

# Harassment Prevention and Response: An Overview of Current Policy, Training, and Intervention Approaches



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## Overview

The United States Department of Defense (DoD) prohibits harassment in the Armed Forces, as it “jeopardizes combat readiness and mission accomplishment, weakens trust within the ranks, and erodes unit cohesion” (Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, 2020a, p. 3). This paper outlines the requirements for harassment and prevention as mandated by the Federal Government and DoD, as well as provides information about prevention and response to address the issue.

## Harassment Policy Mandates and Definitions

Harassment can be understood as a discriminatory practice that violates several U.S. laws, including the 1964 Civil Rights Act (Becton et al., 2017). This section covers the policy mandates that necessitate harassment and prevention training within the DoD, a variety of definitions for the term from different perspectives, the types of harassment that have been defined by the DoD, and information on the impacts of harassment in both the civilian sphere and the Military.

### Policy Mandates

DoD Instruction (DoDI) 1020.03 (Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, 2020a), *Harassment prevention and response in the Armed Forces*, requires training for harassment response and prevention, including knowledge on the definitions of the terms and proper response as well as preventative measures. Additionally, DoDI 1020.03 states that it will “hold leaders at all levels appropriately accountable for fostering a climate of inclusion that supports diversity, is free from harassment, and does not tolerate retaliation against those filing harassment complaints” (p. 3). DoDI 1020.04, *Harassment prevention and response*

*for DoD civilian employees*, further extends the policy mandate to civilian employees, stating, “the conduct prohibited by this policy includes, but is broader than, the legal definitions of harassment and sexual harassment” (Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, 2020b, p. 7). According to these policies, harassment might be an isolated incident or prolonged behavior.

## **Definitions of Harassment**

### ***Federal Law***

Harassment law outside the workplace varies from state to state. For example, Statute S240.25 in New York states, “a person is guilty of harassment in the first degree when he or she intentionally and repeatedly harasses another person by following such person in or about a public place or places or by engaging in a course of conduct or by repeatedly committing acts which places such person in reasonable fear of physical injury” (USLegal, n.d.). Each state has its own variation of requirements that usually follow the “reasonable person” standard, which asks juries or law enforcement to determine how a reasonable person would feel about such behavior. Criminal harassment cases being pursued under U.S. law are subject to state guidelines and sentencing procedures.

Workplace harassment, however, is prohibited under several Federal acts, including: Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Age Discrimination and Employment Act of 1967, and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (Equal Employment Opportunity Commission [EEOC], n.d.). Under those protections, harassment is “unwelcome conduct that is based on race, color, religion, sex (including sexual orientation, gender identity, or pregnancy), national origin, older age (beginning at age 40), disability, or genetic information (including family medical history)” (EEOC, n.d.). The violation of Federal law supersedes any state law, meaning that anyone can

file a workplace harassment claim with the Federal Agency, the EEOC, and request an investigation, a protection that does not exist for criminal harassment cases. For such behavior to be unlawful, two conditions must be met: 1) The person being harassed is negatively impacted in their daily work, and 2) the behavior is pervasive or severe and creates an environment that a reasonable person would find hostile, intimidating, or abusive (EEOC, n.d.).

### ***Common Definitions in Industry***

Any institution with U.S. employees is required to comply with the workplace guidelines established by Federal law. As such, most organizations utilize similar language for their own policies. However, organizations may add additional components to their own company harassment policies. For example, Wells Fargo (2022) includes hairstyles or hair texture as well as veteran status in their protections against harassment. They also explicitly state that their policy is broader than legal standards, meaning that they can sanction employees for behaviors even if the legal threshold for harassment is not met (Wells Fargo, 2022). Similarly, Google (n.d.) states that behaviors conducted outside of the workplace may be subject to company scrutiny if it impacts the workplace, such as an employee stalking another employee or unwelcomed conversations after the work day. As such, there is precedence for workplace harassment to occur outside of the physical workplace. The Department of Defense employs language that allows for harassment reports outside of the physical workplace, using the language “including off-duty or ‘unofficial’ unit functions and settings” in the definition of bullying (Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, 2020a, p. 20).

***Military Definition***

DoDI 1020.03 defines harassment as “behavior that is unwelcome or offensive to a reasonable person, whether oral, written, or physical, that creates an intimidating, hostile, or offensive environment” (Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, 2020a, p. 20). It can include actions such as:

Offensive jokes, epithets, ridicule or mockery, insults or put-downs, displays of offensive objects or imagery, stereotyping, intimidating acts, veiled threats of violence, threatening or provoking remarks, racial or other slurs, derogatory remarks about a person’s accent, or displays of racially offensive symbols. (Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, 2020a, p. 10)

As part of DoDI 1020.04, which includes protections for civilians, unwanted physical contact, hazing, and bullying are listed as types of harassment, whereas DoDI 1020.03 mentions hazing and bullying as types of harassment. Harassment, as defined by DoDI 1020.03 and 1020.04, can occur in or across multiple settings, such as in person, electronic communication, or social media. Similar to EEOC definitions, behavior must adversely impact the work environment in order to be considered harassment; rude, ignorant, or unkind behavior alone does not constitute harassment (Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, 2020b). Further, DoDI 1020.03 specifically states that harassment is prohibited in all environments, including off-duty and unofficial settings. The definition of harassment in the DoD is broader than what is outlined in Federal legislation, as it applies to any setting. The decision to incorporate a broader definition should allow leaders to respond to incidents that would not be considered harassment under Federal law statutes.



