



Ministry
of Defence

Sexual harassment surveys 2021:

Tri-Service overview

Foreword

Sexual harassment remains an unacceptable reality experienced by too many people serving in the Armed Forces. We recognise the detrimental impact this behaviour can have on our people. Sexual harassment persists in broader society, it is not a unique challenge for Defence, but we have a role to play in protecting our people and it can have a corrosive effect on team cohesion and thus undermine operational effectiveness.

Defence remains committed to preventing and tackling all forms of unacceptable behaviour including sexual harassment. As part of our ongoing efforts to understand the problem in-depth, each of the single Services commissioned sexual harassment surveys. This supports the design of interventions and highlights where we may need to adjust our approach. We are determined to be open and transparent about our progress tackling this issue.

We will continue to adopt leading practice and learn from the excellent House of Commons Defence Committee's report into Women in the Armed Forces as well as the government's violence against women and girl's strategy in our approach to tackling this issue.

Our efforts to foster an inclusive working environment in Defence are enduring. It is mission critical for us to recruit and retain the best talent for today's, and tomorrow's, challenges. An Armed Forces where sexual harassment is not tolerated absolutely contributes to our mission.



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J Swift'.

Lt Gen James Swift
Chief of Defence People

March 2022

Introduction

Sexual harassment surveys have been conducted in Defence since 2006. The 2019 Wigston Review into inappropriate behaviour judged them as offering an important and unique insight into sexual harassment and recommended that further surveys be conducted in 2021. Each of the single Services conducted a sexual harassment survey (SHS) in 2020-2021.

This overview accompanies the publication of the single Services' surveys.¹ The MOD remains committed to being transparent about the challenge of sexual harassment and our progress addressing it.

We do not underestimate the serious impact this type of behaviour has on individuals, as well as the knock-on effect of undermining our effectiveness and hard-earned reputation.

In the Armed Forces, as within wider society, too many people are still experiencing sexual harassment and women are disproportionately affected. The sexual harassment surveys were launched in a period of increased societal awareness of diversity and inclusion, violence against women, and the increasing use of social media.

In its response to the House of Commons Defence Committee report into Women in the Armed Forces, Defence committed to continue accelerating a broad range of work to improve women's experiences.

This especially included work related to sexual harassment and sexual offending.

"I guess there's two types [of harassment] the high-profile serious incidents, and low-level comments which are harder to detect and happen more often. One is dealt with and one is not, it depends on the attitude of the individual in the chain of command. Does the command take it seriously. Or is it just 'banter'? Different command cultures lead to different outcomes."

Army Sexual Harassment Report 2021

Part of being able to measure the effectiveness of our programmes is understanding the baseline from which to measure success.

Accelerating progress

Improving our understanding

Defence has made concerted efforts to improve its understanding of the types and drivers of sexual harassment experienced by its people, in addition to administering sexual harassment surveys. This captures a wide range of behaviour, from low-level generalised sexual behaviour, such as jokes

¹ These are available on gov.uk

and swearing, through to serious sexual offences.

The MOD introduced a question on sexual harassment into the Armed Forces Continuous Attitude Survey (AFCAS) in 2021.² This revealed that whilst overall reported levels were low at 2%, there is a significant gender difference with 11% of women reporting it against 0.4% of men. The breakdown per Service is given below.

The annual People Survey, completed by Civil Servants and their military line managers, has a supplementary question that further explores the nature of unacceptable behaviour experienced. In

AFCAS 2021 – breakdown by Service

Those who believed they had been subject to sexual harassment in a Service environment in the previous 12 months:

Royal Navy

Officers: 2%
Other Ranks/Rates: 2%
Servicemen: 0.4%
Servicewomen: 10%

Army

Officers: 1%
Other Ranks/Rates: 2%
Servicemen: 0.5%
Servicewomen: 12%

RAF

Officers: 1%
Other Ranks/Rates: 2%
Servicemen: 0.4%
Servicewomen: 10%

2020, 144 staff indicated that they had experienced sexual harassment within the previous 12 months. The figure drops by 30% in 2021 to 101 staff. Of those affected, 15% were male and 75% female (10% preferred not to say).³

In summer 2021, MOD digitised the reporting requirements for its Diversity and Inclusion Advisers which can assist in real time monitoring and longer-term trend analysis. This captures any approaches related to sexual harassment.

The MOD bullying, harassment and discrimination helpline was set-up in September 2020 to provide support and advice to personnel, including on sexual harassment matters.

Defence has mandated a new approach for climate assessments (a tool to measure the local culture in its organisations) and has included core questions about the prevalence of and attitudes towards sexual harassment. This will offer further information about the scale of unacceptable behaviour on a rolling basis.

