

<b>Case 4   Issue 40 – Abuse of Position for Sexual Purpose</b>		
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**Radio operator pursues contact with a vulnerable woman**

*Inappropriate contact with a vulnerable woman, raising issues about:*

- *Maintaining professional boundaries*
- *Use of personal social media*

This case is relevant to the following areas:

<p><b>Call handling</b></p> 	<p><b>Professional standards</b></p> 
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**Overview of incident**

Ms A called police using the 101 number to report concerns regarding her mother. She told the IOPC she informed the call handler her mother was very vulnerable, had Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD) and poor eyesight, and she was concerned she was being financially exploited by a woman she had started a relationship with. An incident log was created and the call was graded as a low priority response.

The call centre passed the call to a team of designated radio operators. This team undertakes further work in cases where there is no immediate need to allocate officers to the incident. The call log was accepted for further action by Mr B, a radio allocator and dispatcher.

Mr B updated the log to record he had attempted to contact the caller on two occasions but these attempts had been unsuccessful.

Eventually he managed to make contact with the caller. She agreed to allow Mr B to speak to her mother directly. Mr B noted on the log that Ms A suffered with autism and OCD.

Mr B updated the log to record he had attempted to make contact with the woman’s mother on the number provided, however there was no response so he had left a message asking her to return his call. He subsequently followed this up with a text message.

Mr B spoke to the original caller and informed her he had been unable to reach her mother. Mr B asked Ms A if she wished to have the call held over to the following day when he was back on shift. He said “if somebody else calls and they don’t know the background . . . they might not deal with the same sense of humour.” Ms A said she had been staying out of the house for

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some time. Mr B offered to call her the next day to check if she was ok, and she accepted the offer.

Mr B asked Ms A whether she felt safeguarded and if she was going to be ok. Ms A said she would wait and see what happened when she got home, and if her mother got angry, she would probably go out again.

Mr B asked Ms A whether she was on social media. Ms A told Mr B she did not have as much support as she would like, but she did have a Community Psychiatric Nurse (CPN) and a social worker, but often she could not get through to them. Mr B asked her if she had any friends she could talk to.

Ms A and Mr B agreed that the incident would be deferred to the following day so he could follow up the incident himself, rather than delegate to another member of staff. Mr B offered a reference number for the call.

The next day Mr B called Ms A as arranged. Ms A confirmed her mother had not come home last night. Ms A confirmed her mother's behaviour was not unusual, and sometimes she stayed away from home for up to two nights when she wanted space.

Mr B started to talk to Ms A about where she was living and her finances.

Mr B talked about how his mother had recently gone into a nursing home and how it had left a gap in his life. He went on to say he was on Facebook and was looking for groups to join.

At the end of the conversation, Mr B confirmed he would attempt to make contact with the woman's mother and call her back once he had tried. Mr B said "Thank you, you are really nice, I've enjoyed talking to you." Ms A responded "Thank you, thank you so much officer (laughs) and I wish the best for you as well."

Mr B told Ms A he would like to speak to Ms A outside of work, but he did not know if it would be appropriate. Ms A responded "Erm I could, I don't know, but you are an officer so I'm pretty sure I can trust you."

Mr B made a further call to Ms A after trying to contact her mother without success, and asked her to confirm the contact number. Mr B said he was off for a few days so the call would be picked up by a colleague. Mr B mentioned the possibility of treating the woman as a missing person if Ms A hadn't seen her for a few days.

The conversation continued and Ms A spoke to Mr B about her relationship with her mother generally.

As the call continued, Mr B told Ms A he would like to talk to her more and get to know her better. He asked if she wanted to go for a coffee. Ms A did not respond.

Later, Mr B asked her if she was on social media, and she said she was on Facebook. He asked if he could friend her on there, and she replied "if you want to". Mr B asked again, and added "if not do you mind if I text you?" Ms A replied that it was ok.

A few hours later Mr B called Ms A to update her on the attempts he had made to contact her mother. He informed her he had still not been able to make contact. There was a discussion about how to handle the situation. An agreement was made to close the log. Ms A agreed to

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inform him once she had made contact with her mother and if she still felt she was in a vulnerable relationship.

Later that evening Mr B contacted Ms A via Facebook Messenger and they exchanged a number of messages. Mr B again invited Ms A for coffee. She said she would think about it. He asked her to provide a picture of herself, but she refused.

Ms A agreed to make a complaint to the police after speaking to her advocate about her contact with Mr B.

When asked by the IOPC how the actions of Mr B had affected her, she described how initially she was worried that it was her who had done something wrong. However, her advocate assured her she had done nothing wrong.

### Type of investigation

IOPC independent investigation

### Findings and recommendations

1. No organisational learning recommendations were identified during this investigation.

### Other action taken by this police force

1. The force's internal newsletter covered the issue of sexually predatory behaviour and informed staff about the force's anonymous reporting line to the counter corruption unit. Within the same article, the force informed staff about a training programme which would focus on sexual harassment and abuse.
2. The force has engaged with three local charities and employed a Sexual Harassment Associate and Project Manager. This role is responsible for developing a sexual harassment policy and training for staff.
3. The force has created an online forum which allows staff to talk openly about issues that matter to them. Issues discussed have included sexual harassment in the workplace.

### Outcomes for officers and staff

#### Mr B

1. Mr B was found to have a case to answer for gross misconduct.
2. A gross misconduct hearing was convened and Mr B was dismissed without notice.
3. Mr B appealed against the dismissal, but the original decision was upheld.

**Questions to consider**

**Questions for policy makers and managers**

1. Does your force utilise the NPCC abuse of position training video to improve awareness amongst officers and staff about what constitutes abuse of position?
2. What processes does your force have to quality assure officer and staff contact with members of the public?