emotional Reaction	Frequency
Angry	40
Frightened	26
Embarrassed	26

Figure 4*Emotional Responses to Workplace Misconduct***Interpretation**

This study researched the psychosocial impacts of workplace sexual harassment, and its findings show that such behaviors trigger a wide range of negative chain reactions. 40 respondents reported feeling anger, 26 reported experiencing fear, and another 26 reported feeling embarrassed; anger was the most frequently reported negative emotion in this survey. Furthermore, 54.2% of respondents stated that this type of inappropriate behavior directly negatively affected their own work performance.

These emotional impacts not only affect direct victims—witnesses to the incidents also commonly suffer from emotional distress. Previous studies have proposed that indirect exposure to inappropriate workplace behavior can lead to a series of negative organizational impacts, a finding that aligns with this study's findings. Such effects are never isolated individual incidents; they spread to become group-wide pressure at the organizational level. Subsequent chapters will discuss response plans at the levels of organizational culture and institutional systems.

4.3. Organizational Culture

Section 4.3 moves from behavioral prevalence and psychological effects to the structural and cultural conditions shaping those outcomes. The findings highlight perception divergence and a significant policy awareness gap—both of which are critical governance indicators.

Table 5

Respondents' Perceptions of Organisational Culture

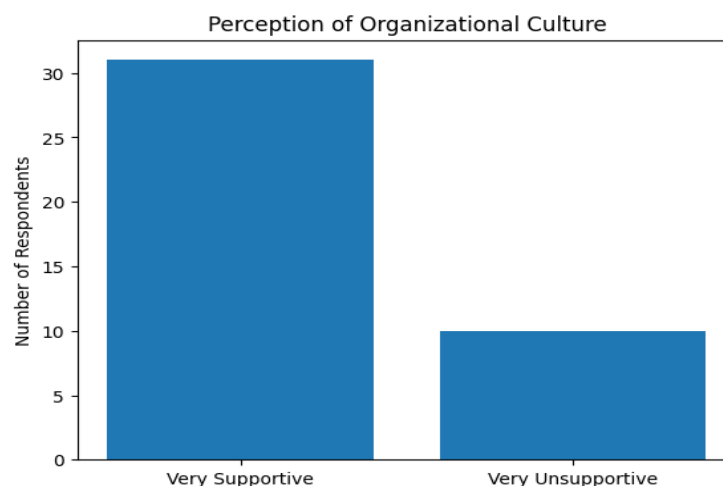
A. Culture Perception

Perception	Frequency
Very supportive	31
Very unsupportive	10

Note. Remaining respondents likely fall within moderate or neutral categories, suggesting perception spread across a continuum.

Figure 5

Respondents' Perceptions of Organisational Culture



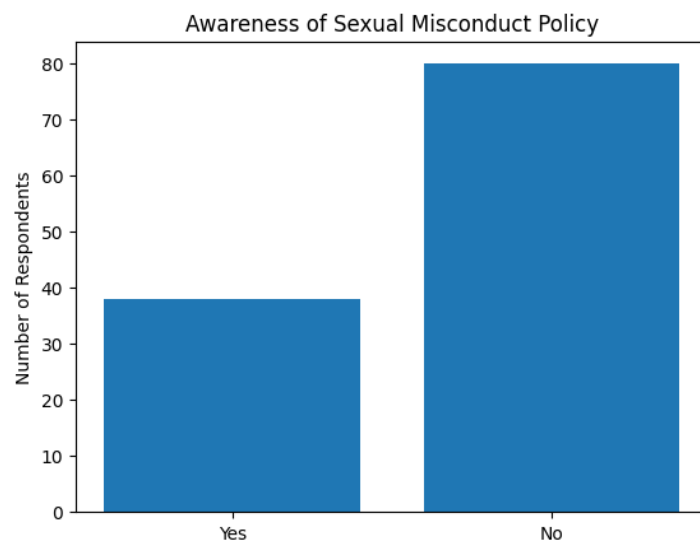
Interpretation

The workplace survey results of this study show that respondents' perceptions of the supportiveness of organizational culture are clearly divided, and there are gaps in workplace experiences across work units and supervisory levels. In addition, two-thirds of respondents do not understand the sexual misconduct policy, and significant loopholes exist in the policy's dissemination and implementation.

