

Sexual Harassment Training Styles: Evaluating Tools with DoD Personnel

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Introduction

- Not all training programs targeting sexual harassment are created equal and limited studies have addressed which types are most effective (Buchanan, Settles, Hall, & O'Connor, 2014).
- Developing a strong, comprehensive program to combat military sexual harassment is extremely important to the health of Service Members and their units as a whole.
- This research contributes to the DoD sexual harassment prevention strategy development currently underway at DEOMI. It aims to gather information about Service Members' perceptions of current training methods.
- Using a focus group approach provides an opportunity to collect qualitative data from specific groups that may then be screened for recurring themes and sentiments (Cyr, 2016).
- The facilitated group discussion of sexual harassment training encouraged open dialogue that provided rich insight for future prevention practices.

Hypotheses

- H1:** Students will consider the *PowerPoint presentation* to be the least effective training tool (**Supported**).
- H2:** Students will consider the *Legal-Based Employee Handbook* to be the least engaging training tool (**Not supported**).
- H3:** Students will consider the *Interactive Role-Playing Skit* to be the most effective (H3a) and most engaging (H3b) training tool (**Neither supported**).

Methods

- Design:** Focus Group
- Sample:** 78 (50 male, 23 females) Human Relations Specialists in a student training status
- Setting:** Classroom
- Materials:**
 - Workbook consisting of:
 - 5 different types of sexual harassment training tools:
 - PowerPoint presentation led by a sexual harassment expert
 - Virtual training game
 - Legal-Based Employee Handbook
 - Interactive role-playing skits with professional actors
 - Professional film examples of realistic sexual harassment scenarios
 - Assessments for each tool:
 - Quantitative Ex: How effective do you think this tool would be in training persons not to sexually harass others? (1=Not at all effective, 5=Very effective)
 - Qualitative Ex: What about this training tool do you think could be improved?
 - Overall training tool assessment

