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## Servicewomen's Experiences of the Aftermath of Sexual Assault in the British Military

Blame, Shame and Betrayal

Harriet Gray, Nicola Lester & Emma Norton

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# Servicewomen's Experiences of the Aftermath of Sexual Assault in the British Military Blame, Shame and Betrayal

Harriet Gray, Nicola Lester and Emma Norton

Harriet Gray, Nicola Lester and Emma Norton present the first peer-reviewed, empirical academic study that explores servicewomen's lived experiences of sexual assault, and its aftermath, in the British military. They argue that responses to sexual violence within the military space are often shaped by gendered military culture and by the prioritisation of institutional needs over individual wellbeing and, moreover, that this can be experienced as a form of institutional betrayal. In response to these findings, the authors call for a much broader reckoning with the British military's problem with sexual violence that goes far beyond present reforms to its criminal justice system.

**T**his article outlines the findings of the first empirical academic study exploring servicewomen's experiences of sexual assault and its aftermath in the British military. The findings, based on six in-depth interviews,<sup>1</sup> indicate that gendered military culture, as well as the processes through which the institution responds to sexual violence, can cause further harm to victim-survivors above and beyond that engendered by the assault itself.

Sexual violence perpetrated by serving members of the British military against other serving members – while significantly under-explored in the academic literature – is a prevalent and pressing

issue. Two recent independent examinations of the military's criminal justice response to (among other things) sexual violence have indicated serious shortcomings. These led to recommendations (that were rejected) that rape and serious sexual violence should be removed from the purview of the Service Justice System (SJS).<sup>2</sup> What has been missing in ongoing debates about the SJS has been an in-depth understanding of how sexual violence and its aftermath are experienced by the servicewomen who are its victims.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, the authors have been struck by the paucity of academic research into sexual violence in the British military – to their knowledge, there are to date no published peer-

1. While not statistically representative, this represents a deep dive into lived experiences and as such, contributes to a richer understanding of understudied issues.
2. Sarah Atherton, 'Protecting Those Who Protect Us: Women in the Armed Forces from Recruitment to Civilian Life', House of Commons Defence Committee, 25 July 2021, <<https://committees.parliament.uk/committee/24/defence-committee/news/156892/report-protecting-those-who-protect-us-women-in-the-armed-forces-from-recruitment-to-civilian-life/>>, accessed 11 July 2022; Shaun Lyons, 'Service Justice System Review: Part 1', Ministry of Defence, 29 March 2018, <[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5f636c83e90e0759fdaaba37/SJS\\_Review\\_Part\\_1\\_Report\\_for\\_publication\\_accessible\\_.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5f636c83e90e0759fdaaba37/SJS_Review_Part_1_Report_for_publication_accessible_.pdf)>, accessed 11 July 2022; see also Charlotte Herriott et al., 'Sexual Offences Committed by Members of the Armed Forces: Is the Service Justice System Fit for Purpose?', *Criminology and Criminal Justice* (22 February 2023), DOI:10.1177/17488958231153353.
3. While both women and men are victims of military sexual violence and harassment, this article focuses on female victims. Future research with male victim-survivors would be valuable.



The experiences of victim-survivors indicate that the military often inadequately addresses the harms caused by sexual assault. Generated by AI. Courtesy of Olena Panasovska / Adobe Stock

reviewed studies drawing on qualitative interviews with victim-survivors.<sup>4</sup> This study goes beyond the challenges of the SJS to highlight how broader elements of the response to sexual violence within the institution can cause harm to victim-survivors.

As of 2022, the British military has a ‘zero tolerance’ policy<sup>5</sup> to what it terms ‘unacceptable sexual behaviour’: a category which includes ‘any sexual conduct that is unlawful (ie, a sexual offence) and/or that is inconsistent with core behaviours’.<sup>6</sup>

According to the policy, the presumption should be that personnel found guilty of unacceptable sexual behaviour will be administratively discharged. The existence of this policy is notable, in particular given that, as MacKenzie highlights, while ‘zero tolerance’ is widely claimed by Western militaries, actual policies to that effect are rare.<sup>7</sup> However, despite the welcome strong language of the new policy, its success relies upon the existence of a structure and culture in which victim-survivors feel safe to report,

4. C.f. Lauren R Godier and M Fossey, ‘Addressing the Knowledge Gap: Sexual Violence and Harassment in the UK Armed Forces’, *Journal of the Royal Army Med Corps* (Vol. 164, No. 5, September 2018), pp. 362–64; Herriott et al., ‘Sexual Offences Committed by Members of the Armed Forces’; Louise Morgan, ‘Understanding Sexual Offences in UK Military and Veteran Populations: Delineating the Offences and Setting Research Priorities’, *British Medical Journal Military Health* (Vol. 168, No. 2, April 2022), pp. 146–49. Other research, by Godier-McBard and Herriott is forthcoming.
5. HM Government, ‘2022DIN01-035: Zero Tolerance of Sexual Offending and Sexual Relationships Between Instructors and Trainees’, Ministry of Defence, 20 July 2022, <<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/2022din01-035-zero-tolerance-of-sexual-offending-and-sexual-relationships-between-instructors-and-trainees>>, accessed 1 September 2023.
6. Here, the policy is referring to the Sexual Offences Act 2003, the main civilian legislation relating to sexual offences in the UK. For a definition of ‘core behaviours’, see HM Government, ‘JSP 763: Behaviours and Informal Complaint Resolution: Part 1: Directive – Understanding Behaviours in Defence’, Ministry of Defence, 2021, <<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/jsp-763-the-mod-bullying-and-harassment-complaints-procedures>>, accessed 1 September 2023.
7. Megan Mackenzie, *Good Soldiers Don’t Rape: The Stories We Tell About Military Sexual Violence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023), pp. 128–33. Indeed, it is worth noting that the MoD has long maintained that it takes a zero-tolerance approach but that this language has only recently made it into the official policy. See, for example, *BBC News*, ‘MoD: Army has “Zero Tolerance” Approach to Harassment’, 29 November 2012.