The MOD further commissioned a deep-dive into the study data of its large qualitative study into the lived experience of women and minority groups in Defence, looking at unacceptable sexual behaviours. This secondary analysis explored the characteristics of the accused and accusers in the situations reported; the context in which unacceptable behaviour occurred and the outcomes of the behaviour for all parties.

The MOD continues to improve its management information relating to sexual offences. During 2020, there were 161 investigations by the Service Police into

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/armed-forces-continuous-attitude-survey-2021>

³ Total People Survey responses 144,101.

alleged sexual offences. Of those, 76% of victims were female and 93% of suspects were male. Victims were most commonly in the junior ranks, aged 30 or under. We also recognise that there is male-on-male, female-on-female and female-on-male offending within the Armed Forces environment. The statistics relating to sexual offences are treated as Official Statistics, due to handling requirements, this prevents further commentary on the 2021 figures available on gov.uk.

Policy framework

The MOD recognises that its policies need to be fit for purpose and provide the tools to tackle unacceptable behaviour consistently and robustly.

A booklet on sexual harassment was issued in 2020 which provided an easy-read guide to what it is and what to do if people experienced, witnessed or reported it.

In June 2021, behaviour and complaints policies were revised. This simplified and outlined our definitions of unacceptable behaviour, and the standards of behaviour expected of our people. As part of this effort, a range of Defence-relevant examples of sexual harassment were included.

MOD issued new policy in March 2022 emphasising its zero-tolerance of sexual offending and relationships between instructors and trainees. Anyone convicted of a sexual offence will be discharged. Work is also underway to introduce a sexual exploitation and abuse policy that will provide clear standards of behaviour which Service personnel will have to meet whilst overseas, and a new strategy will be

published to prevent and respond to rape and serious sexual offences later this year. All Service Complaints of a sexual nature will be required to be fully dealt with outside the direct chain of command. This includes the use of central admissibility teams in the single Services, independent investigators, independent members at decision and appeal body stages and the use of decision makers from outside the direct chain of command.

Training

A range of training is in place across Defence to ensure people have the knowledge and awareness to support broader cultural change and bear down on unacceptable behaviour. Annual mandatory training on values and standards and diversity and inclusion is delivered within the Armed Forces and Civil Service. A training needs analysis was conducted to set a common framework and assurance model. Active Bystander training was introduced in 2020 to empower people to call-out unacceptable behaviour. The online version has been streamed more than 124,000 times.⁴ Work is currently underway to develop 'personal experience' training in collaboration with staff networks.

Bespoke consent training is offered by specialist police within the Armed Forces. This has become core learning for new recruits in the Army. The Royal Navy is integrating formal consent training into training establishments and leadership courses and the RAF Police deliver sexual offences awareness campaign presentations widely. This covers sexual offending, consent understanding and aims to build confidence in reporting. Work is also underway to develop online consent training

⁴ An individual could stream the training on more than one occasion.

which is complementary to the in-person training provided by the Service Police. MOD is also upskilling its Diversity and Inclusion Advisers and Practitioners in order to more effectively tackle sexually unacceptable behaviour. An event run in February 2022 reached approximately 300 personnel to build their understanding and confidence in dealing with sexually unacceptable behaviour.

Survey results

Survey methodologies

Measuring and defining sexual harassment remains difficult due to its subjective nature and often, the reluctance of people to report it. The individual sexual harassment survey reports outline in detail the specific methodologies used.

In delivering the surveys, the single Services used similar approaches and there are similarities in the questions posed. They are, however, not directly comparable due to differing methodologies.

The sexual harassment surveys included both Regulars and Full Time Reserve Service:

- RN: 2,041 surveys were returned, the response rate was 21%
- Army: 3,751 surveys were returned, the response rate was 19%;
- RAF: 2,120 surveys were returned, the response rate was 27%.

The Army also conducted 10 focus groups to gain a wider view of sexual harassment. Outcomes from a thematic analysis are integrated throughout the report.

Respondents were also given the opportunity to elaborate on their quantitative

answers. Comments generated key themes which are outlined in the reports.

Royal Navy

The Royal Navy last conducted a sexual harassment survey SHS in 2015 when it was designated an 'Official Statistic'. The 2021 survey has been given the same designation. Due to the later availability of data, this overview offers limited insights on the Royal Navy survey. Development of an action plan is now underway.

Whilst the Royal Navy survey closely followed the methodology used in the Army and RAF, an overall figure for those reporting experiencing sexual harassment is not derived. This is due to the Royal Navy sexual harassment survey approach which focussed on the types of behaviours encountered, rather than asking individuals if they recognised them as specifically as 'sexual harassment'.

The Royal Navy has recently established a Conduct and Culture Cell, as a centre of excellence for policy and advice on behaviour and to implement a programme of behavioural climate assessments across the Command. The Royal Navy is also the first area of Defence to undergo assessment for the National Equality Standard; the results of which will drive further positive transformation to ensure the lived experience is improved for all.

