

# SEXUAL ETHICS AND RESPECTFUL RELATIONSHIPS

Creating a Positive Workplace Culture



A case study on creating and implementing mandatory sexual violence prevention training within the New Zealand Defence Force (NZDF)

## SUMMARY

In June 2016, the Chief of Defence Force (CDF) launched Operation RESPECT, an organisation-wide military operation to eliminate harmful and inappropriate sexual behaviour within the NZDF. As part of Operation RESPECT, the Sexual Assault Response Team (SART), researched and created a three hour Sexual Ethics and Respectful Relationships (SERR) training package to be delivered as a key activity to prevent harmful and inappropriate sexual behaviour. In January 2017, the CDF made this training package mandatory for everyone in the organisation and instructed that it be completed by the end of June 2018 (after June 2018, SERR training

is delivered to new recruits and new civilians who join the Defence Force).

SERR training has been made a compulsory training requirement for members to complete before being able to deploy on operations. The training was facilitated by the regional Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Advisors (SAPRAs) and evaluated by the Organisational Research Team.

The training has received overwhelmingly positive responses from participants. To date, over 12,000 NZDF personnel have completed the SERR training.

## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the SERR training was to implement a prevention activity that would promote a safe and inclusive work environment, decrease harmful sexual behaviour, and engage participants so that they feel empowered and prepared to address harmful sexual behaviour. The SERR training is facilitated by subject matter experts employed by the NZDF on all camps and bases.

Facilitators aim to create a space where everyone, regardless of rank, age, ethnicity, and religious affiliation, are encouraged to have capable and courageous conversations about sex, healthy relationships, consent, and harmful sexual

behaviours. These conversations are strengths-based, highlighting our people's ability to embrace leadership opportunities, and sowing seeds of respect to cultivate an environment of safety, dignity, and inclusivity, thereby enhancing operational effectiveness.

Whilst most people understand the harmful sexual behaviours that are illegal, there are a number of insidious behaviours that are neither illegal nor appropriate. The SERR training uses a diagrammatic continuum of harmful behaviours (with green being appropriate, yellow/orange being inappropriate and red being illegal) and case studies to discuss behaviours.

### Continuum of harmful behaviours



#### Appropriate Behaviour

Dignity and respect for all, highest standard of conduct

#### Sexualised Social Behaviour

Unacceptable language/jokes, sexist or sexually demeaning comments, inappropriate pictures, adverse personal relations

#### Sexual Harassment

Improper and offensive behaviour directed at another, including sexting and email

#### Sexual Offences

Offences under Crimes Act 1961 such as sexual assault, criminal harassment (i.e. stalking), threats

## CONTEXT

The foundation of any military is the ability to respond swiftly to challenging situations. The readiness of personnel is a function of many factors, and includes a high degree of physical and mental fitness and team cohesion. Harmful and inappropriate sexual behaviour significantly erodes the team cohesion necessary for the successful achievement of military tasks. It is from this standpoint that harmful and inappropriate sexual behaviour is an operational readiness issue, incongruent with organisational ethos and values.

Recognition of historic cases and reviews into NZDF allowed us to acknowledge that an issue existed within the Defence Force and that it was our responsibility to address it. NZDF wanted to do something practical that would make a positive difference in its members' lives. The NZDF was also looking to communicate with their members that harmful sexual behaviour was not solely a "women's problem" and that it had a huge range of impacts on victims/survivors, their families, their friends and the workplace. The SERR training also allowed the NZDF to make it clear to everyone that assistance and support was available should they need it and that reports of harmful sexual behaviour were going to be taken seriously.

For a number of NZDF staff, the organisation is a 'whole of life' experience, whereby members live and work in NZDF. Being a military organisation, NZDF has challenges including a hierarchal structure (which can make calling out inappropriate behaviour difficult) and a greater proportion of males (which can create a 'hyper masculine' culture - a recognised potential risk factor for sexual violence). These challenges are addressed and openly discussed in the SERR training.

NZDF is proud to have taken proactive measures in an area that has not typically been canvassed in a workplace setting. We believe that respectful relationships is the foundation for safety, diversity, and inclusion in the workplace.