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investigations are carried out with professionalism and understanding, and the guilty are convicted. Existing research has, as noted below, compellingly documented significant flaws in the SJS, which undermine its ability to secure such convictions, particularly in relation to rape. Moreover, the authors have found that when reporting sexual violence, servicewomen are also subjected to humiliation, disbelief, blame, shame, isolation and ostracisation. Participants report feeling betrayed by their colleagues, their chain of command (CoC), and the institution itself. They describe a gender culture in which sexual harassment is rife and sexual violence is not taken seriously. In addition, they describe interactions with multiple facets of the institution in which military interests were prioritised over their individual needs and rights as victim-survivors, and in which their own behaviour – whether they had been drinking or had been in a location where they were not meant to be – became the target of investigation and/or judgement. Whilst victim-blaming prevails beyond the military context, the military's capacity to officially judge and sanction the actions of victim-survivors – and thereby to create serious career repercussions for them – by investigating whether they have breached the Armed Forces Code of Social Conduct or the Values and Standards<sup>8</sup> of their service, is unique. These factors, the authors suggest, need to be taken seriously, as they undermine the potential for the new zero tolerance policy to be effective.

In this article, the authors first map the existing knowledge about the prevalence of sexual assault in the British military, as well as offering a brief outline of relevant literature on gendered military culture and sexual violence in other Western militaries. Next, the authors discuss their methodology, emphasising the trauma-informed approach. Then, the findings across three main sections are discussed, focused on: gender culture; the prioritisation of institutional over individual needs; and betrayal. Finally, the authors offer concluding remarks and recommendations.

## The Extent of the Problem

While academic scholarship is notably sparse, there is significant policy-orientated and journalistic research showing that sexual harassment and sexual assault are prevalent in the British armed forces.<sup>9</sup> The 'Armed Forces Continuous Attitudes Survey: 2021' reported that 11% of female personnel (and less than 1% of male personnel) had experienced sexual harassment in the Service environment in the previous 12 months.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, over the preceding 12 months: 37% of the 3,751 servicewomen respondents to the 'Army Sexual Harassment Survey: 2021' had experienced unwelcome sexualised comments targeted towards them; 19% had experienced unwanted attempts to establish a sexual relationship despite their discouragement; 7% had been treated badly for refusing to have sex with someone; 4% had been subjected to a sexual activity

8. See British Army, 'A Soldier's Values and Standards', <<https://www.army.mod.uk/who-we-are/our-people/a-soldiers-values-and-standards/>>, accessed 8 October 2023.
9. Diane Allen, 'Something Needed to be Done,' Sh+me, 24 July 2021, <<https://shame.bbk.ac.uk/blog/military-metoo-something-needed-to-be-done-by-diane-allen>>, accessed 30 May 2023; Atherton, 'Protecting Those Who Protect Us'; Larisa Brown, 'Military has its MeToo Moment as 4,000 Women Speak Out', *The Times*, 4 March 2021; Defence Human Capability Science and Technology Centre (DHCSTC), 'TIN 2.101 Defence Inclusivity Phase 2: The Lived Experience Final Report', BAE Systems, 30 November 2020, <[https://data.parliament.uk/DepositedPapers/Files/DEP2021-0099/Lived\\_Experience\\_Technical\\_Report.pdf](https://data.parliament.uk/DepositedPapers/Files/DEP2021-0099/Lived_Experience_Technical_Report.pdf)>, accessed 1 August 2023; Paula Edwards and Tony Wright, 'No Man's Land: Research Study to Explore the Experience and Needs of Women Veterans in the UK', Forward Assist, 2019, <<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5829ccde2e69cf19589499ac/t/637e0bc6ec635f127810df64/1669204938646.pdf>>, accessed 1 August 2023; Paula Edwards, Tony Wright and Stuart Honor, 'No Man's Land 2: Research Study to Explore the Experience and Needs of Women Veterans in the UK', Forward Assist, 2022, <<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5829ccde2e69cf19589499ac/t/637e0bd50e9b0c66b20a4804/1669204950767.pdf>>, accessed 19 July 2023; Hannah Markson, 'Sexual Harassment Report 2018', Ministry of Defence, 16 July 2018, <[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5b8506d4e5274a4a807b316f/20180821\\_Sexual\\_harassment\\_report\\_2018\\_OS.PDF](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5b8506d4e5274a4a807b316f/20180821_Sexual_harassment_report_2018_OS.PDF)>, accessed 25 November 2022; Isobel Thompson "'The Family Secret': How Rape is Hushed Up in Britain's Armed Forces", *The Economist*, 28 April 2022; Michael Wigston, 'Wigston Review into Inappropriate Behaviours', Ministry of Defence, 15 July 2019, <<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/wigston-review-into-inappropriate-behaviours>>, accessed 11 July 2022. See also Matt Fossey and Sanela Dursun, 'Sexual Violence in the Military (HFM-287)', in NATO, 'Science and Technology Organization 2022 Highlights', 2022, p. 57.
10. HM Government, 'Armed Forces Continuous Attitude Survey: 2021', 20 May 2021, <<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/armed-forces-continuous-attitude-survey-2021>>, accessed 11 July 2022.

to which they were unable to consent; 2.6% had been seriously sexually assaulted; and 1.8% had been raped.<sup>11</sup> Different methodologies mean that it is often difficult to compare statistics between the military and civilian workplaces; however, a 2014 report comparing sexual harassment of women aged 28–40 across multiple sectors found that the uniformed and armed services had the highest rates at 23% (construction followed closely behind at 22%; rates across most other sectors were considerably lower).<sup>12</sup> Statistics of this kind, as well as the details of the individual incidents that they received, led the House of Commons Defence Committee to describe the evidence of bullying, sexual harassment and rape as ‘truly shocking’.<sup>13</sup>

While sexual violence in the British military remains under-studied by academics, there does exist within feminist International Relations other areas of research that are directly relevant. First, scholars have studied the masculinised culture that characterises Western military institutions, including the British military, often highlighting the specific difficulties that female personnel have in

gaining acceptance from male colleagues.<sup>14</sup> Second, there is a wealth of research knowledge on the closely interrelated issues of conflict-related sexual violence<sup>15</sup> and domestic violence in military families, including the British military,<sup>16</sup> as well as on sexual violence within other Western militaries.<sup>17</sup> Taken together, this body of literature demonstrates a close interrelationship between masculinised military cultures, the hierarchical structures of military institutions and gender-based/sexualised violence, albeit one that plays out somewhat differently in different contexts. Thus, scholars have described Western militaries as ‘sexualized hypermasculine’<sup>18</sup> or even ‘rape prone’<sup>19</sup> cultures, and have identified gender based violence as ‘an inherent part of the military institution’.<sup>20</sup> MacKenzie’s recent work has demonstrated, in addition, that dominant media narratives about sexual violence in Western militaries serve to normalise and diminish its seriousness or to position it as inevitable, to the extent that avenues for working towards real systematic change are often closed off.<sup>21</sup>