Army

The Army last conducted a sexual harassment survey in 2018, this offers comparative data in considering progress and remaining challenges.

The 2020 survey is the Army's third survey, which is part of its 10-year commitment to

sexual harassment research. It revealed that the vast majority of Service personnel (92%) stated they had not personally experienced sexual harassment in the workplace, 3% stated they had and 5% reported they did not know whether they had or not.

Significantly more Servicewomen (17%) personally experienced sexual harassment in the workplace than Servicemen (2%). Numbers of Other Ranks (ORs) and Officers (OFs) experiencing sexual harassment in the workplace were the same (3%).

The majority of Service personnel (88%) stated they had not observed a situation that they thought was sexual harassment and 6% reported observing it and 6% were not sure whether they had observed it or not. Significantly more Servicewomen (16%) observed sexual harassment in the workplace than Servicemen (5%). Numbers of ORs and OFs observing sexual harassment were similar (between 6 and 8%).

7% of Servicemen and 33% of Servicewomen had either experienced sexual harassment in the workplace or observed a situation they thought was sexual harassment. The statistic excludes those who both experienced and witnessed it.

Reported instances of those experiencing general sexualised behaviours (such as telling jokes, using explicit language and body gestures, and sharing images of a sexual nature) have fallen considerably, from between 40% and 86% (dependant on the behaviour category) in 2018 to between 31% and 69% in 2021.

Overall, notably more Servicewomen (between 1.8% and 37% dependant on the behaviour category) experienced targeted sexualised behaviours (i.e. those directed specifically at them) than Servicemen (between 0.9% and 15%). The percentage

of Servicewomen (between 1.8% and 18%) experiencing the more physical targeted sexualised behaviours is notably higher than for Servicemen (between 0.9% and 4%).

Respondents were significantly more positive about the way in which their chain of command would respond to reports of sexual harassment, with the majority (84%) thinking that it would be 'very likely' the chain of command would take it seriously, improving from 64% in 2018.

Eight recommendations have been identified for focused action and are being tied into Operation TEAMWORK which commenced on 8 February 2022:

- To update policy (AGAI 67) to reflect Termination of Service as the default entry point for sanctions for matters of serious sexual misconduct.
- The foundation of a Junior Non-Commissioned Officer academy, which will further professionalise training for junior commanders and leaders, and which will include the delivery of sexual consent training.
- A review of all formal training and education courses to determine where gaps may exist in the requirement to include sexual consent training.
- The launch of #Teamwork, to include challenge to sexualised behaviours and harassment. This will be linked to the #NoMore campaign against sexual and domestic violence.
- The introduction of a centralised Service Complaints admissibility capability.
- Closer monitoring of climate assessment data feeding into the Sexual Offences Prevention Working Group.
- Capture of Sexual Offences Prevention Working Group data in

Performance and Risk Reporting processes.

- Publication of types of sexual offences and Major Administrative Action taken.

Royal Air Force

This is the first sexual harassment survey the RAF has conducted since the Tri-Service approach in 2009. The survey revealed that 4% of Service personnel reported experiencing sexual harassment at work during the past 12 months. Slightly more individuals (6%) reported observing sexual harassment at work during this period.

Whilst only small numbers of people reported experiencing sexual harassment, far more people are willing to report individual behaviours, which suggests they do not label their own experience of sexualised behaviours as sexual harassment.

A higher proportion of servicewomen (21%) than men (6%) had experienced or observed sexual harassment. Similar proportions of OFs and ORs had experienced and observed sexual harassment.

A higher proportion of servicewomen (15%) than men (2%) had experienced sexual harassment. A higher proportion of servicewomen (13%) than men (5%) had observed sexual harassment.

The majority of respondents have never had an upsetting experience; however, upsetting experiences in the last 12 months was reported by over 15% of respondents. A higher proportion of servicewomen than servicemen had experienced a particularly

upsetting behaviour; similarly, a higher proportion of ORs than OFs had experienced a particularly upsetting behaviour.

A small proportion of respondents (3%) stated they believe sexual harassment is a widespread problem in the RAF; whilst 49% men and 61% servicewomen believe it exists in some parts (51% overall).

Servicewomen were more likely than servicemen to report experiencing directed sexualised behaviours across all behaviours with the exception of being sent sexually explicit material. Sexualised behaviours tend to occur in the workplace but also in social settings (where personnel live and socialise), and increasingly facilitated by technology which means it can occur across settings and at all times of the day. Whilst more servicewomen than men were likely to experience unwelcome comments especially those related to sexual matters, they were also more likely to experience physical sexualised behaviours included the most serious forms such as sexual assault.