Table 6*Awareness of Sexual Misconduct Policy Among Respondents***B. Policy Awareness**

Awareness	Frequency
Yes	38
No	80

Note. 80 of 120 respondents (66.7%) report a lack of policy awareness.

Figure 6*Respondents' awareness of the sexual misconduct policy***Interpretation**

This study synthesizes empirical survey findings on workplace sexual harassment governance and identifies two core organizational problems. First, there is a polarized perception of workplace culture: some respondents view their organizational environment as supportive, while another group holds negative assessments, with sharp differences in employee experiences across departments and regulatory oversight contexts. The root cause of this divide is the uneven implementation of organizational values. Second, the awareness rate of sexual harassment-related policies is extremely low. Data from this study's survey show that roughly two-thirds of respondents are uncertain about the existence and core content of these relevant policies, pointing to a significant gap between policy formulation and employee awareness.

Previous academic research has noted that the effectiveness of workplace policies depends not only on the existence of the policies themselves but also on employees' clear understanding of reporting procedures, the protections available to them, and organizational expectations. The combination of these two problems prevents formal safeguard mechanisms from being embedded in

daily work practices, leading employees to rely more on individual leadership styles and informal workplace norms than on institutional processes. An in-depth analysis of this impact will be elaborated in Section 4.4. Based on these findings, this study proposes that stakeholders must strengthen policy communication, foster a unified organizational culture, and build a workplace environment defined by safety and respect.

4.4. Reporting and Accountability

Section 4.4 analyzes the health of the law enforcement information ecosystem. While previous sections have examined the prevalence of misconduct and its psychosocial consequences, this section addresses whether the institutions are safe, credible, and functional. Reporting systems are considered the sine qua non of organizational accountability; their strengths and weaknesses are key in determining culture.

Table 7

Respondents' Comfort Level in Reporting Misconduct

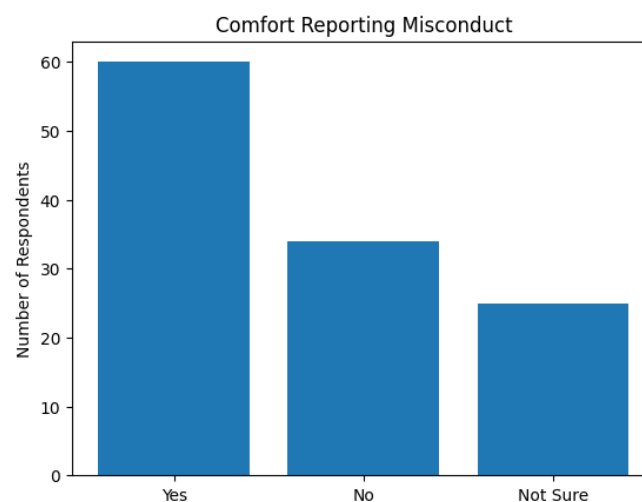
A. Comfort Reporting

Response	Frequency
Yes	60
No	34
Not Sure	25

Note. Total hesitant or uncertain (No + Not Sure): 59 respondents (49.2%)

Figure 7

Respondents' comfort level in reporting misconduct



Interpretation

This survey finds that only half of all respondents feel secure enough to report misconduct, while most of the remaining respondents hold hesitant or resistant attitudes toward reporting. The two barriers are a lack of trust in the investigation process and fear of retaliation. Respondents have called for improvements in the credibility of investigations and the refinement of anonymous reporting mechanisms, revealing that public trust in the accountability process remains severely lacking.