Figure 1. Rank of Training Tool Effectiveness and Engagement

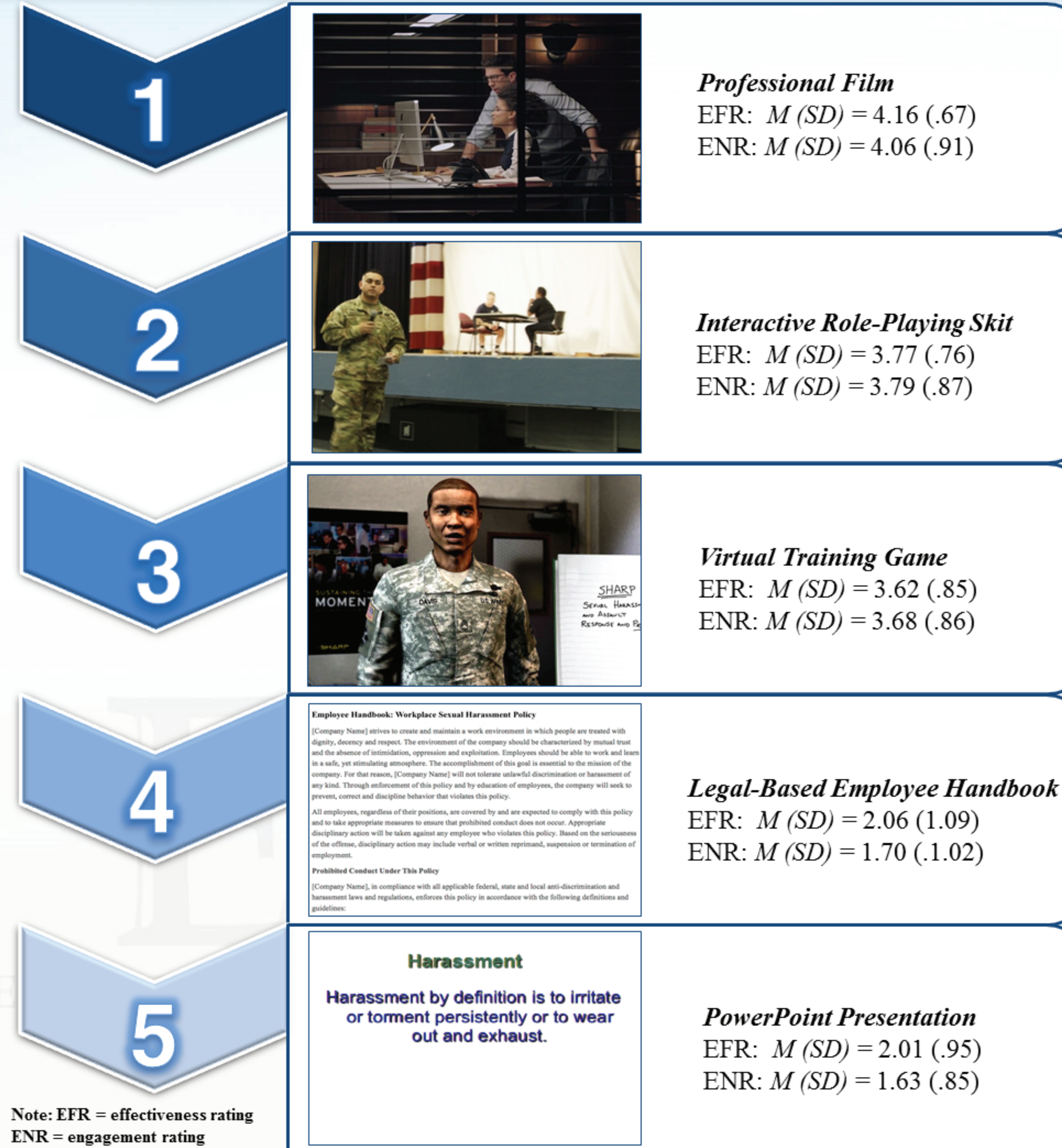


Figure 2.

How often should sexual harassment training be held?

