

Optimizing the Response to Harassment

Facilitator Protocol and Processes

The purpose of this study is to assess DoD's efforts for providing harassment response resources for servicemembers. The study has two objectives: 1) to identify which support services and forms of assistance should be available to service member complainants of any form of harassment, including whether or not the current workforce is effectively structured to meet the needs of those service members; and 2) to determine what, if any, additional services and support may be required by military personnel reporting sexual harassment (SH) and identify the most appropriate Department of Defense (DoD) personnel, policies, and practices to meet those needs. This study will help inform the DoD on service provision and workforce design for response to harassment complaints. While there are important benefits of this study, we recognize that these topics may be challenging for some individuals to discuss. Below we outline processes and procedures for RAND staff involved in this study.

All focus group facilitators have extensive experience conducting qualitative focus groups and interviews with vulnerable individuals on sensitive topics. Many also have experience with qualitative research on these topics conducted in a military setting, to include interviews, small group discussions, and focus groups. All focus groups will include at least two RAND staff members—one facilitator (researcher) and one notetaker (RA, PA, or PRGS student). Please note that we consulted with a trained clinician at RAND who has worked on several similar projects and helped to develop this guidance.

The information sheet/consent form that will be provided to all participants before the sessions begin includes information about the risks/benefits and voluntary nature of the study as well as a list of resources should a participant wish to seek support after the discussion. Both the risks/benefits and resources are also included in the protocol script that will be read by all facilitators at the start of the discussion. Contact information for resources will also be posted in the chat at the beginning and end of the focus groups.

In addition to what is outlined in the protocol script, all facilitators will be trained in the following procedures. If a participant becomes visually or emotionally *distressed* (e.g., tearful, upset) during the focus group/small group discussion, the facilitator will:

- Reiterate to participants that they can leave the focus group at any time and that participation in the focus group is voluntary.
- Remind participants of the list of resources noted on the information sheet handout, should they wish to receive support following the focus group.
- Remind participants we are not looking for personal experiences, but for answers to hypothetical situations. If participants start to present personal experiences, redirect the conversation back to the stated topic.
- Offer for the participant to step away from focus group temporarily to take time and space.
- Offer for the participant to stop participation in the focus group.
- Check in with the participant after the focus group via direct chat with language such as the following:
 - *"Thank you so much for participating in the focus group today. We really appreciate the time you took, and we understand that talking about sexual harassment and gender discrimination can be upsetting. We want to remind you that we have provided a list of resources you may consider reaching out to for support."*
- Discuss any incidences of distress with the PIs.

- We will report any incidences of immediate threat of self-harm or harm to others to the HSPC in the unlikely case that these issues arise.