## **Types of Harassment**

DoDI 1020.03 identifies and describes several basic categories of harassment including: discriminatory harassment, sexual harassment, hazing, bullying, and stalking. Each type of harassment must create an intimidating, hostile, or offensive environment for the target and can occur across multiple contexts, including writing, in-person, or electronic communication (Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, 2020a). This section further defines each category and provides information regarding reported incidence. For each type of harassment, information is also provided related to prevalence and impact of that form of harassment in the civilian world. Workplace harassment is an issue that impacts employees across the board, so important lessons can be learned from both knowledge and awareness of the bigger picture.

### ***Discriminatory Harassment***

DoDI 1020.03 defines discriminatory harassment as “a form of harassment that is unwelcome conduct based on race, color, national origin, religion, sex (including pregnancy), gender-identity or sexual orientation” (Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, 2020a, p. 20). Service members who identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual are at an elevated risk of sexual harassment, stalking, and sexual assault during their time in the Armed Forces; this is especially true for gay men, who are at an increased risk of discriminatory harassment (Schuyler et al., 2020). Schuyler et al. (2020) suggest the increased risk could stem from the masculine ideals that dominate the culture of the Military and the fact that gay men may not fit into the mold. However, sexual minorities (especially gay men) are at a greater risk of harassment in the general population as well, according to a 2018 study of U.S. individuals, so the reason behind elevated harassment numbers may be more nuanced (Raj et al., 2021).

Certain populations may be at a higher risk of discrimination and harassment. For example, according to Sears et al. (2021), 37.7% of LGBT employees reported experiencing harassment at work at some point in their lives. Transgender employees reported higher rates of verbal harassment, 43%, than their cisgender LGBT colleagues, 29% (Sears et al., 2021). LGBT respondents in that study reported hiding their identities or leaving their jobs to avoid such environments (Sears et al., 2021). Further, LGBT employees of color were more likely to face verbal harassment, 35%, than White LGBT employees, 25% (Sears et al., 2021). One in four Black employees and one in four Hispanic employees in a recent survey reported experiencing discrimination in the workplace attributed to race, compared to 15% of White employees (Lloyd, 2021); although discrimination and harassment are not the same, repeated discriminatory acts against individuals or groups can lead to a hostile environment and be considered harassment.

### ***Sexual Harassment***

Sexual harassment “involves unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and deliberate or repeated offensive comments or gestures of a sexual nature” (Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, 2020a, p. 22). Specifically, such conduct either involves a power dynamic wherein rejecting such advances might adversely impact an individual’s career path or job security or interferes with one’s job performance and contributes to a hostile work environment (Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, 2020a). There is no need to show evidence of physical or psychological distress as a result; rather, any behavior that creates a hostile work environment related to sexual advances is considered to be sexual harassment (Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, 2020a).

In a study of law enforcement officials, 71% of female officers experienced harassment and assault (Taylor et al., 2022). However, 41% of men in the same study reported experiencing harassment and assault, which is approximately 15% higher than the general population (Taylor et al., 2022). According to a study completed with 2018 data of active Service members, 24% of women in the Service experienced harassment, with 27% of them being non-Hispanic White women and 17% identifying as Black (Breslin et al., 2022). The most common forms of harassment reported were sexual jokes, being solicited for an unwanted relationship repeatedly, and hearing sexual comments about their bodies; importantly, over 75% of the time, these were not one-time occurrences but were consistently experienced (Breslin et al., 2022). Further, sexual harassment does not occur in a vacuum; a study using 2002 data found that 76% of women who experienced sexual harassment also experienced sex discrimination and workplace aggression (Larsen et al., 2019).

According to the EEOC, there was a 13.6% increase in the reports submitted from FY17 to FY18 following the #MeToo movement in October of 2017 (EEOC, 2022). Additionally, there were 7,609 sexual harassment charges filed in 2021 (EEOC, 2022). Sexual harassment complaints are filed predominantly by women, with 78% of complaints from FY18 to FY21 filed by women (EEOC, 2022). It is likely that race and gender interact in predicting who will be targets of sexual harassment. Cassino and Besen-Cassino (2019) examined EEOC data from 1997-2017 and found that African American women have “become increasingly more likely to report sexual harassment than white women” (p. 1235). A recent study of white-collar workers found that 43% of men and 30% of women admitted to “making sexual comments, jokes, gestures, or looks about someone” a few times in the past year, which could constitute as harassment depending on the context, severity, and frequency (Hardies, 2019, p. 3). A recent

qualitative study of women in the workplace found that many women talked about sexual harassment as part of the culture and something they just had to live with (Spiliopoulou & Witcomb, 2022).

### *Hazing*

The Department of Defense (DoD) defines hazing as:

A form of harassment that includes conduct through which Service members or DoD employees, without proper military or other governmental purpose, but with a nexus to Military Service, physically or psychologically injure or create a risk of physical or psychological injury to Service members for the purpose of initiation into, admission into, affiliation with, change in status or position within, or continued membership in any military DoD civil organization. (Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, 2020a, p. 20)

Examples include “oral or written berating of another person to belittle or humiliate; playing abusive or malicious tricks; encouraging another person to engage in illegal, harmful, demeaning, or dangerous acts” (Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, 2020a, p. 21). Hazing can include physical, verbal, psychological, written, or non-verbal behaviors; documented hazing behavior in the U.S. Military includes forcing members into industrial dryers or inducing chemical burns by forcing members to be in close proximity to dangerous chemicals (Hodge Seck, 2021).