Around three quarters of respondents reported the RAF supports those who are being or have been sexually harassed and tries to prevent sexual harassment. Most Service personnel believe their chain of command promotes a unit climate based on respect and trust; but fewer believe it provides training on sexual harassment prevention which is engaging.

“People get away with it, they don’t get removed, you have to work with them or under them, ‘oh he got away with [act of sexual harassment] and he’s more senior, so I can’.”

Army Sexual Harassment Report 2021

Servicewomen were less likely than servicemen to report that the RAF or their chain of command is supportive. Servicewomen and ORs are less likely to agree that the RAF or their chain of command will be supportive.

Qualitative comments highlighted that perceptions of sexualised behaviours are complex, for instance, not everyone realises that their behaviour is inappropriate, and that people have different levels of tolerance and interpretation of sexual harassment.

The impact of experiencing sexualised behaviours is varied. Personnel reported a range of ways of responding and outcomes. For many, the experience was a one-off incident that was quickly dealt with; although this was not the case for everyone. Many comments related to a preference to deal with issues quickly and informally before escalation to more formal approaches.

Driving long-term change

The 2021 surveys provide greater insight across Defence to shape and deliver interventions that will prevent and tackle sexual harassment.

We are clear about the need to accelerate progress and are committed to making the step-change required to improve the day-to-day experiences of everyone in Defence, many examples of which can be found in the government's response to the House of Commons Defence Committee's report into Women in the Armed Forces.

Across Defence strides have already been taken to tackle unacceptable behaviour and identify initiatives to improve the personal experience for all personnel. We have published our zero-tolerance approach to sexual offending and relationships between

“My boss said if something was to happen then to let him know and he would put them back in line. I can always rely on my boss to help me out.”

Army Sexual Harassment Report 2021

Based on the survey findings, the RAF have identified areas for further work, including a commitment to being transparent about the results, taking action in the areas of leadership, reporting, support, communications, training and social media.

instructors and trainees. Anyone convicted of a sexual offence and instructors found to be having relationships with trainees will be discharged.

We are undertaking mandatory climate assessments across Defence. The climate assessment surveys include a question on whether individuals consider that there is a problem with sexual harassment in their unit and whether individuals have experienced it within the previous year; this will expose hot spots and Commanding Officers will be required to implement interventions to tackle the problem.

We have also launched an 'easy read' guide to Service Complaints to increase the accessibility of the system and launched the Outsourced Investigation Service, which has

built in additional independence and reduced the time for investigating complaints. Our forthcoming policy prohibiting sexual exploitation and abuse demonstrates our intent and determination to act.

More widely, Defence is continuing to improve the experiences of women in the Armed Forces, including by rolling out updated combat clothing and body armour. The armour, known as the Virtus Scalable Tactical Vest, has been adapted following extensive trials with serving female soldiers ensuring personnel have more tailored protective equipment and demonstrates Defence's commitment to meet the needs of the growing number of servicewomen.

Looking to the future

We have set out a comprehensive plan to tackle the recommendations raised in our response to the House of Commons Defence Committee report into Women in the Armed Forces and the Wigston Review 2019. One of the commitments we have made it to run a sexual harassment survey annually, with a new, centralised approach to be piloted later in 2022. This model will better enable comparisons to be made across Defence and it will be expanded to cover the whole-force. This will ensure that others who work alongside our Armed Forces, such as Civil Servants and contractors can share their experiences. We will continue our commitment to being transparent and accountable by publishing survey findings.

We are also committed to building more independence from the chain of command into the Service Complaints system, particularly around sexual complaints and we will be publishing a strategy to tackle rape and serious sexual offences to ensure we improve our prevention and handling of such incidents.

Colonel Mark John has been appointed as the Provost Marshal of the Defence Serious Crime Unit and is overseeing the development of both the Headquarters and full Unit. The Unit will be at full operational capability later this year. The new Unit will enable all serious crime allegations to be investigated outside the existing single Service chain of command, giving greater reassurance to victims, and building trust in the Service Justice System.

Our leaders have a vital role to play in setting an inclusive and respectful culture, ensuring our people feel empowered to call out sexual harassment and taking robust action when incidents are reported. We are investing in ensuring we have quality leadership across Defence by improving the Senior Officer Appraisal Report. 180-degree reporting is being incorporated into the senior officer appraisal process, placing greater focus on inclusive leadership, development, objectives-based reporting, and behaviours.

Defence will work with the single Services to develop new measures to ensure Commanding Officers who are found to have fallen short of expected standards in handling Service Complaints, receive appropriate, consistent and robust consequences, that appear on their employment records.

Equally, we are clear it is everyone's responsibility to challenge sexual harassment when they see or hear about it. Standing-by cannot be an option. Change will not happen overnight, but we are resolved to push it faster.