Table 8

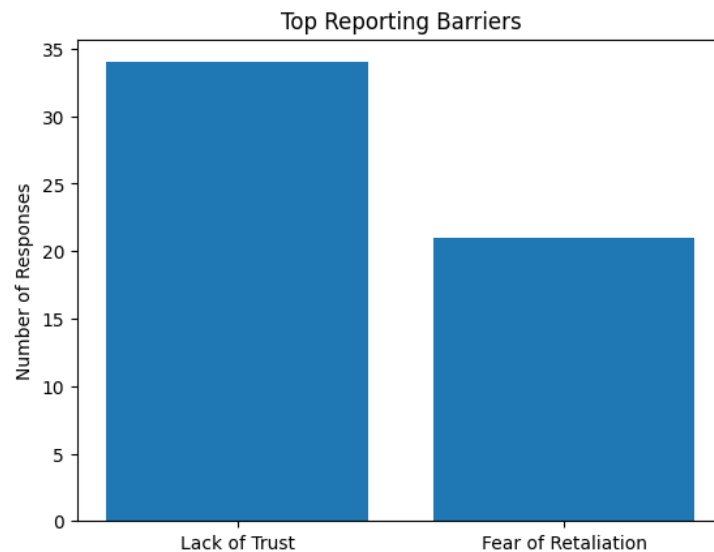
Top Barriers to Reporting Misconduct

B. Top Reporting Barriers

Barrier	Frequency
Lack of trust in investigations	34
Fear of retaliation	21

Figure 8

Top barriers to reporting misconduct as identified by respondents



Interpretation

This study systematically identifies the core barriers to the formal reporting of workplace misconduct, as well as two key influencing factors. The first is a lack of confidence in the investigation process. Respondents generally expressed concerns about the fairness, impartiality, confidentiality, and effectiveness of investigations, noting that existing reporting mechanisms lack sufficient credibility. This finding aligns with conclusions from existing procedural justice research: confidence in organizational processes is a core determinant of an individual's willingness to report misconduct.

The second factor is fear of retaliation. Respondents worried that reporting would lead to negative career outcomes, social exclusion, and unfair treatment in the workplace, prompting them to abandon formal reporting channels even when available. These two categories of barriers have a mutually reinforcing relationship: insufficient confidence in investigations exacerbates concerns about retaliation, which in turn further erodes trust in the organizational system, and together they hinder formal reporting.

This study proposes that strengthening confidence in reporting mechanisms and enforcing anti-retaliation protections are core priorities for organizational accountability. This proposition echoes the issues of organizational culture and policy perceptions discussed in the preceding Section 4.3 and emphasizes the need for workplaces to establish credible and reliable reporting systems.

Table 9

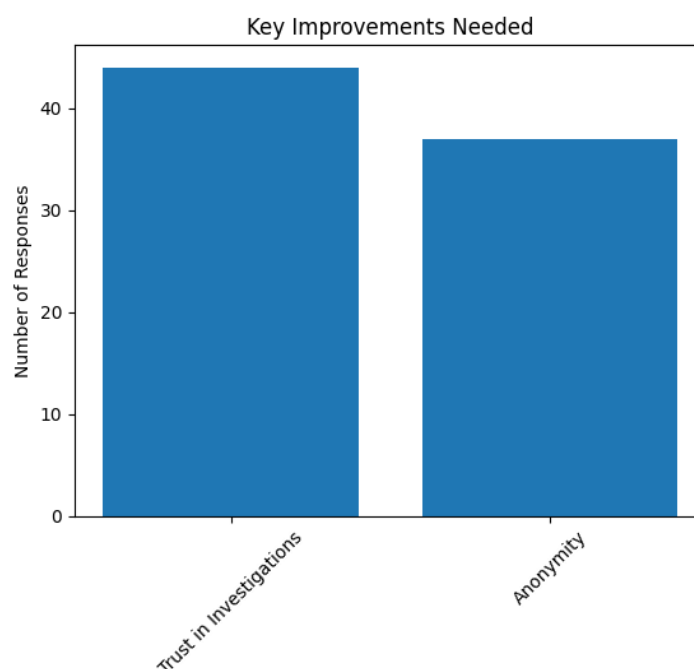
Key Improvements to Reporting Systems

C. Key Improvements Needed

Improvement Area	Frequency
Trust in investigations	44
Anonymity	37

Figure 9

Key improvements to reporting systems as identified by respondents



Interpretation

This study draws on previously summarized barriers to reporting workplace misconduct and compiles the core demands for improvement put forward by participants in this current survey: 44 participants noted that confidence in investigation processes needs to be strengthened, which aligns with their concerns about the credibility, fairness, and effectiveness of existing investigation procedures.