A 2019 study found that 17% of military members reported experiencing hazing, and that military members who have been hazed are at a higher risk for anger and depression, as well as higher risk of suicidal ideation (Kim et al., 2019). Further data from a 2018 report showed the majority of hazing complaints, over 90%, come from the Marine Corps; however, it is possible

that the discrepancy comes from under-reporting in the other branches (Hodge Seck, 2021). In February 2018, the DoD issued a report addressing hazing prevention and response in the Armed Forces, outlining the need-based motivation for hazing prevention regarding its negative impact on mission readiness. The report reflects on hazing as “an affront to department values,” acknowledging that the act of hazing violates basic human dignity and adversely affects unit trust and cohesion among Service members. These weaknesses in unity jeopardize combat readiness and inhibit mission accomplishment (Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, 2020a). A recent Office of People Analytics (OPA) report noted that similar perspectives of hazing were observed. Commander focus groups reported that hazing escalated the severity of existing troublesome behavior. These behaviors were linked to poor perceptions of leadership, low morale, increased risk for sexual assault, and higher intention to leave military Service (Clare et al., 2021).

Hazing is not unique to the Military. Indeed, hazing is ubiquitous in many college and university organizations. For example, Allan and Madden (2012) found that over half of students involved in formal student organizations, e.g., fraternities, sororities, bands, athletics, had experienced some form of hazing. College students who participated in hazing justified the practice by appealing to their loyalty to the organization and that such loyalty justifies behaviors that test the loyalty of others (Alexander & Opsal, 2021). This justification was used by 100% of ROTC and fraternity members in the study (Alexander & Opsal, 2021). However, hazing is not unique to college campuses; it can happen in the workplace as well. Although research on the prevalence of hazing in the workplace is scarce, it is believed that anywhere from 25-75% of workers in the U.S. experience workplace hazing at some point (B. J. Thomas et al., 2021). Workplace hazing might include derogatory nicknames, unnecessary physical tasks unrelated to

work, or task-based hazing where newcomers are made to do work below their pay grade or not allowed to take breaks (B. J. Thomas et al., 2021).

### ***Bullying***

The Department of Defense defines bullying as:

A form of harassment that includes acts of aggression by Service members or DoD civilian employees, with a nexus to military service, with the intent of harming a Service member either physically or psychologically, without a proper military or other governmental purpose. (Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, 2020a, p. 19)

Bullying often involves a power differential and includes behaviors such as: physically hurting another, teasing or taunting, forced consumption of anything, damaging property, and causing bodily harm (Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, 2020a). A comprehensive review of definitions of bullying in the military literature found that a commonly held difference between bullying and hazing is that hazing is meant to promote group cohesion, while bullying is designed to harm or exclude others (Stuart & Szeszeran, 2021). In the literature on bullying in the United States Military, junior ranked individuals and members of minority groups, including gender, religion, race, or sexuality, are shown to be the most at risk of bullying behavior (Stuart & Szeszeran, 2021). In fact, U.S. data gathered by DEOMI indicated that junior enlisted Service members are at 12 times the risk of perceiving bullying than senior officers (Farmer, 2016).

According to Namie (2021), 30% of adults in the United States report experiencing bullying in the workplace, while an additional 19% report having witnessed it happen to others. It is likely that the incidence of bullying depends on the industry. For example, Munro and

Phillips (2020) found that as many as 90% of health care professionals reported witnessing instances of bullying and 60% reported experiencing bullying personally. Although it is unclear why bullying occurs in the workplace, research shows that employees may feel that their organizations only addressed the issue because of financial concerns and high turnover (Salin et al., 2020). There is, however, promising research to show that others in the workplace can be positive bystanders against bullying when given the right information and tools (Ng et al., 2020).

### ***Stalking***

DoDI 1020.03 states that stalking is conduct, behavior, or knowledge of such conduct which results in the offender places a target “in reasonable fear of death or bodily harm, including sexual assault, to himself or herself, to a member of his or her immediate family, or to his or her intimate partner” (Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, 2020a, p. 23).

In 2019, about 1.3% (3.4 million) of all persons aged 16 years or older were targets of stalking. Furthermore, women are stalked more than twice as often as men (Morgan & Truman, 2019). Global estimates of between 12-16% of women will be targets of stalking in their lifetime compared to 4-7% of men (Sheridan et al., 2003). Research shows that rates of stalking civilian and military women are similar (Black & Merrick, 2013). A majority of perpetrators are either current or former acquaintances/intimate partners with almost half of targets experiencing at least one unwanted contact per week (Morgan & Truman, 2019). Stalking behavior is often grouped into two categories: traditional stalking, e.g., following and watching, sneaking into a place, or leaving or sending unwanted items, and stalking through the use of technology, e.g., making unwanted phone calls, leaving voice messages or sending texts, spying using technology,

or monitoring activities using social media (Morgan & Truman, 2019). A full list of stalking behaviors can be found in the intervention appendix.

### **Harassment Response**

DoDI 1020.03 outlines the requirements for responding to harassment claims. Sexual harassment allegations (even without sexual assault) require a faster response timeline than other harassment complaints. Sexual harassment claims must be elevated within 72 hours and the investigation should happen within 14 days with a final report due within 20 days. Sexual harassment complaints that involve sexual assault must also be reported to a sexual assault response coordinator (SARC). For other types of harassment, individuals can choose to make an informal or formal complaint about the situation. Informal complaints should be addressed at the lowest appropriate level for resolution. Informal complaints do not need to follow the same procedures for resolution as formal complaints, but they do need to be included in the data reporting required by DoDI 1020.03, which includes demographic information of those involved as well as detailed information about the incident. Formal complaints must be sent to a superior officer within five days and the investigation must start within that time period. The formal investigation should be completed within 30 days, and the final report should be turned in within 36 days of the original complaint. All harassment complaints also need to be reviewed to ensure that legal requirements are met, especially if the harassment could be considered unlawful or criminal.

### **Response Considerations Per Branch**

Harassment response and structure vary across the branches. A brief overview for each branch is discussed below.