11. Paula Lanchbury et al., ‘Sexual Harassment 2021 Report’, Ministry of Defence, 31 March 2022, <<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/army-sexual-harassment-survey-2021>>, accessed 15 July 2022.
12. Kathryn Nawrocki et al., ‘Project 28-40: The Report’, Opportunity Now and PwC, 2014, <<https://www.wearethecity.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/Project-28-40-The-Report.pdf>>, accessed 15 July 2022.
13. Atherton, ‘Protecting Those who Protect Us’, p. 4.
14. See, for example, Rachel Woodward and Trish Winter, *Sexing the Soldier: The Politics of Gender and the Contemporary British Army* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007); Anthony King, ‘Women, Gender, and Close Combat Roles in the UK: “Sluts”, “Bitches”, and “Honorary Blokes”’, in Robert Egnell and Mayesha Alam (eds), *Women and Gender Perspectives in the Military: An International Comparison* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2019), pp. 141–52; Helena Carreiras, *Gender and the Military: Women in the Armed Forces of Western Democracies* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006); c.f. Clare Duncanson and Rachel Woodward, ‘Regendering the Military: Theorizing Women’s Military Participation’, *Security Dialogue* (Vol. 47, No. 1, 2016), pp. 3–21.
15. Aisling Swaine, *Conflict-Related Violence Against Women: Transforming Transition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018); Kerry Crawford, *Wartime Sexual Violence: From Silence to Condemnation of a Weapon of War* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2017).
16. Danielle Rentz et al., ‘Family Violence in the Military: A Review of the Literature’, *Trauma, Violence and Abuse* (Vol. 7, No. 2, 2006), pp. 93–108; Rebecca Lane et al., ‘Intimate Partner Violence and Abuse: A Qualitative Exploration of UK Military Personnel and Civilian Partner Experiences’, *Journal of Family Violence* (September 2022), DOI:10.1007/s10896-022-00446-x; Harriet Gray, ‘Domestic Abuse and the Public/Private Divide in the British Military’, *Gender, Place and Culture* (Vol. 23, No. 6, 2016), pp. 912–25.
17. Joanna Bourke, ‘Military Sexual Trauma: Gender, Military Cultures, and the Medicalization of Abuse in Contemporary America’, *Journal of War and Culture Studies* (Vol. 15, No. 1, 2022), pp. 86–105; Nancy Taber, ‘The Canadian Armed Forces: Battling Between Operation HONOUR and Operation Hop on Her’, *Critical Military Studies* (Vol. 6, No. 1, 2020), pp. 19–40; Lorraine Bayard de Volo and Lynn Hall, ‘“I Wish All the Ladies Were Holes in the Road”: The US Air Force Academy and the Gendered Continuum of Violence’, *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* (Vol. 40, No. 4, June 2015), pp. 865–89; Ben Wadham, ‘Violence in the Military and Relations Among Men: Military Masculinities and “Rape Prone Cultures”’, in Rachel Woodward and Claire Duncanson (eds), *The Palgrave International Handbook of Gender and the Military* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2017), pp. 241–56.
18. Taber, ‘The Canadian Armed Forces’, p. 22.
19. Bayard de Volo and Hall, ‘“I Wish All the Ladies were Holes in the Road”’, p. 865.
20. Wadham, ‘Violence in the Military and Relations Among Men’, p. 242.
21. Mackenzie, *Good Soldiers Don’t Rape*.

## Study Approach: Trauma-informed Research

The authors' analysis is based on six in-depth, semi-structured, qualitative interviews that Harriet Gray carried out in 2021–22 with female veterans of the British military who had experienced sexual violence while serving, perpetrated by a serviceman. A sample of six, while small, is not unusual for this kind of research, as such studies do not seek statistical generalisability.<sup>22</sup> Instead, the study prioritised a deep dive into lived experiences and thus, the generation of rich, rigorous understandings of understudied issues.

Participants were recruited via the Centre for Military Justice (CMJ) – a charity that provides legal advice, support and advocacy services to people in the armed forces who have experienced sexual assault, harassment, bullying or discrimination – of which Emma Norton, one of the authors of this article, is founder and director. Victim-survivors who approach the CMJ do so because they are unhappy with the military's response to their assaults; as such, recruiting through this organisation has no doubt shaped the nature of the study's sample. As discussed throughout the paper, however, all the evidence suggests that negative experiences in the aftermath of reporting assaults is a widespread problem, not limited to those who approach the CMJ. The authors would, of course, welcome the opportunity to expand their sample in future studies.

Participants ranged in age from late teens to late 30s at the time of the interview and had left the military within the four years preceding their recruitment for the study. All had been victims of sexual offences while serving, perpetrated by a serviceman. The sample included women who had served in the Army, the Royal Navy and the RAF. The

small size of the population from which participants are drawn means that, to protect anonymity, the service is not specified in any given interview quote (for example, terms such as 'ship' or 'squadron' have been replaced with the more generic 'base' or 'unit'). Similarly, identifiers are not used (even anonymous ones) when quoting participants.<sup>23</sup> Interviews were transcribed verbatim, and then analysed using a thematic analysis approach.<sup>24</sup>

The sensitive nature of this study demands an ethical, trauma-informed approach. For Voith et al., trauma-informed research '[realizes] the widespread impact of trauma and understands potential paths for recovery [recognizes] the signs and symptoms of trauma [responds] by fully integrating knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures, and practices [and seeks] to actively *resist* re-traumatization' (emphasis in original). In addition, 'study participants' voices should be central to the study [...] to build platforms for disempowered groups to speak their truth'.<sup>25</sup> The authors sought to fully integrate these principles at all stages of the study.

## Interview Analysis

The participants interviewed for this study were highly critical of the way they had been treated after reporting sexual assault; they told us, in a variety of ways, that they had been 'systematically failed'. Several aspects of participants' experiences relate directly to criticisms of the SJS already raised by previous research, including: the lack of training and experience demonstrated by the CoC and SJS personnel dealing with their case;<sup>26</sup> a failure to inform them that they had the right to report to the civilian rather than the military police;<sup>27</sup> and an enormous sense of frustration that perpetrators did not face