An additional 37 participants called for improvements to anonymous reporting mechanisms, confirming that confidentiality is a core factor shaping willingness to report misconduct. Our analysis finds that overall, participants' reporting confidence is moderate but fragile. While formal reporting mechanisms have already been established, the public lacks sufficient confidence in their effectiveness.

Three types of concern investigation credibility, protection for anonymity, and the potential consequences of submitting a report—reduce willingness to use official reporting channels. This finding echoes the core themes of organizational trust and accountability that run throughout this study and highlights that a trustworthy reporting system is a key support for addressing workplace misconduct.

4.5. Victim Support and Training

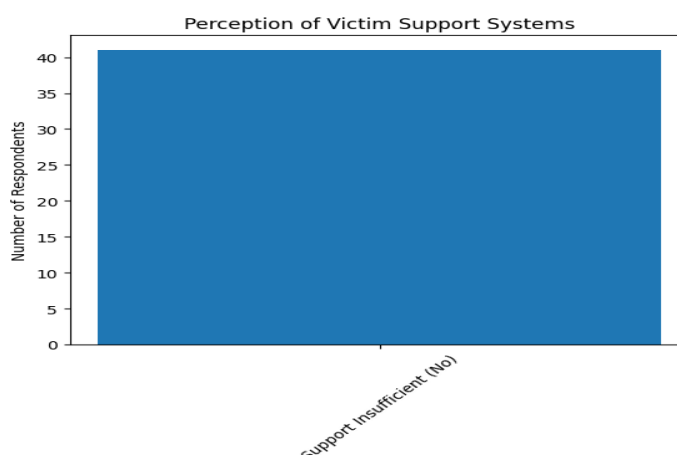
This study's survey of the support system for victims of sexual misconduct within the Guyana Police Force found that most respondents reported clear flaws in the existing support mechanisms for victims of such behavior. These mechanisms are not only hard to access and fail to share information properly but also leave many victims uncertain about how to obtain relevant services. These problems prolong victims' emotional distress and lower the group's level of trust in the organization's support system. Respondents also proposed two sets of improvement directions: first, four victim-centered intervention measures, including confidential counseling and peer support programs; second, mandatory training covering four topics, such as sexual misconduct prevention and bystander intervention, to help the police force build a safe workplace culture.

Table 10

Respondents' Perceptions of Victim Support Systems

A. Support Systems

Perception	Frequency
Support insufficient	41

Figure 10*Respondents' perceptions of victim support system adequacy***Interpretation**

This survey finds that only half of all respondents feel secure enough to report misconduct, while most of the remaining respondents hold hesitant or resistant attitudes toward reporting. The two barriers are a lack of trust in the investigation process and fear of retaliation. Respondents have called for improvements in the credibility of investigations and the refinement of anonymous reporting mechanisms, revealing that public trust in the accountability process remains severely lacking.

Table 11*Training Priorities as Identified by Respondents***B. Training Priorities**

Training Area	Frequency
Mandatory training	85
Professional conduct	84

Figure 11*Training priorities as identified by respondents*

Interpretation

This survey targeting working professionals finds that over 70% of respondents support strengthening training and career development initiatives related to workplace misconduct. Of these respondents, 85 back the rollout of mandatory training, while 84 support specialized training on professional ethics.

This outcome highlights widespread consensus among the surveyed group that preventive measures against workplace misconduct should be implemented and workplace conduct standards should be reinforced. Respondents prefer mandatory, organization-wide uniform programs over voluntary initiatives, and recognize that such training can promote the spread of positive workplace behaviors, including professional integrity, respectful communication, and ethical leadership.

An additional 41 respondents believe that the existing support systems for victims are insufficient and express concerns over the availability and effectiveness of relevant assistance. The surveyed group simultaneously requires both preventive and supportive interventions. This survey not only exposes ongoing challenges in workplace governance but also identifies opportunities for change: employees' high acceptance of training reflects their willingness to participate in workplace improvement, proves that organizations already have a foundation for workplace cultural transformation, and confirms the importance of continuously refining employee support and education.

4.6. Integrated Findings Summary

This survey finds that while the frequency of reported cases of extremely serious misconduct is low, acts including discrimination, harassment, and coercion are widespread. Numerous pain points currently exist, creating an urgent need to strengthen institutional safeguards and accountability mechanisms.