### *Air Force*

The Air Force recently updated their policy so that sexual harassment claims and sexual assault claims are processed through the same office with access to the same resources (Cohen, 2022). Prior to this change, sexual harassment reports were funneled through the EO program, which limited the support and complicated the process for dealing with perpetrators (Cohen, 2022). Reporting through the Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office (SAPRO) allows members access to victim advocacy services (Cohen, 2022). Additionally, the Air Force is piloting a program that combines the resources for stalking, domestic abuse, cyberbullying, and sexual assault/harassment called the “Integrated Response Co-location Pilot Program” (Novelly, 2022). This program, which started in August 2022, is designed to make the reporting process more streamlined and provide higher quality victim advocacy services.

### *Army*

The Sexual Harassment/Assault Response and Prevention (SHARP) Program “provides commanders with the tools to prevent sexual assault, sexual harassment, and associated retaliation in the Army” and “ensures that the Army is able to provide professional, compassionate, and comprehensive care and support to victims if these incidents do occur” (U.S. Army, 2021). Services include online reporting and a sexual harassment and assault prevention annex (U.S. Army, 2021).

### *Coast Guard*

The Coast Guard recently faced a national probe, where it was found that the Coast Guard was not adequately addressing complaints of harassment, bullying, and retaliation (Bergman, 2019). As a result, Master Chief Petty Officer Jeremiah Wolf of the Coast Guard

(2020) released a statement saying, “The Coast Guard is steadfast and enduring in this commitment build a culture where women and men at all levels of our organization feel empowered to stop harassing behaviors.” A list of resources is available on their website, which can be found in the references (U.S. Coast Guard, n.d.).

### ***Marine Corps***

According to Corporal Francesca Landis (2021), “one of Marines’ most important responsibilities is to look out for their brothers and sisters beside them.” When someone comes forward with a concern about sexual assault or harassment, they are assigned a Sexual Assault Prevention Response Victim Advocate (SAPR VA), who helps support them through the process and the traumatic experience (Landis, 2021). Additionally, bystander intervention programs are in progress in the Marine Corps (Landis, 2021).

### ***Navy***

The Navy is committed to maintaining a work environment that is free of harassment and unlawful discrimination (MyNavy HR, 2023). The official U.S. Navy verbiage around preventing harassment revolves around leadership and the climate, saying, “Commanders and supervisors at every level must clearly communicate that harassment and prohibited discrimination will not be tolerated and must reinforce, through both words and actions, a climate that does not condone this behavior” (MyNavy HR, 2023).

### **Impact on Targets**

Research shows that sexual harassment can have negative outcomes for those who are targets. For example, Gradus et al. (2008) “found evidence of an association between sexual harassment and alcohol use among women” (p. 350). This association was not present among

the men in the study, suggesting that women may be at a greater risk of alcohol abuse following instances of sexual harassment (Gradus et al., 2008). Victims of harassment or mistreatment experience both an emotional toll and a reduced effectiveness in the workplace (Burns, 2022). Griffith (2019) found that soldiers who experience sexual harassment are at a higher risk of suicidal ideation or attempts. Furthermore, women who had experienced sexual harassment or assault were more likely to have depression, anxiety, and PTSD (C. L. Thomas et al., 2021). Findings on the impacts of sexual harassment and assault on the male population are limited (Millegan et al., 2016). Although fewer men are impacted overall, research indicates targets do experience negative physical and psychological outcomes. Millegan et al. (2016) found that “male military service members who experienced recent sexual trauma were more likely to report symptoms of PTSD, major depression, and poorer overall mental health” (p. 137).

### **Impacts on the Organization**

The negative effects of harassment are not limited to personal health. Men who were targets of sexual harassment or assault were 60% more likely to prematurely depart from Service (Millegan et al., 2016). In a study of Black women who experienced harassment in the Service, almost half (44%) of Black women who reported harassment were dissatisfied with the complaint process and 25% were prompted to take steps to leave Service as a result of the harassment and response (Breslin et al., 2022). The risk of negative workplace outcomes might be facilitated by poor organizational response to harassment reports. Both targets of workplace mistreatment and bystanders to such behaviors or acts are more likely to leave an organization that does not adequately address concerns (Burns, 2022). Research from the DoD 2016 Workplace and Gender Relations survey found that when negative actions, such as being encouraged to “drop it” or punishment, follow a report of sexual harassment, there is increased

emotional distress felt by the target, which leads to a decrease in desire to stay in the Military among those who reported (Daniel et al., 2019). Conversely, when positive organizational actions, such as asking the offender to change their behavior or punitive action against the offender occurred, the target was less likely to experience emotional distress and less likely to consider leaving Service. As such, the actions of leaders to set the tone for response to sexual harassment are vital to supporting the target and promoting a climate where harassment is not tolerated.

### **Harassment Prevention**

Due to the negative organizational outcomes associated with harassment, preventing harassment is vital to mission readiness, but it is a complicated issue requiring a multi-pronged approach. This section will discuss both bystander intervention programs, best practices in corporate industry, and considerations for harassment prevention in the military setting.

#### **Prevention Models and Bystander Considerations**

Harassment rarely happens in isolated environments; most of the time, there is at least one other person around to witness some of the troubling behaviors that take place to constitute harassment (Hamby et al., 2016; Planty, 2002; Moschella & Banyard, 2021). As such, studies of bystanders and bystander intervention are an important consideration of prevention. Bystanders can intervene when harassment is occurring. A multitude of studies have been conducted on what motivates bystanders to intervene and what actions and trainings can support future bystanders to intervene.