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22. Mira Crouch and Heather McKenzie, 'The Logic of Small Samples in Interview-Based Qualitative Research', *Social Science Information* (Vol. 45, No. 4, December 2006), pp. 483–99.
  23. Given the small size of both the study's sample and the population from which it is drawn, the authors were concerned that presenting multiple elements of a participant's story linked together through an identifier such as 'Participant 1' would allow people who had come across an individual's story before to identify them.
  24. Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, *Thematic Analysis: A Practical Guide* (London: SAGE, 2021).
  25. Laura Voith et al., 'Using a Trauma-Informed, Socially Just Research Framework with Marginalized Populations: Practices and Barriers to Implementation', *Social Work Research* (Vol. 44, No. 3, September 2020), p. 172.
  26. See Herriott et al., 'Sexual Offences Committed by Members of the Armed Forces'; Jon Murphy, 'Service Justice System Policing Review (Part 1): Does the Current Structure and Skill Set of the Service Police Organisations, and the MDP, Match the Future Requirements of the Service Justice System?', Ministry of Defence, 27 February 2020, <<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/service-justice-system-review>>, accessed 26 July 2022.
  27. Centre for Military Justice, 'The Armed Forces Bill 2021: Submission from the Centre for Military Justice', Armed Forces Bill Committee, 20 March 2021, p. 13, <<https://centreformilitaryjustice.org.uk/guide/briefing-on-the-armed-forces-bill/>>, accessed 8 July 2022.

justice.<sup>28</sup> The interviews, then, reinforce these earlier findings; however, the SJS is not the topic of this article. Instead, the authors focus on three key themes that emerged from their interviews and that highlight issues not already well understood. First, the military's 'laddish' gender culture and how it shapes understandings of, and responses to, sexual offences is discussed; second, the authors explore how the multiple ways in which the institution is prioritised over individual wellbeing has impacted victim-survivors' experiences; and finally, to a certain extent building on the first two themes, the authors discuss the participants' experiences in terms of institutional betrayal.

### A 'Laddish' Culture

One major theme that emerged from the interviews was the military's gender culture. Participants described a 'culture of gender discrimination'; a 'very misogynistic' environment; a 'man's world'; and 'a laddish culture'. One participant remembers that servicewomen 'would be referred to as "split arse"',<sup>29</sup> and jokes would be made about how they should be getting breakfast ready and doing laundry. One participant pointed to the atmosphere of 'what they would call banter, which is [...] sexism'. This laddish culture is not a surprise; British military culture<sup>30</sup> has long been described as characterised by a culture of 'endemic low-grade sexism'<sup>31</sup> and a 'general acceptance of hypermasculine banter and behaviour'.<sup>32</sup> Recent research commissioned by the MoD found that the 'white male prototype is pervasive and undermines inclusion'; it also

described sexual harassment as 'part of the landscape of work for females in Defence'.<sup>33</sup>

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### One major theme that emerged from the interviews was the military's gender culture

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It is important to note that, despite the recognition that it undermines inclusion, the hyper-masculine, sexualised culture of militaries has also been understood as crucial for the purposes of recruitment and of motivating men to fight;<sup>34</sup> their 'banter' culture is seen as fundamental for maintaining morale and for unit bonding.<sup>35</sup> The denigration of women – even when officially against institutional codes, values and standards – has been allowed and enabled 'because of its perceived value in sustaining the hegemonically masculine culture'.<sup>36</sup>

It might be suggested that a culture of hypermasculinity and sexualised banter is not the same as a culture of sexual violence. The feminist concept of the continuum of gender-based violence, however, reminds us that its different forms – from 'everyday' normalised sexual harassment through to less common (though still widespread) physical violence such as rape – are deeply interconnected, and are all underpinned by common factors.<sup>37</sup> Moreover, the available research suggests that military environments characterised by hypermasculinity and/or everyday sexual misconduct are also characterised by increased levels of rape.<sup>38</sup> The US Department of Defense notes that sexual

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28. Murphy 'Service Justice System Policing Review', p. 44.

29. A derogatory term for women.

30. Many other Western militaries could be described in similar terms.

31. Brown, 'Military has its MeToo Moment'.

32. Godier and Fossey, 'Addressing the Knowledge Gap', p. 362–63; see also Atherton, 'Protecting Those who Protect Us', p. 17; and references in fn. 12.

33. DHCSTC, 'TIN 2.101 Defence Inclusivity Phase 2', pp. 1, 55.

34. Victoria Basham, 'Gender and Militaries: The Importance of Military Masculinities for the Conduct of State Sanctioned Violence', in Simona Sharoni et al. (eds), *Handbook on Gender and War* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2016), pp. 29–46; Aaron Belkin, *Bring Men: Military Masculinity and the Benign Façade of American Empire, 1898–2001* (London: Hurst and Company, 2012).

35. Bayard de Volo and Hall, "'I Wish All the Ladies Were Holes in the Road'"; Nick Caddick, Brett Smith and Cassandra Phoenix, 'Male Combat Veterans' Narratives of PTSD, Masculinity, and Health', *Sociology of Health and Illness* (Vol. 37, No. 1, January 2015), pp. 97–111; Godier and Fossey 'Addressing the Knowledge Gap', pp. 362–63.

36. Basham, 'Gender and Militaries', p. 35.

37. Liz Kelly, *Surviving Sexual Violence* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1988).

38. Herriott et al., 'Sexual Offences Committed by Members of the Armed Forces', p. 5; Anne Sadler et al., 'Factors Associated with Women's Risk of Rape in the Military Environment', *American Journal of Industrial Medicine* (Vol. 43, No. 3, March 2003), p. 271.



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harassment creates 'an environment in which sexual assault is more likely to occur'.<sup>39</sup>

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## One participant described how the camp turned into a 'hostile environment' after she reported her assault

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Reflecting this, one participant described the military as having 'a massive rape culture'. This begins with attitudes towards women who engage in consensual sex. One participant told of servicewomen who had sex with male soldiers being judged negatively: 'they just see them as "slags"; 'they all, kind of, knew me as [...] "the slag of the [sub-unit]"'. Several participants discussed specific incidents of sexual harassment during the course of their duties: 'someone shouted "look at the cheeks on that", and everyone was like "whay!" The whole [group] erupts, you're like dying inside. But then, even to your superiors, it's banter'; 'we'd be marching sometimes and we'd have [servicemen] wolf-whistling at us'. The general feeling, however, was that no one bothered even discussing most of the sexual harassment that took place, because it was so overwhelmingly prevalent. One participant, for example, said: '[t]he undertone of the military is just sexual harassment [...] If you actually acknowledged every single thing that was said, or every touch, or every, like, brush past you or anything like that [...] people would be at it 24/7'.

This culture of harassment, the authors suggest, feeds into a situation where sexual violence is widely misunderstood and survivors commonly encounter victim-blaming attitudes. One participant recalls how, after a serviceman attempted to rape her, she was accused of leading him on because 'I was trying to settle an argument between him and a friend [...] by saying "well, you're a nice guy"'. Another recounted a similar experience with the CoC after she was assaulted:

When you hear your own officer commanding saying, 'you drink too much [...] you wear short skirts so you deserve it', when somebody in a hierarchical position [...] is sat in front of you and is allowed to say things like that, it [...] sends your mind all over the place, you just question everything [...] and when you're in that blame

state where you think it's your fault, you do believe what they're telling you.