4.7. Final Integrated Assessment

The Guyana Police Force Academy is at a critical juncture in its reform. It faces three realities that compel progress: a continuously rising public awareness of misconduct, gaps and resource shortages in its reporting mechanisms, and a clear demand for preventive and supportive training. Therefore, the Guyana Police Force Academy must implement a comprehensive strengthening strategy, paired with supportive post-incident measures, to solidify confidence in its reporting system, end the normalization of misconduct, and strengthen the institution's legitimacy.

5. Discussion

The results of this study contribute empirical evidence to the existing literature on sexual misconduct in hierarchical and hyper-masculinized institutions, particularly policing contexts. In keeping with past studies on official versus actual infractions (Buchanan, 2016; Loftus, 2009), misconduct in the Guyana Police Force is clearly much more visible than it is formally acknowledged or recorded within its own bureaucracy, suggesting a fracturing of the nexus between lived experience and institutional instrumentality. This gap between observation and formal reporting also reflects structural and cultural dynamics that extend beyond the mere lack of misdeeds to report.

5.1. Observable Misconduct and Cultural Normalization

This study documented 33 reports of gender discrimination and 31 reports of verbal harassment within the policing field, while the volume of direct reports of far more severe misconduct was extremely low. On this basis, we preliminarily judge that low-intensity misconduct has become normalized in this organizational environment. Drawing on organizational climate studies by Cortina et al. (2001) and Hulin et al. (1996), which confirm that tolerating routine discrimination gives rise to more serious misconduct, this study integrates Skolnick's (2002) research that sorts out three sets of characteristics used to justify misconduct in the policing field: hierarchical authority, peer solidarity, and informal loyalty. Supplemented by Buchanan's (2016) definition of authority-based harassment, this study proposes that cultural tolerance of discrimination functions as a structural risk amplifier, elevating groups' vulnerability to serious misconduct.

5.2. Policy Awareness and Implementation Gaps

The finding that 80 respondents reported a lack of awareness of sexual misconduct policies reveals a significant implementation deficit, as organizational reform literature emphasizes that the mere existence of a policy does not guarantee its effectiveness (Dobbin & Kalev, 2019). Low policy awareness may reflect insufficient dissemination mechanisms, inadequate training reinforcement, limited integration into supervisory practice, and weak monitoring and evaluation systems. In policing institutions, where operational demands often dominate daily functions, internal governance policies may fail to reach frontline ranks unless they are actively reinforced by leadership. The findings therefore suggest that while institutional reforms may exist at the strategic or administrative level, they have not fully translated into operational culture, creating a disconnect between formal governance frameworks and frontline awareness, which represents structural vulnerability.

5.3. Reporting Hesitation and Leadership Accountability

Among the 60 respondents surveyed in this study, while a subset believed they could safely report misconduct within their organization, a comparable number

still felt uncomfortable or skeptical about blowing the whistle, exposing long-standing underlying risks in the current whistleblowing environment. Among the core barriers to reporting, 34 respondents cited a lack of trust in the investigation process, and 21 mentioned fear of retaliation. Drawing on the procedural justice theory proposed by [Tyler \(2006\)](#), individuals' perceptions of the fairness, neutrality, and transparency of an organization's processes influence their willingness to interact with and trust authority figures. Within hierarchical systems, supervisors can manipulate employees' core professional interests through performance evaluations, job transfers, and promotions. [McDonald \(2012\)](#) also previously identified retaliation as the primary obstacle to whistleblowing. This reluctance to report misconduct does not stem from indifference to wrongdoing, but rather from a sense of perceived vulnerability shaped by hierarchical structures. It is therefore necessary to strengthen leadership accountability and boost employees' confidence in reporting processes to rebuild trust.