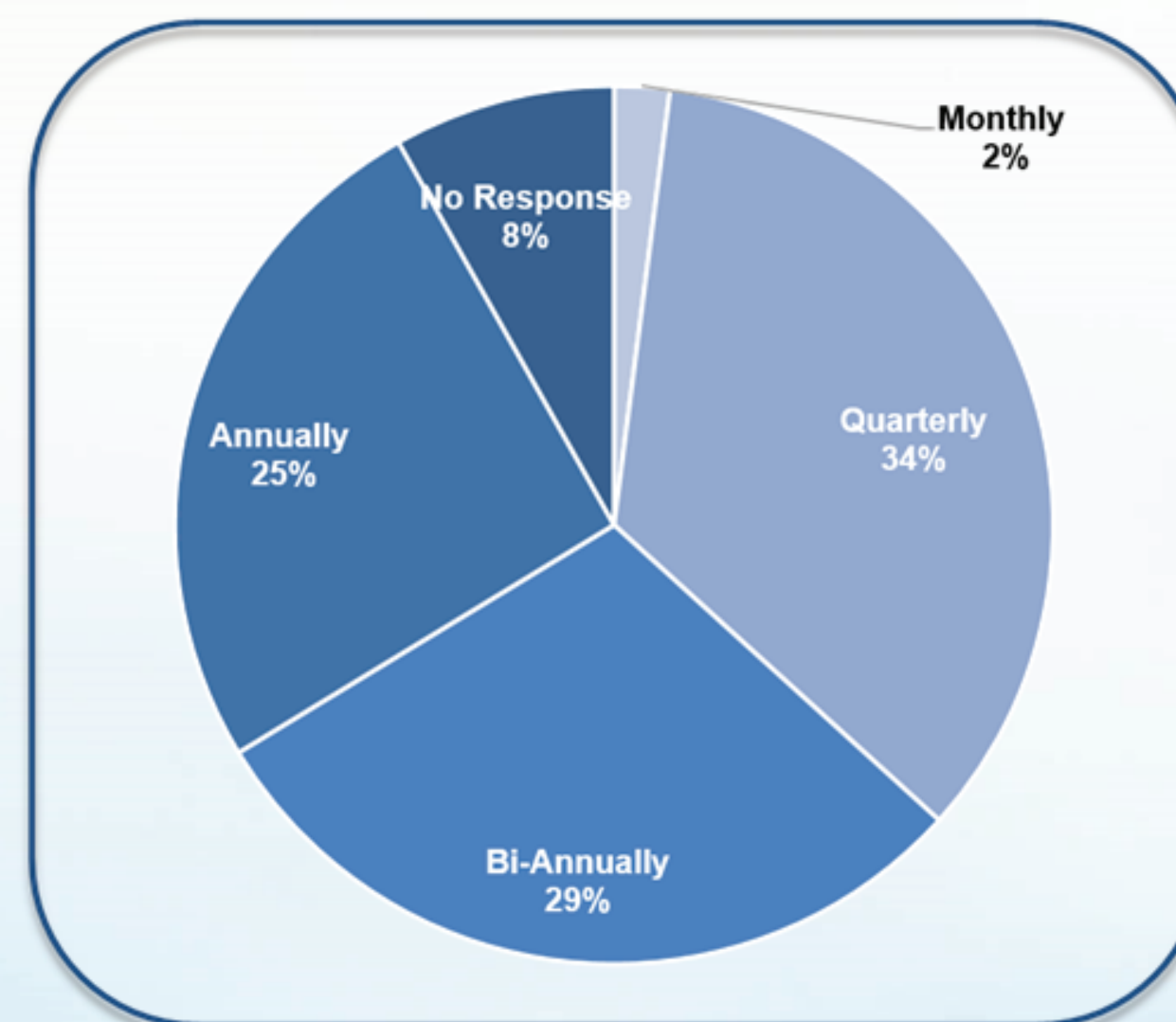


Figure 3.

Respondents used these words to describe their choice for the most effective tool:



Best Practice Recommendations

Students reported that effective training should:

- Be led by a professional instructor who believes in the message
- Be held at least once per year, but its message needs to be communicated by command continuously
- Include victim testimony
- Portray diverse scenarios (male/male, female/male, etc.)
- Be engaging and include the trainee audience
- Be realistic and relevant and show actors in military environments
- Include small-group discussion about scenarios and nuances
- Not be a "check-the-block" task

Limitations and Further Research

Limitations:

- Self-report nature of quantitative data
- Possible effects of groupthink on individual responses (Belzile & Oberg, 2012).
- Sample consists of students who may be more knowledgeable about the subject matter than typical Service Members
- Facilitator bias: In presenting the training tools, the facilitator prefaced the demonstration of the PowerPoint tool by saying "I know that you all are sick of 'death by PowerPoint.' This tone could have influenced respondents' reactions to the tool.
- Use of non-professional actors: For the sake of convenience in presenting the Interactive Role-Playing Skit, volunteers from the audience were used to play the roles in the skit.

Future Research:

- This focus group measured how students *thought* the training tools would measure up in terms of effectiveness.
- Though it is useful to understand trainee preferences, further research should examine the actual effectiveness of certain tools.
- In particular, further research could cater to student preference by assessing effectiveness of different videos with professional actors to identify tools that are top of the line.

Resources

- Belzile, J., & Oberg, G. (2012). Where to begin? Grappling with how to use participant interaction in focus group design. *Qualitative Research, 12*(4), 459-472.
- Buchanan, N. T., Settles, I. H., Hall, A. T., & O'Connor, R. C. (2014). A review of organizational strategies for reducing sexual harassment: Insights from the U.S. military. *Journal of Social Issues, 70*(4), 687-702.
- Cyr, J. (2016). The pitfalls and promise of focus groups as a data collection method. *Sociological Methods & Research, 45*(2), 231-259.

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