Perhaps connected to this failure to understand the reality of sexual violence, several of our participants described the serious and damaging bullying that survivors experienced after reporting, and the disincentives to report that it engendered.<sup>40</sup> This bullying was felt particularly keenly because of the strength often assumed to characterise bonds between service personnel; as one participant put it, '[people] who you'd expect to die for [...] to go to war with, to die alongside [...] they've basically stabbed you in the back'.

One participant described how the camp turned into a 'hostile environment' after she reported her assault. Colleagues stated that they did not believe her and refused to work with her. She was told by her commander that she was becoming an 'inconvenience' because of the bad atmosphere it was creating. Some of her fellow servicewomen, she recounted, 'would come to me and be like "it happened to me, I believe you", it was kind of like a small MeToo movement [but] if you spoke out, you [were] ostracised'. For example, the participant told the authors, a friend of hers who tried to speak up for her on a social media group used by members of the unit was reprimanded by her CoC for 'affecting the dynamics'. The bullying of this participant by her colleagues and the protection of the accused perpetrator, apparently backed by the CoC, made her believe that subsequent assaults would likely not be reported: 'If any female there, if this had of happened to them, at that time or now, after seeing what happened to me for saying something, no one would ever speak up again'.

While the military remains a male-dominated institution, the lack of understanding of sexual violence and hostility experienced by the participants was reproduced by women as well as men. Several participants recounted specific negative reactions from servicewomen and expressed dismay that women did not offer them more support. One participant recounted how she had been openly disbelieved by multiple colleagues after she reported her assault, but that, for her 'the worst thing [was that it] was majority females doing that. Which makes me think like "what are you thinking?" [...] There were males that did turn against [me] as well, but the majority that were very vocal about it [were women]'.

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39. Cited in Bayard de Volo and Hall, "I Wish all the Ladies were Holes in the Road", p. 867.

40. The definition of bullying used by the MoD is 'unwanted behaviour from a person or a group that makes someone feel uncomfortable, including feeling frightened (intimidated) or less respected (degraded) or upset (humiliated)'. HM Government, 'JSP 763', pp. 9–10.

These vocal responses, this participant recalled, included a servicewoman approaching her at a party: ‘And she said: “I know what you’ve accused him of”, and put her middle finger up to my forehead and [swore]’. Another participant similarly felt that ‘women generally are very unsupportive of other women [...] I think they were less supportive than even a man would have been’. When this participant sought to complain about the mishandling of her report of sexual assault, it was a woman in a senior position who told her that ‘basically I was the problem [...] because I was rocking the boat’. Experiences of being unsupported by fellow servicewomen are prevalent across the participants’ accounts, raising important questions about the extent to which misogyny has been internalised by servicewomen.

### Institutional Versus Individual Needs

Rape myths, misogyny and hostility towards victim-survivors are prevalent across British society. However, they play out in several unique ways in the military context, not least because of how the involvement of the institution in the ‘private’ lives of its personnel formalises the sacrifice of individual wellbeing for institutional priorities. The military involves itself in the private lives of its personnel through, for example, the provision of in-house services such as policing and welfare and the requirement that personnel conform to standards of behaviour even when off duty. These services and requirements are anchored in the pursuit not of the individual well-being of personnel, but of the needs of the institution.<sup>41</sup>

The primary purpose of the SJS, for example, is not to pursue justice per se but ‘to enable the

military to perform at their best’.<sup>42</sup> In addition, it is understood that the various branches of the service police need to ‘balance operational effectiveness with the needs of the victim’;<sup>43</sup> and that prosecution decisions are based in part on the question of ‘whether it is in the Service interest to prosecute this defendant on this charge’.<sup>44</sup> Similarly, the Army Welfare Service ‘delivers a comprehensive and confidential welfare service responsive to the needs of individuals, families and the Chain of Command in order to maximise the operational effectiveness of Service Personnel’.<sup>45</sup> The Values and Standards to which military personnel are expected to conform,<sup>46</sup> and the rules for personal relationships laid out in the Armed Forces Code of Social Conduct,<sup>47</sup> are also in place primarily to protect institutional needs. The Code of Social Conduct, for example, explains that personal relationships must be regulated to ‘sustain team cohesion and to maintain trust and loyalty between commanders and those they command’.<sup>48</sup> Breaches of the Code of Social Conduct or of Values and Standards are judged in relation to the service test: ‘[h]ave the actions or behaviour of an individual adversely impacted or are they likely to impact on the efficiency or operational effectiveness of the Service?’<sup>49</sup>

While this general orientation away from individual rights and towards institutional needs is perhaps not surprising, it may have significant impacts on the experiences of victim-survivors of sexual violence.<sup>50</sup> This played out in two main ways in the participants’ experiences. First, several participants felt that responses to their reports were primarily oriented around protecting the organisation, its interests and its normal ways of functioning over and above their needs as survivors. Second, participants

41. See Gray, ‘Domestic Abuse and the Public/Private Divide’.

42. Lyons, ‘Service Justice System Review’, p. 38.

43. Murphy, ‘Service Justice System Policing Review’, p. 21.

44. HM Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate, ‘The Service Prosecuting Authority: The Inspectorate’s Report on the Service Prosecuting Authority’, December 2010, p. 62; see also Murphy, ‘Service Justice System Policing Review’, pp. 20, 24.

45. British Army, ‘Army Welfare Service’, <<https://www.army.mod.uk/people/health-wellbeing-welfare-support/welfare-support/the-army-welfare-service-aws>>, accessed 8 September 2023.

46. British Army, ‘Values and Standards of the British Army’, <[https://www.army.mod.uk/media/5219/20180910-values\\_standards\\_2018\\_final.pdf](https://www.army.mod.uk/media/5219/20180910-values_standards_2018_final.pdf)>, accessed 7 July 2023; Royal Air Force, ‘Ethos, Core Values and Standards’, 2019, <[https://recruitment.raf.mod.uk/recruitment/media/3897/20200703-raf\\_ap1\\_2019\\_rev\\_3\\_page\\_spreads.pdf](https://recruitment.raf.mod.uk/recruitment/media/3897/20200703-raf_ap1_2019_rev_3_page_spreads.pdf)>, accessed 7 July 2023; Royal Navy, ‘Our People’, <<https://www.royalnavy.mod.uk/our-people>>, accessed 7 July 2023.