5.4. Psychological and Occupational Impact

This study systematically investigates the psychological and occupational outcomes of respondents who have experienced workplace misconduct, with its core findings forming a complete impact chain that extends from the individual to the organizational level. This study finds that anger is the most frequently reported negative emotion among respondents. Drawing on prior research by [Lazarus \(1991\)](#) and [Dean et al. \(2019\)](#), this emotion originates from perceptions of injustice, damaged dignity, moral injury, and feelings of betrayal. Findings from the [American Psychiatric Association \(2022\)](#) and [Nielsen and Einarsen \(2012\)](#) confirm that this emotional pattern aligns with the traumatic stress responses linked to workplace harassment and abuse, completing the academic validation of individual-level psychological harm. This study further proposes that even indirect exposure to workplace misconduct can trigger issues such as secondary traumatic stress and workplace anxiety. This conclusion is supported by [Figley's \(1995\)](#) research on indirect trauma, which expands the scope of harm covered in this line of inquiry. More than half of the respondents reported that the experience undermined their work performance. This finding of impaired occupational functioning is supported by the meta-analysis of [Willness et al. \(2007\)](#) and the conclusions of [Bowling and Beehr \(2006\)](#). Ultimately, such psychological burdens also drive up long-term organizational costs through reduced productivity, increased absenteeism, and higher staff turnover rates. A set of conclusions backed by the research of [Hershcovis and Barling \(2010\)](#) and [McDonald \(2012\)](#).

5.5. Cultural Variability and Empowered Respondents

This study conducts its analysis building on research gaps identified in prior work. Drawing on primary data collected from this organizational culture survey, 31 respondents described their organization's culture as highly

supportive, and all reported generally high comfort with reporting workplace misconduct. Based on these observations, this study deduces that a positive institutional subculture already exists within the organization. Additional findings include divergence across departments in leadership and work climate; the presence of robust accountability practices in some units; and the ability of supportive superior-subordinate relationships to mitigate overall institutional risk. Citing the classic 1996 conclusion by Hulin et al. that visible fairness, clear communication of zero-tolerance expectations, and consistent disciplinary actions can profoundly shape organizational climate, this study further confirms that the reform examined need not start from scratch. Its existing strengths can be promoted and replicated, and effective change can be achieved with complementary strategic strengthening. While risks remain, the organization has already built the core foundation to support sustained reform.

5.6. Implications for Institutional Reform

This study proposes three interrelated areas of institutional reform for the governance of workplace sexual misconduct: structural, cultural, and capacity building. Structural reform strengthens the independence of investigations, sets up anonymous reporting channels, and enforces anti-retaliation protections, to boost the credibility of reporting and accountability processes; cultural reform advances ethical leadership centered on modeling appropriate workplace conduct, delivers training to empower bystanders, and reinforces gender equality norms, to build a respectful and inclusive work environment; capacity-building reform implements mandatory policy awareness training, embeds prevention and accountability requirements into performance management, and establishes a continuous monitoring and evaluation mechanism, to guarantee long-term organizational improvement. Workplace sexual misconduct is not merely a disciplinary issue but a core concern related to governance, culture, and institutional integrity. It requires simultaneous advancement of procedural strengthening and cultural transformation to build a workplace environment that integrates accountability, trust, professionalism, and respect.

5.7. Synthesis

Overall, these findings reinforce that misconduct in policing settings may be visible but underreported as a function of layered hierarchies and patterns of cultural acquiescence. Institutional implementation gaps and trust deficits: Nations with low policy awareness and hesitation to report. However, the presence of supportive subcultures and the high demand for training indicate a willingness to reform. The psychological burden uncovered highlights an opportunity for intervention, whilst the variation in this community's cultural perceptions signals further opportunities for strategic action by leadership. Overall, the discussion situates the Guyana Police Force within broader global scholarship on workplace misconduct, especially in enforcement settings, and

identifies context-specific institutional levers to enhance accountability, professionalism, and workforce well-being.

6. Recommendations

6.1. Policy Recommendations for Institutional Reform

This study proposes a full-chain reform plan to address workplace sexual misconduct within the Guyana Police Force. First, it frames the issue as a systemic challenge that undermines governance effectiveness, organizational culture, and institutional integrity, rather than an isolated individual disciplinary problem. Three types of external references support the plan: the relevant recommendations from the [EEOC \(2016\)](#), the procedural justice principles put forward by scholar [Tyler \(2006\)](#), and the international best practices for public sector governance summarized by the [World Bank \(2017\)](#). The core reform framework of this study covers seven dimensions: prevention, reporting, accountability, leadership, support services, policy awareness, and institutional oversight. It mandates that all police officers complete mandatory annual full-force training, which covers trauma-informed practice, scenario-based policing drills, and bystander intervention skills, to boost trust in the reporting system and reduce barriers to disclosing incidents.