## IMPLEMENTATION

SERR training was delivered as a three hour interactive, facilitated session. They were delivered by SAPRAs and a trained military champion from one of the three services. The sessions were delivered regionally to groups of around 30 people, who came from different parts of the organisation and were a mixture of ranks and roles. As noted, the SERR training is also delivered to new recruits of all three services, and new civilians who join the Defence Force. The SERR training covers a range of topics including but not limited to:

- Identifying harmful sexual behaviour
- Impacts of harmful sexual behaviour
- Sex-positive messaging on consent
- Barriers and enablers to bystander intervention
- Applying NZDF values to prevent harmful sexual behaviour
- Healthy vs unhealthy relationships

Most importantly, as long as it was brought up in a respectful way, no topic was taboo or off the table. The training is about creating a mutually respectful and inclusive NZDF for all and is designed to create a safe space to talk about topics that some people may have never discussed before.

## RESULTS

Surveys were used to evaluate the SERR training. The aim of the survey was to examine the effectiveness of the training and identify any areas that may need to be developed for future trainings. The survey took no longer than 5 minutes to complete and asked questions about harmful sexual behaviour, culture change and consent. The survey was administered in accordance with the Privacy Act (1993) and DFO3.14.5: Authority to Conduct Personnel Research in the NZDF.

Three surveys have been administered since the start of SERR, with a response rate of approximately 20% for each survey. Over 2,000 people contributed to the results, which remained consistent throughout the evaluation period. The key points included:

- Strong agreement that NZDF is ready to make positive cultural changes (90%)
- Majority (82%) reported having an excellent understanding of the topics covered within the SERR training prior to training
- Regardless of pre SERR knowledge of sexual ethics and respectful relating most attendees (81%) found SERR useful
- After the training, around three in five SERR training attendees had further conversations about consent/HSB in their personal or working lives.

The survey also allowed participants to add comments on their experience and/or responses. Below are some quotes from participants:

*"I found the training very informative. I have taken the information learnt and shared at home and at work."* (Army, female)

*"The training has allowed us to more easily discuss the themes contained within the training among our own unit. I believe discussion in a frank and grown-up way allows for better understanding of different people's perspectives and creates a more aware and accepting environment."* (Defence - Civ, male)

*"The Air Force is very receptive, and I have witnessed a shift in how individuals approach potential HSB. The personnel around me are more aware of what impact their words can have, and I personally feel more empowered to say something if someone says something that I do not agree with."* (Air Force, male)

*"The Training at Ohakea was really well done, it ended up being just a great long conversation on the SERR subjects, there was no ramming home the corporate message (but the CDF's message was clear) or targeting any one group. It was enjoyable and relaxed (if a little awkward at times), the presenting team managed to get the message across in a fun, light hearted way (but serious) way, that was thought provoking - very well done."* (Air Force, male)

*"It was very well run and discussed issues openly and frank."* (Navy, female)

*"I found the open, honest and blunt approach hit the spot by which most of us think and was able to create a good interactive environment."* (Air Force, male)

*"I think most people dread mandatory company-wide training sessions to address legal and regulatory issues, and I will admit I was not terribly optimistic about this one. However, the instructors did a fantastic job of breaking the sessions into several different workshop types which involved personal interaction and contribution in small groups, with various people taking responsibility for various small tasks. This served to keep everyone alert and involved. It made the time pass more quickly, and made the session more interesting. Preachiness and lecturing were avoided, and an environment was created where individuals felt comfortable enough to speak up and offer suggestions and opinions. BZ (Bravo Zulu) to the instructors for a job well done."* (Defence Civ, female)

## CONCLUSION

The potential positive ripple effect of the SERR is likely to be significant. Three out of every five attendees at SERR training report having had subsequent conversations about consent and harmful sexual behaviour; this is significant and encouraging for New Zealand, given over 12,000 people have already had SERR training.

In August 2018, the NZDF was awarded both the Diversity Awards NZ 2018 Supreme Winner Award and the Emerging Diversity and Inclusion Award for the SERR training. In order to maintain momentum and ensure the key messages of the SERR training are maintained, the training has now been adapted for all new recruits, civilians and contractors joining the NZDF and is undertaken as part of the normal on-boarding process going forward.