47. HM Government, ‘JSP 887 Diversity Inclusion and Social Conduct: Defence Strategy and Social Conduct Code to Meet Public Sector Equality Duties’, 2014, <[http://data.parliament.uk/DepositedPapers/Files/DEP2016-0068/20141217\\_JSP\\_887\\_version\\_for\\_publication\\_\\_3\\_\\_PQ00604.pdf](http://data.parliament.uk/DepositedPapers/Files/DEP2016-0068/20141217_JSP_887_version_for_publication__3__PQ00604.pdf)>, accessed 10 August 2022.

48. HM Government, ‘JSP 887’, p. 6.

49. HM Government, ‘JSP 887’, p. 7; British Army, ‘Values and Standards of the British Army’, p. 30.

50. Deborah Harrison and Lucie Laliberté, ‘The Competing Claims of Operational Effectiveness and Human Rights in the Canadian Context’, *Armed Forces and Society* (Vol. 34, No. 2, January 2008), pp. 208–29.

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shared experiences where they themselves had been either disciplined or threatened with being disciplined after reporting sexual violence, because their own behaviour, brought to the attention of their superiors through their reports, had breached the military's rules. These are discussed in turn below.

Participants shared multiple ways in which, in their experience, the needs of the institution had been prioritised over their wellbeing as victim-survivors in the aftermath of assault. First, several were frustrated by a lack of confidentiality. The normal practice of sharing information about a particular service member up their CoC persisted even when this was upsetting: 'People that don't need to be informed [...] information is overshared with a lot of people'. Another line of critique was an inability to relocate. One participant told the authors how she applied repeatedly for a different military job closer to her hometown and support network, but she was denied permission to be released from the role she was in: 'And I was like "I don't understand [...] why I can't have it" and they were like "because your trade's in demand, you can't go"'. Another participant found herself stuck living near her perpetrator on the same base – a situation which made her feel 'very, very trapped'. In these examples it seems that while sexual violence was a major breach in victim-survivors' lives, institutional responses treated it as insufficient for making an exception to the normal ways of functioning.

Following the vein of the prioritisation of institutional interests over those of victim-survivors, some participants felt that, in reporting sexual violence, they had crossed a line which meant that they could no longer rely upon the institution. One participant said that she believed the support she received was poor because the institution and community wanted to 'protect their own'. When the interviewer pointed out that she was 'their own', she replied: '[t]hey only protect you until something's wrong. And I found that in general, you're all cosy until [...] if they can't cover it up for you, they're not interested, they'll let you out to dry'. This participant felt cast out of the sphere of those protected by the military; however, her assailant was not. Despite the first response of her line manager when she told him what had happened being 'he's done this before', the perpetrator was later found not guilty at court martial and transferred to another base to continue his career. Following this acquittal, the victim-survivor lodged a formal service complaint about the

perpetrator's conduct and, after investigation, the service accepted that he had committed the alleged act. Despite this, the perpetrator continued to serve.

Finally, several participants believed that there was an overriding concern with keeping negative stories out of the media to protect the military's reputation. One participant told us that, following her report of rape, the CoC ordered that potential evidence be deleted from mobile phones, because of a concern that photos or videos would end up on social media: '[b]asically they couldn't have anything that would expose them to anything. Basically covering up'. Others suggested that the concern over keeping stories of sexual violence out of the media was particularly powerful when there were senior officers involved: 'anything that they can keep out of the media they will [...] especially if there's a rank involved, you know, if there is a high-ranking officer, abuse of power, they absolutely don't want that making the media'. This issue is closely connected with the blanket policy that prevents service personnel from speaking with the press or Parliament about any matter connected with their service without prior written permission from the MoD, a policy that is explicitly concerned in large part with avoiding compromising the reputation of the service.<sup>51</sup>

Moving on, participants also shared experiences in which they had been punished or threatened with punishment for having broken institutional rules after reporting sexual violence. This, the authors suggest, takes the prioritisation of institutional over individual needs one step further, indicating a real lack of flexibility and understanding in some elements of the CoC. Sometimes, this is related to the consumption of alcohol. One participant explained that, while stationed overseas, her sub-unit had been told not to have more than three drinks and not to stay off base overnight. This participant, however, went out with colleagues, 'drank more than three drinks 'cos that's what everyone did' and stayed overnight in a hotel, where she was assaulted by a colleague. The next day, she told her friend what had happened:

I were, like, crying my eyes out, and I was, like, I don't know what to do, and we sat [there] for like two, three hours contemplating what to do 'cos I knew that if I reported it that we'd all get into trouble for staying out 'cos no one knew we'd stayed out. We'd get done for drinking. So it were all, like, what do I do?

51. HM Government, 'Contact with the Media and Communicating in Public', Ministry of Defence, April 2020, <<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/defence-instruction-contact-with-media-and-public/contact-with-the-media-and-communicating-in-public>>, accessed 11 July 2023.

After much reflection this participant did report, and, when it was passed up the chain to a superior officer, her fears were confirmed: ‘his first reaction was anger, “why did you stay out? Why did you go out drinking?”’

This case is a somewhat unusual one, because the sub-unit were under specific orders to limit their drinking. In other examples, the participants have found themselves in something of a double bind, where they are expected to drink and yet blamed for doing so if they are sexually assaulted:

It’s just the culture [...] you’ve got to come out and we have these functions and you have to drink and you have to conform [...] but then [you] put yourself in that situation and then is it your fault [if you are assaulted] because you’ve drunk too much? I was in the military 19 years and to have somebody say [that it was my fault] to me at that stage in my career. Yeah, messed with my head.

It is beyond the scope of this study to offer any broad conclusions on sexual violence and alcohol in the British military. However, it is worth noting both the deeply embedded culture of alcohol consumption within the institution<sup>52</sup> and the likelihood that powerful rape myths to do with alcohol – common in the civilian world – may be widespread.<sup>53</sup> Judge Advocate General Alan Large, for example, recently said in evidence to a Select Committee hearing on the Armed Forces Bill, ‘our servicepeople are thoroughly good people, but they drink too much, something goes wrong and they end up in court.’<sup>54</sup> Large’s predecessor Jeff Blackett, similarly, has made statements which appear to blame alcohol consumption for sexual assault, as have other military judges.<sup>55</sup> These statements echo Mackenzie’s recent work, which highlights how alcohol-based rape myths contribute to a sense of normalisation, resignation and justification of sexual violence in the Australian military.<sup>56</sup>

More specific to the military than a blame culture surrounding alcohol is the notion of fraternisation.<sup>57</sup> One participant, raped when she was too drunk to consent, was chastised by her CoC both for breaking the Code of Social Conduct and for failing to properly show remorse in the aftermath of the event. In what she experienced as a ritual humiliation, the entire unit was brought together. A small number of personnel – those who she says were considered ‘responsible’ – were asked to read out the Code of Social Conduct to all those who were gathered. She recalls that they ‘read [it] out and it’s just humiliating. I don’t know where to look, and it’s just horrid [...] they may as well [have] just put us in stocks and thrown tomatoes’.

