

Written evidence submitted by Dr Rachel Fenton, Senior Lecturer in Law, University of Exeter Law School and Speak Out Guardian, University of Exeter

My professional expertise lies in the field of prevention of sexual and domestic violence, prevention of sexual harassment, inappropriate behaviours and microaggressions, and the law on sexual offences. I have been researching, developing and evaluation bystander approaches to violence prevention since 2014 and am a leader in the field in the UK. I contributed to the very welcome Wigston Review into Inappropriate behaviours.

It is clear that women defence personnel face significant challenges in terms of gender-based violence and inappropriate behaviours rooted in gender inequality.

Survey development

- The Army Sexual Harassment Report, Ministry of Defence 2018 does not ask questions in line with best research practice. Thus it is unlikely to have accurately assessed the full extent of these behaviours.
- Direct questions such as “made a serious sexual assault on you” or “raped you” (MoD, 2018) are unlikely to capture the full extent of behaviours and thus using descriptive behaviourally specific language which enables the participant to recognise behaviours they have experienced are recognised as gold standard.

Recommendation 1: External researchers in the field should be involved in survey development to ensure best research practice is adopted

Bystander intervention for prevention of inappropriate behaviours including sexual violence and harassment

The Wigston Review recommendation 2.4 reads “Investigate, develop and implement appropriate bystander training across Defence.”

- It is not clear what exactly has been done to implement the Wigston recommendation. There is a dearth of available information
- If action has been taken it is not clear how the MoD has worked with experts in the field to develop and evaluate any such training
- Bystander models are complex and multi-faceted. They require time and sufficient dosage and to be designed and implemented by experts and tailored to the defence context. Failure to do so properly can result in backlash (see Fenton et al, 2016)
- Bystander interventions must be theory-driven and should take participants through the stages required to become a prosocial bystander and the criteria for effective

prevention must be adhered to. Social norms theory should be integrated. (See Fenton et al, 2016)

- Evidence in the UK is promising in student populations (Fenton and Mott, 2018) and in translation out into other populations (Gainsbury, Fenton and Jones, 2020) and a male-dominated professional sport setting (Kovalenko and Fenton, 2021).

Recommendation 2: External researchers who experts in design, delivery and evaluation should be consulted about bystander prevention across defence to ensure best research evidence and practice is incorporated

Recommendation 3: Bystander training should be properly evaluated using psychometric measures and mapping onto extant literature in the field.

Recommendation 4: A contemporaneous social norms marketing campaign is indicated

- The literature in the US demonstrates some positive results from the bystander approach in defence. (indicative literature review available on request from author, from presentation delivered to Army HQ, 2018)
- Leadership is a key area for intervention: defence leaders from officers to commanding officers upwards must be trained. **Leaders are crucial role models and therefore need to be exemplary bystanders.** Sadler et al, 2003 found that Ranking officer/supervisor behaviours are strongly associated with rape frequency: for example there was a 5-fold increase in rape when officers engaged in quid pro quo behaviours and 3-4 fold when officers allowed or initiated sexually demeaning comments/gestures to female soldiers. Holland, Rabelo and Cortina, 2016 found that the more senior the officer the more likely they are to take action. Other factors predicting likelihood to take action were higher unit morale, increased exposure to training and greater trust in reporting systems.

Recommendation 5: Bystander training should be rolled out at officer training because leadership behaviours are a powerful risk and protective factor

Effective prevention goes hand in hand with effective reporting systems in which women are supported and believed, and have trust in the system.

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References

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