### *Civilian Bystander Considerations*

It is likely that bystanders consider the consequences of intervening when witnessing harassment. Moschella and Banyard (2021) found that bystanders are more likely to intervene when they believe they will receive positive consequences from both the target and others. As such, bystanders may be more likely to intervene in an obvious instance of an unwanted harassment, e.g., sexual advance or a harassing comment, than in an ambiguous situation, e.g., a controlling partner, as it is unclear if the help will be desired (Moschella & Banyard, 2021). Research also shows that bystanders are more likely to intervene in a private context, as opposed to public, and to intervene in an online communication over an in-person interaction when the interaction happens on a social network forum (Bastiaensens et al., 2015). Given the rise of social media, these are important considerations to take into account for bystander trainings (Bastiaensens et al., 2015). There is also evidence to show that exposure to media that portrays harassment as normalized or acceptable reduces bystanders' willingness to intervene in real-life situations (Galdi et al., 2017). An individual's exposure to media cannot be controlled by an institution, but such concerns can be raised in training to help members understand and address lingering biases that might prevent them from intervening.

There is some evidence to show that bystander intervention in situations involving religious discrimination or harassment is less likely to occur than in situations of sexual harassment (Ghumman et al., 2016). Religious discrimination and harassment numbers are on the rise, with reports doubling from 1999 to 2014 (Ghumman et al., 2016). Training for prevention should include examples of different kinds of harassment, such as religious, so that individuals are aware of how harassment can manifest in different settings (Ghumman et al., 2016). Service members and leaders should be able to apply intervention strategies across all

types of harassment and other harmful behaviors. Examples of harassment scenarios are in the interventions appendix and can be modified as needed.

International research indicates that fear may be a motivating factor when bystanders consider their response to harassment. Hellemans et al. (2017) found that participants in Belgium were less likely to intervene when they did not have confidence to intervene or felt afraid to intervene. Similarly, researchers in Spain found that 40% of respondents did not respond to gender-based harassment situations because they were fearful of retaliation or negative reactions to them as active bystanders (Melgar et al., 2021). Gender can play a role in bystander intervention: a study in Italy showed that bystanders are more likely to intervene in cases involving women than those involving men (Spaccatini et al., 2022). Additionally, if a bystander views the target as at fault, due to clothing, behavior, etc., they are less likely to intervene (Spaccatini et al., 2022). However, that is not to say that men and women cannot be effective bystanders. A recent study showed that men and women are equally likely to intervene in a harassment situation if given the proper tools (Galdi et al., 2017).

A multinational study taking place in Australia, India, and Turkey found that bystanders did not intervene for two reasons: a power dynamic that could not be overcome, i.e., supervisors abusing power to mistreat employees, and fear that intervening would result in unfair treatment for the bystander (Paull et al., 2020). This fear could be mitigated by a workplace climate shift where reporting is encouraged and there is buy-in from others in the organization to support both bystanders and targets (Paull et al., 2020). Workplace climate is paramount to the success of bystanders; a study in Sweden found that intervention was more likely when workplace incivility was viewed as discriminatory rather than simply rude (Sinclair, 2021). When members are in an environment that they feel comfortable sharing concerns with colleagues about troublesome

interactions, organizational leaders are better positioned to identify patterns and address issue areas (Sinclair, 2021).

Bystander intervention training is shown to increase the intention to intervene, improve confidence about intervening, and show an increase in actual interventions (Dobbin & Kalev, 2019). A recent study by the Veterans Health Administration (VA) showed two main outcomes after a bystander intervention training: 1) Staff experienced less barriers to intervening and 2) staff members were more likely to recognize harassment when it occurred (Relyea et al., 2020). As such, bystander intervention programs have the capacity to increase the acknowledgement of problematic situations, including, but not limited to, harassment, and to provide the tools to de-escalate them (Relyea et al., 2020).

### ***Military Bystander Training and Considerations***

Research on the U.S. Army's bystander intervention program indicates that almost half of the individuals surveyed, 46%, had seen a risky behavior, e.g., dangerous alcohol use, suicide risk, or sexual assault/harassment, in a two-month time period following the intervention training (Elliman et al., 2018). However, while over 90% of soldiers reported intervening in alcohol abuse or suicide attempt situations, only 50% intervened in a sexual harassment/assault scenario (Elliman et al., 2018). This indicates a need for increased emphasis on bystander intervention training for sexual harassment/assault situations. Of additional importance is the fact that members of junior enlisted rank (E1-E4) were twice as likely as higher ranking individuals to witness alcohol abuse or sexual harassment/assault scenarios (Elliman et al., 2018). Military leaders have an obligation to protect all members of their organization; as such, they should be aware of the increased risks for lower-ranking military members. Since this research focused only on the U.S. Army's bystander intervention program, and due to a relatively small sample

size, the results from this study are not generalizable. However, the results indicate bystander intervention programs should take into consideration the fact that there appears to be more comfort among members in addressing alcohol or suicide related situations than ones that involve sexual harassment (Elliman et al., 2018).

One key consideration in harassment prevention is the unique context of Military Service (Gidycz et al., 2018). In civilian employment, there is a clear delineation between what is considered to be the workplace and what is not, whereas the lines in a military establishment are much more blurred, especially when living and working in the same location (Gidycz et al., 2018). The Military has been referred to as “total institution,” meaning that there is very little differentiation between the work environment and the personal environment (Gidycz et al., 2018; Griffith, 2019). As such, “leadership plays a critical role in setting norms and expectations that create a climate characterized by respect and professionalism or one in which sexism, sexual aggression, and other forms of misconduct are tolerated” (Gidycz et al., 2018, p. 244). Given the positive relationship between sexual harassment and sexual assault and rape, noticing and correcting such misconduct early can lead to lowered risk of sexual assault and trauma for individuals at risk (Gidycz et al., 2018).