Supporting implementation mechanisms include confidential, accessible reporting channels backed by an independent oversight body; an anonymous digital reporting platform; a zero-tolerance accountability model tied to leadership performance evaluations; and confidential counseling, legal support, and anti-retaliation protections for affected individuals. This study identifies a significant gap in existing policy awareness, so it pairs the reform framework with an implementation strategy centered on leadership development, policy communication, and continuous monitoring. This strategy requires regulatory staff to receive specialized training in ethical leadership, strengthen force-wide policy awareness through outreach, integrate the policy into standing orders, and include it in recruit training. It also mandates workplace climate surveys every two years and regular publication of public reports. The full set of measures forms a feasible, evidence-based roadmap that ultimately aims to strengthen institutional accountability, increase trust in reporting processes, advance organizational justice, and build a safer, more professional workplace environment.

6.2. Implementation Phasing Model

This study proposes a two-year reform framework for the Guyana Police Force, which will be implemented in three chronological phases: the first phase covers the 0 to 6 months after the framework's launch, the second phase spans 6 to 12 months post-launch, and the third phase runs from 12 to 24 months after launch.

Across all three phases, 9 core, practical, and implementable tasks have been clearly defined, and each task is tied to a corresponding timeline anchor to ensure on-schedule delivery.

The strategic value of this framework is not limited to addressing workplace misconduct. Internally, it can support 5 core capacity-building initiatives for the police force, including strengthening police professionalism and consolidating institutional legitimacy. Externally, it can drive the achievement of 6 key objectives, such as implementing human rights standards and rebuilding public trust, endowing the framework with prominent practical value.

7. Conclusion

This study focuses on four core dimensions of sexual misconduct within the Guyana Police Force (GPF): the prevalence of such misconduct, the organizational and cultural factors that drive it, the effectiveness of existing reporting systems, and the institutional reforms needed to strengthen accountability and workplace safety. Its core conclusions are as follows: Sexual misconduct remains a central organizational challenge currently facing the GPF. Most surveyed police staff have personally experienced harassment-related incidents, lack confidence in internal reporting mechanisms, fear retaliation after reporting, and hold uneven levels of awareness of relevant policies. The results of this study support the judgment put forward in prior literature that "organizational culture, power imbalances, leadership practices, and institutional trust are core determinants of the reporting and prevention of misconduct". They also align with classic conclusions in the research field of hierarchical policing organizations: formal policies alone are insufficient to resolve the problem of sexual misconduct, and written policies become completely ineffective when employees lack confidence in enforcement processes and view reporting systems as non-functional.

The original finding of this study is the existence of a strong association between organizational culture and reporting behavior: respondents who perceived supportive leadership and a positive work climate had significantly higher confidence in institutional processes, while respondents holding distrust and fear rarely used the reporting system, demonstrating that organizational culture carries the dual attributes of both a protective factor and a risk factor.

In response to this, the study proposes advancing culture-oriented reforms in tandem with procedural and policy reforms across five domains: governance, accountability, leadership development, policy dissemination, and employee education. Concrete implementation measures include strengthening reporting systems, enforcing protections against retaliation, improving policy awareness,

and promoting trauma-informed leadership to build a comprehensive reform framework that can boost trust and institutional legitimacy.

This study fills a gap in the limited empirical literature on sexual misconduct in law enforcement agencies across the Caribbean region, expands relevant knowledge for policing in developing nations through survey evidence from the GPF, and argues that sustainable reform requires integrating structural accountability measures with long-term cultural transformation. To effectively address the target problem, it is necessary to advance coordinated reforms, strengthen reporting and accountability mechanisms, roll out matching personnel support, and cultivate a professional culture that incorporates ethical leadership grounded in respect and transparency.

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AI Statement

Tools such as ChatGPT were employed to assist with aspects of this manuscript, including language editing and structuring ideas. Article content has been sourced, reviewed, and verified by the author.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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