The service police were then brought in to investigate whether the Code of Conduct had been breached. During this investigation, they noticed bruising on the victim-survivor’s body. This, together with the description of events given to them by those involved, should have prompted them to open an investigation into whether sexual assault had taken place, but they did not. This approach appears to indicate a fundamental failure to follow basic lines of enquiry. The possibility of sexual assault was not investigated; instead, the victim-survivor was put on warnings and had to pay a fine for breaching the Code.

Similarly, another participant was concerned about the repercussions of reporting her rape. In her interview, she described how she was acutely aware that she had broken several rules, first by smoking, and second by entering the male accommodation to continue a conversation with a male colleague, where she was assaulted. She explains:

I think a lot of [women] don’t feel confident reporting it [...] Because I couldn’t, it’s kind of like, you weren’t supposed to be in [that accommodation] and you weren’t supposed to do that [...] weren’t supposed to be in that [sub-unit], and you weren’t supposed to be, you

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52. Edgar Jones and Nicola T Fear, ‘Alcohol Use and Misuse Within the Military: A Review’, *International Review of Psychiatry* (Vol. 23, April 2011), pp. 166–72.
  53. Amy Grubb and Emily Turner, ‘Attribution of Blame in Rape Cases: A Review of the Impact of Rape Myth Acceptance, Gender Role Conformity and Substance Abuse on Victim Blaming’, *Aggression and Violent Behaviour* (Vol. 17, No. 5, September–October 2012), pp. 443–52.
  54. Michael Hamilton and Julia Atherley, “‘Good’ Rapists Rage: Military Top Judge Sparks Fury by Blaming Rapes in Armed Forces on “‘Thoroughly Good People” Drinking Too Much Booze’, *The Sun*, 28 March 2021.
  55. Danielle Sheridan, ‘Former Judge “Could Not Convict Despite Believing Rape Accusers”’, *The Telegraph*, 13 March 2021; Steven Morris, ‘Judge Calls for Ban on Drunken Parties in UK Armed Forces after Rape Case’, *The Guardian*, 16 December 2021.
  56. Mackenzie, *Good Soldiers Don’t Rape*, pp. 101–07.
  57. Neither the Code of Social Conduct nor the services’ Values and Standards explicitly use the term, however fraternisation may be considered a breach of these rules. Moreover, King identifies double standards in that ‘if two soldiers are guilty of fraternisation, the female is blamed and denigrated’ (cited in Atherton, ‘Protecting Those Who Protect Us’, fn. 109).

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know, smoking a fag and I feel like, I don't know, I felt like that was something they focus on.

Despite being reassured by one senior officer after she first reported the rape that she would not be in trouble, her commanding officer later informed her that she 'could be discharged for breaking the rules'.

The military does have a policy, 'Guidance to Commanding Officers and Victims when Dealing with Allegations of Serious Criminal Offences including Sexual Offences', which is designed to ensure that the CoC meets the needs of victim-survivors.<sup>58</sup> The policy contains a series of detailed mandatory steps that a commanding officer must take when one of their personnel reports a serious crime, including sexual assault or domestic abuse. The steps include: the need to appoint a Victim Support Officer (to guard against bullying of the victim) and a Victim Liaison Officer (to support continued engagement in any criminal justice process); to ensure the victim is aware that they can request a career change; and to pro-actively discuss with the victim whether the 'marker' scheme should be applied, to ensure victim and perpetrator are not assigned to the same place in the future. All of the participants experienced widespread ignorance of this policy among the CoC. Moreover, the CMJ's experience of working on multiple cases beyond this study is that this policy is very widely ignored.

### Betrayal

Research into sexual violence in the US military has used the concept of 'institutional betrayal' to make sense of some of the harms experienced by victim-survivors. For Smith and Freyd, 'Institutional betrayal occurs when an institution causes harm to an individual who trusts or depends upon that institution'.<sup>59</sup> This harm may come in a variety of guises including the 'omission of protective, preventative, or responsive institutional actions',

particularly when these actions are 'promised by or available solely through the institution'.<sup>60</sup> Research in the US suggests that military sexual violence survivors experience very high levels of institutional betrayal, often feeling that 'the military institution created an environment in which [sexual violence] was common, likely to occur, and difficult to report'.<sup>61</sup> Moreover, it suggests that institutional betrayal may exacerbate the harms experienced by victims of sexual assault such as post-traumatic symptoms, in particular when the institution was expected to protect the individual.<sup>62</sup> Furthermore, scholars have suggested that military institutional betrayal may be more harmful than other forms of institutional betrayal, precisely because the survivor is likely to highly identify with the military institution, may rely on it for their safety and may be required to continue to live and work within the military space.<sup>63</sup>

Given this, it is no surprise that the theme of betrayal resonated across each of the six interviews. This betrayal can be identified in the accounts above at multiple levels: the military community; powerful individuals such as the CoC; and the institution itself. Not all the examples in the sections above were explicitly framed in these terms by participants, however, the concept of betrayal is nonetheless a useful one in understanding the harms that these experiences caused. Two of the participants, in particular, described very clearly the harms that they had experienced as a result not just of their sexual victimisation, but of the institutional betrayal that followed it – indicating that, as Monteith et al. suggest, institutional betrayal can create a form of secondary trauma.<sup>64</sup> The authors give them the last word in this section.