A recent study on the SHARP program in the Army showed a few additional considerations for preventing harassment and assault (Skopp et al., 2020). Such considerations included modifying the physical environment on the barracks such that dimly lit areas were reduced and encouraging members to set boundaries and not give in to peer pressure. Finally, soldiers themselves identified a desire and need for bystander training to feel more equipped to intervene in tough situations (Skopp et al., 2020).



Bystander intervention trainings exist in a number of different platforms. One such platform is Green Dot Training, which teaches bystanders the skills of the three D's: direct, delegate, distract (Edwards, n.d.; Vector Solutions, 2021). "Direct" involves doing or saying something to diffuse the situation in the moment, "delegate" requires the bystander to ask someone else to intervene, and "distract" means breaking up the situation through an action that diffuses the situation.

Ideally, when someone sees something happening, they can choose one of the D's to implement; with the alliterative component of small words, the hope is that these tools will be easy to remember and enact in a tense moment (Edwards, n.d.; Vector Solutions, 2021). Afterwards, of course, the situation should be reported, especially in a military context. Green Dot Training is only one form of bystander intervention training; other trainings could be used instead, as to best fit the needs of the DoD. Should Green Dot training be determined the best route, information on interventions and practice scenarios can be found in the intervention appendix.

### **Best Practices in Industry**

Unfortunately, information on harassment prevention programs effectiveness is scarce. However, research does indicate that prevention workshops increase awareness of what constitutes as sexual harassment (Campbell et al., 2013; Desplaces & Ogilvie, 2020), which is an important step in harassment prevention.

The Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) publishes a number of articles and information about HR training, which includes harassment prevention training. A recent article (Wilkie, 2017) discusses how trainings can be the most effective and can be summarized by the following:

- Focus on changing behavior, not minds – it does not matter if people think a behavior is acceptable, but they should know it will not be tolerated.
- Encourage or require the presence of higher leadership at trainings and include them as part of the training, if possible. They could give a testimonial or be part of a skit, but they should be seen as fully bought into the training and the purpose.
- Emphasize why the training is important and should not simply be about liability, but also about the potential impact on employees and the organization as well as consequences for harassment behaviors.
- Continue to provide space for conversations, mentorship, and training about harassment in an ongoing way. Once a year training is not enough to change a culture, so ensure that people feel both supported to come forward to report issues and that expectations about behavior continue to be clear and enforced.

### **Considerations for Preventing Harassment in the Military**

A military leader's response to a harassment case dictates whether a Service member feels confident in the military response, which can impact how that member (and others who observe the interaction) feel about reporting and preventing harassment for the future. Studies from the early 2000s indicate that the reporting process impacts the experience of the target (Bell et al., 2014; Eliezer et al., 2020). Service members who were satisfied by the process and the response showed a lower likelihood of developing PTSD symptoms afterwards (Bell et al., 2014). Research indicates that men are less likely than women to be satisfied with the response to an allegation (Eliezer et al., 2020). Reporting processes have changed substantially since the early 2000s, but the fact that the process has an impact on the target afterwards underscores the importance of meaningful response to the incident in order to support the target and prevent

further emotional trauma. Thus, it is important to learn from the lessons of the past to ensure that policies and procedures are effective and do not have a deleterious impact on the well-being of targets.

Harassment prevention training on its own may not be enough to decrease harassment. It is likely that leadership plays an important role in decreasing workplace harassment. Department of Defense data from 2010 showed that creating a climate of respect decreases the likelihood of harassment in the workplace (Robotham & Cortina, 2021). A workplace climate of respect needs to state and show that the organization does not tolerate harassment and will respond accordingly, which goes above and beyond the typical training that is provided to prevent harassment (Robotham & Cortina, 2021). Leaders in the Military can accomplish this by ensuring that all individuals are treated fairly and that productivity is not valued over the treatment of others (Robotham & Cortina, 2021).

Similarly, Daniel et al. (2022) found that racial/ethnic harassment and discrimination is less likely to happen in climates where supervisors pay attention to such behaviors and workplace hostility is not tolerated. As such, “the tone from leaders may be one of the most important, though not only, ways to decrease racial/ethnic harassment and discrimination” (Daniel et al., 2022, p. 11). Leadership commitment to diversity and inclusion efforts, including making reasonable and honest efforts to stop discrimination, is imperative to successfully changing the climate (Daniel et al., 2022). Rubino et al. (2018) found that a justice-oriented climate, one where individuals felt that everyone was treated fairly, resulted in a decrease in harassment, meaning that an overall climate shift, even without specific harassment training, can result in better well-being and less harassment for everyone. Inclusive leadership, which involves promoting individuality and belonging for all individuals, such that everyone in the

space feels respected as their authentic selves, is also associated with lower rates of harassment and more positive outcomes for workers (Perry et al., 2021).

Although the current review only covers harassment and not sexual assault, there is an important correlation between the two which should be briefly addressed. A recent study found that military women who had been sexually assaulted by an intimate partner were more likely to experience both harassment and stalking from that partner before or after the assault; this same group of women are also less likely, as a group, to be satisfied with the response from leadership addressing the issue and providing support (Eliezer et al., 2020). The issue of harassment is incredibly complex given the variables present, and leadership should try their best to tailor responses to each person according to the situation (Eliezer et al., 2020).

### **Training And Intervention Strategies**

Training and intervention strategies for harassment prevention should take into account the information covered in this brief, as well as relevant literature on training effectiveness. For example, participants in harassment training at a VA hospital reported group discussions that involved problem solving, strategies for response, and practicing in a non-threatening environment were the most impactful and aspects of the training (Relyea et al., 2020). Army personnel involved in bystander intervention programs identified real-life scenarios, skits, role plays, and engaging facilitators as the most effective methods for teaching harassment prevention (Skopp et al., 2020). The modality of training may also impact training effectiveness. In-person engagement with training, while more expensive, has been shown to be more effective for long-term outcomes than videos or web-based trainings (Buchanan et al., 2014).

When it comes to scenarios and practice with interventions, it is important to include scenarios from a variety of situations in which bystander intervention might be necessary. As

discussed in this brief, some types of harassment and harmful behaviors, e.g., religious discrimination comfort level in addressing certain situations, in the workplace may be overlooked or ignored by bystanders; thus, bystander intervention trainings should cover a wide array of scenarios. These skills are easily transferrable to many different situations; as such, using scenarios that may not qualify as harassment can still serve to illustrate effective application of intervention strategies. At a minimum, discriminatory and sexual harassment, hazing, bullying, and stalking should be covered. G. F. Thomas et al. (2022) provided training scenarios for what they refer to as “gray zone” situations. In these situations, behaviors are not illegal or necessarily against policy, but are still inappropriate and could escalate into more severe forms of harassment or even assault. Gray zone scenarios are included in the intervention appendix and should be considered for training since those behaviors may escalate further inappropriate behavior. In scenario-based training, the focus should be on communicating that people need to change their behavior and not necessarily on changing the attitude around the behavior, as the attitude may not be easily changed (Wilkie, 2017).

The leadership of an organization has the power to truly change its culture. Thus, training for senior leaders in the Service should also focus on how the response to harassment should be handled to make targets feel supported and bystanders empowered. Multiple studies point to the important role that leadership plays in setting the tone and climate of culture around the permissibility of any form of harassment (Robotham & Cortina, 2021; Buchanan et al., 2014; Daniel et al., 2022; Eliezer et al., 2020; Gidycz et al., 2018; Griffith & Medeiros, 2020). Setting norms and expectations that make it clear harassment will not be tolerated is an important responsibility of a leader (Gidycz et al., 2018). Seeing as many people learn acceptable attitudes

and behavior through observing others (Bandura, 1977), it is important for leaders to exhibit fair treatment of employees and hold employees accountable for their conduct (Brown et al., 2005).

In addition to setting expectations and modeling desired behaviors, Perry et al. (2021) suggest that promoting individuality and belonging for individuals results in lower rates of harassment and more positive outcomes. Doing so is thus a key step towards changing the climate to prevent discrimination and harassment (Daniel et al., 2022). As such, leaders in the Military must be careful to not only model respect and inclusivity, but also ensure that any behavior to the contrary is addressed promptly in a way tailored to the situation that prevents it from recurring in the future.

Another way leaders can show support is through their interactions with targets and bystanders who speak up. Rather than using annual training that has proven to be ineffective (Roehling & Huang, 2018), leaders should be trained to be more prepared to address sexual assault. Making an active effort to eliminate myths about sexual assault can help targets to feel more satisfied and supported with said responses (Eliezer et al., 2020). Research suggests that if a response is seen as negative or unsupportive, there is a higher chance of Service members leaving prematurely (Breslin et al., 2022; Burns, 2022; Daniel et al., 2019; Millegan et al., 2016). The attitude from leadership must be one that promotes inclusivity and discourages poor behavior.

Attributes of a transformational leader, which refers to “the leader moving the follower beyond immediate self-interests through idealized influence, inspiration intellectual stimulation, or individualized consideration” (Bass, 1999), have been said to decrease harassment in the workplace. Stressful work environments (Balducci et al., 2012) and poor conflict management skills (Baillien et al., 2011) are related to workplace harassment. Therefore, leaders are essential

in supporting their employees to diminish added stressors and decrease interpersonal conflict (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Additionally, leaders should attempt to encourage a sense of shared team spirit amongst employees (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Exemplifying these attributes is one step in preventing harassment in the workplace.

Each form of harassment can have differing causes, thus requiring different solutions. For example, Eliezer et al. (2020) suggest implementing bystander and alcohol interventions for sexual assaults, whereas Daniel et al. (2022) suggest targeting workplace harassment directly and promoting civility amongst employees as a means of targeting discriminatory harassment. Other research has suggested that having a focus on building inclusive environments (Daniel et al., 2022) and teaching leaders about their importance in fostering these environments is a way to prevent harassment. Additionally, it has been reported that performance appraisal systems and multi-rater feedback can tell leaders what they are doing well and what they may need training on to address harassment more effectively (Perry et al., 2021).

While there is not a one-size-fits-all solution to response and prevention of harassment, leaders are one of the first lines of defense in preventing harassment. Leaders need training and feedback to know what they are lacking skills in, while employees need training on bystander and alcohol interventions. Environments need to be inclusive and feedback should be encouraged to help prevent and hopefully end workplace harassment.

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### **Appendix: Interventions**

PRIOR TO ANY AND ALL USE OF THE ACTIVITIES IN THIS APPENDIX, PLEASE VERIFY THAT AUTHOR/OWNER PERMISSION IS OBTAINED WHERE NEEDED AND THAT USE OF THE MATERIALS DOES NOT RESULT IN COPYRIGHT INFRINGEMENT.

#### **Green Dot Bystander Training (Edwards, n.d.; Vector Solutions, 2021)**

Green Dot Training is likely under copyright and requires a certified facilitator to do trainings (see <https://alteristic.org/services/green-dot/>). However, the premise of Green Dot training is easy enough to replicate – it simply involves giving people different ways to respond to a concerning situation. Even without using the three D’s, scenarios could be developed that have multiple different ways to respond, and individuals at the training should practice each one in a low-risk environment until they feel capable of responding in a real-life situation. Situations for consideration in bystander training are laid out in the next section and the two sections should be incorporated together.

- Direct: saying or doing something to diffuse the situation in the moment
- Delegate: asking someone else to intervene, potentially someone with more power or confidence to do so
- Distract: breaking up the situation by taking an action, such as redirecting focus to themselves

#### **Scenarios for Different Types of Harassment**

In order to ensure that leaders are aware of what different types of harassment can look like, the training should focus roughly 50% of its time on recognizing and responding to harassment scenarios. When leadership can demonstrate effective responses to such situations, it

gives others courage and responsibility to do so as well. Examples below should be tweaked as needed to match the appropriate language and be believable as military scenarios.

### ***Discriminatory Harassment***

Examples of discriminatory harassment should include scenarios involving religion, race, ethnicity, and sexuality. Examples are below, but should be tweaked as needed:

1. Your coworker wears a hijab every day. Another coworker constantly makes remarks about it, asking “why do you keep wearing that?” and “doesn’t that mean that women aren’t equal in your country?” The remarks clearly make your coworker uncomfortable. What can you do? Are you required to do anything?
2. You are at the barracks after your shift and you hear someone refer to someone else as the f-word slur. You look over and see your colleague looking angry as someone else tells them to “calm down” and that “it was just a joke.” What can you do? Are you required to do anything?
3. One of the members in your unit asks for a meeting with you. They tell you that their commanding officer denied their promotion and they are upset. When questioned about the circumstances, the member says that they have heard this officer is racist and has never promoted a Black person in their career. What can or should you do? Are you required to do anything?

### ***Sexual Harassment***

The following scenario is taken from G. F. Thomas et al. (2022) in their work about gray-zone behaviors, which are seemingly innocuous but could turn into more sinister behavior. This one particularly relates to sexual harassment:

You've been an LPO [leading petty officer] for two years now. During a weekly uniform inspection, you notice that a new male LPO colleague gives you a wink and says to the female E-3 standing in line for inspection, "Wow, love your new haircut." You feel this behavior is unprofessional. What would you do? (p. 370).

Other similar situations could be developed as well.

### ***Hazing***

An example of hazing is below, which should be changed as needed:

It's a tradition in your unit to make new people run around the compound naked without being caught. The new person does not know that members of the unit are always one step ahead to make sure they do not get caught. A new person joined last week and you have been put in charge of organizing the ritual. How do you go about doing so?

### ***Bullying***

Examples of bullying may look different depending on the unit involved. An example is below and should be changed as needed:

You are new to the unit and the officer in charge asks you to get them a coffee. Inadvertently, you get the order wrong and the officer berates you in front of everyone, calling you "stupid" and "unable to complete even the simplest task." You brush it off as them having a bad day, but something similar happens two days later and then again the next week. What do you do?

### ***Stalking***

Keep in mind traditional stalking and stalking with technology are both relevant here. An example of each scenario is below. Examples of stalking behavior as highlighted on the supplemental victimization survey, a nationwide survey administered by the U.S. Department of Justice (Morgan & Truman, 2019), are below:

#### **Traditional Stalking:**

- Following and watching
- Sneaking into a place
- Waiting at a place
- Showing up at a place
- Leaving or sending unwanted items
- Bothering friends and/or family about a victim's whereabouts

#### **Stalking with Technology:**

- Making unwanted phone calls, leaving voice messages or sending texts
- Spying using technology
- Tracking the victim's whereabouts with an application or tracking device
- Posting or threatening to post unwanted information on the internet
- Monitoring activities using social media

#### **Examples:**

Your friend tells you that they are being followed by their ex-partner, who is also a member of the Service. Your friend has received flowers and stuffed animals, sometimes sent to the office, and the ex has shown up randomly after work to "check in." Your friend is pretty sure



the ex has a set of keys to their apartment and is getting worried about them randomly showing up. How do you respond to this situation?

A friend tells you that they can't believe their partner is being so difficult. The partner "tried" to break up with the friend, but the friend didn't take no for an answer because "that's not what the partner really wants." They vent to you about how the partner is constantly out at the bars, which they know because they put a GPS app on their car. Your friend makes a remark about how the partner isn't answering phone calls or texts "yet" but they will when they hear about the dirt your friend has on them. How do you respond to your friend and what, if anything, do you do next?

### ***Other Concerning Behavior***

Bystander intervention programs may also choose to cover dangerous behavior, such as alcohol use, suicide ideation, self-harm, or domestic abuse, which are not covered under the umbrella of harassment. Given that some soldiers have demonstrated more comfort in responding to those scenarios (Elliman et al., 2018), it might be worthwhile to start the training with those to break the ice. However, keep in mind that such responses are not defined as harassment prevention.

### **Practicing Inclusive Leadership at the Top**

Given the imperative for leaders to emulate inclusivity and a harassment-free environment, roughly 50% of the training should focus on giving leaders space to reflect on their current commands and the environment they wish to build as a harassment-free space.

### ***Discussion***

The following are example discussion questions for this section:

Have you seen any concerning behavior in your unit that you wish to change? If so, how could you go about implementing change?

How do you personally respond to allegations of harassment? What is your gut reaction/instinct when a situation comes up? How do you work through those emotions to provide the best support possible?

### *Scenarios*

Potential role plays about responding to allegations could be considered here, depending on the amount of Agency leaders have over such responses. Additionally, this could be a time for leaders to develop speeches, skits, or role plays to demonstrate the commitment to anti-harassment to those in their command.

For example, leaders should be given the opportunity to practice responding to someone who is upset about behavior they have experienced. How can they respond to an allegation with empathy while also remaining neutral before the investigation is complete?