[The way that the military dealt with my report of sexual violence is] the reason that I'm diagnosed with complex PTSD and not just PTSD. Because, you know, essentially it's this ongoing trauma, and I was stuck in a situation, you know, there is no potential to reach

58. HM Government, 'JSP 839 Guidance to Commanding Officers and Victims when Dealing with Allegations of Serious Criminal Offences including Sexual Offences', Ministry of Defence, 2015, Annex B, <<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6137374dd3bf7f05afde03aa/JSP839.pdf>>, accessed 4 August 2023.
59. Carly Parnitzke Smith and Jennifer Freyd, 'Institutional Betrayal', *American Psychologist* (Vol. 69, No. 6, September 2014), p. 578.
60. Parnitzke Smith and Freyd, 'Institutional Betrayal', p. 579.
61. Lindsey L Monteith et al., 'Institutional Betrayal and Help-Seeking Among Women Survivors of Military Sexual Trauma', *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy* (Vol. 13, No. 7, October 2021), p. 815.
62. *Ibid.*; Carly Parnitzke Smith and Jennifer Freyd, 'Dangerous Safe Havens: Institutional Betrayal Exacerbates Sexual Trauma', *Journal of Traumatic Stress* (Vol. 26, February 2013), pp. 119–24. Interesting connections might be drawn here with the distinct but related topic of 'moral injury' – see Jonathan Shay, 'Moral Injury', *Psychoanalytic Psychology* (Vol. 31, No. 2, 2014), pp. 182–91.
63. Smith and Freyd, 'Dangerous Safe Havens'.
64. Monteith et al., 'Institutional Betrayal and Help-Seeking'.

out outside of that environment, it's all very insular. You know, they control your health, at the time you know I was living [in military accommodation], so accommodation, absolutely everything.

I've basically lost faith in the service I'm supposed to put, you know, give my whole life to [...] This is what I struggled with for years, I love the [branch of service], I trusted the [branch of service], I believed in the [branch of service]. They told me I was wrong, and it was my fault, and I shouldn't have drunk, whatever. I believed them [...] It's like going to war with someone, you're there to live and die with them. If something kicked off, you're there to fight alongside them. You don't get that anywhere else, you [would] literally you put your life on the line for [them]. You're in what's supposed to be the ultimate [...] band of brothers, and then this awful thing happens to you, and it evaporates.

## Concluding Remarks and Recommendations

As the first published piece of peer-reviewed, empirical academic research that explores servicewomen's experiences of sexual assault and its aftermath in the British military, these findings start an important conversation, which goes beyond existing research concentrated on critiquing the SJS. Given the small size of the sample, one recommendation lies in calling for future research that takes seriously the response to sexual violence of the CoC and other military personnel. Such research should pay significant attention to the use and misuse of disciplinary policies and procedures and focus on how the attitudes of commanders may be contributing to, and causing, harm. Specific attention might also be paid to the attitudes and responses of women within the military community, and to attitudes towards alcohol.

Further research will require MoD co-operation to facilitate access. This study was limited to veterans;<sup>65</sup> to engage with serving personnel, researchers require permission through one of the military's Scientific Advisory Committees (SACs) and the Ministry of Defence Research and Ethics

Committee (MODREC). The authors are aware that gaining access through these committees for further research might not be easy, given that, as Catignani and Basham demonstrate, researchers taking a critical, feminist and/or interpretivist approach may encounter a hostile response, in particular if it is felt that their findings might risk negative press coverage.<sup>66</sup> An overly restrictive scheme of access to service personnel would engage and potentially violate Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights – the right to freedom of expression; it is deeply problematic that the institution liable to criticism within a particular piece of academic research has the power to decide whether and how that research should be conducted. Encouragingly, the 2022 version of the relevant policy appears to have removed the statement, found in the previous version, that 'MoD does not undertake research involving human participants unless it is for the benefit of MoD or other Government Departments'.<sup>67</sup> The 2022 version instead requires that research outputs are 'relevant to MoD, its partners or Other Government Departments',<sup>68</sup> and that research should be 'of benefit to MoD, participants or to science and society'.<sup>69</sup> The authors hope that this allows greater scope for research which, while certainly relevant to the MoD, is primarily for the benefit of servicewomen, whose interests may not always line up with those of the institution. It is vital that the MoD facilitates research that will be of genuine benefit to victim-survivors of sexual violence. This research must be trauma-informed, and it must be underpinned by the huge existing body of (feminist) research knowledge on sexual violence.

Beyond the call for further research, there are important conclusions to be reached and recommendations to be made from this study itself. First, while others have previously argued that the 'laddish' gender culture of militaries may make sexual assault more likely, the authors have also connected it with what victim-survivors experience as a hostile culture. Sexual violence is widely misunderstood and minimised, including by commanders, and

65. This study received ethical approval through the University of York's research ethics process.

66. Sergio Catignani and Victoria Basham, "The Gendered Politics of Researching Military Policy in the Age of the "Knowledge Economy"", *Review of International Studies* (Vol. 47, No. 2, April 2021), pp. 1–20.

67. *Ibid.*, p. 20.

68. HM Government, 'JSP 536: Governance of Research Involving Human Participants. Part 2: Guidance', Ministry of Defence, August 2022, p. 1-D-2, <[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/1098143/20220810-JSP\\_536\\_Part\\_2\\_Governance\\_Research\\_Human\\_v3.3.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1098143/20220810-JSP_536_Part_2_Governance_Research_Human_v3.3.pdf)>, accessed 5 December 2022.

69. HM Government, 'JSP 536: Governance of Research Involving Human Participants. Part 1: Directive', Ministry of Defence, August 2022, p. 5-2, <[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/1097650/20220810-JSP536\\_Part\\_1\\_Governance\\_Research\\_Human\\_v3.4\\_Aug\\_22.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1097650/20220810-JSP536_Part_1_Governance_Research_Human_v3.4_Aug_22.pdf)>, accessed 5 December 2022.

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bullying of victim-survivors appears rife. In addition, participants have highlighted that, to their surprise, hostility to victim-survivors was reproduced by servicewomen as well as servicemen. While the authors welcome the strong language of the '2022 Zero Tolerance Policy', this study's findings suggest that this problem will not be easily solved by a policy focused on what should happen after a conviction for sexual violence is secured. Instead, change will require real, serious and widespread efforts to transform the military's misogynistic gender culture, even where this might impede the perceived benefits of maintaining a masculine culture. Recent research commissioned by the MoD identifies both the need for cultural change in relation to gender and racial diversity and some of the potentially significant barriers to achieving this, including a resistance to change among existing personnel and the insufficiency of existing diversity and inclusion training.<sup>70</sup> It is vital that the military understands these barriers.

Second, the authors have also demonstrated how prioritisation of institutional needs above the needs and rights of individuals is harming victim-survivors. The authors call for a shift in this balance; they call for an end to the use and misuse of disciplinary or administrative procedures against victim-survivors whose breach of the Code of Social Conduct or of the Values and Standards of their service comes to light when they report sexual violence. Sensitive, informed and pro-active career management and support must be provided to victim-survivors. The CoC must be directed that the possibility of negative press must never trump the needs of individual survivors.

The military is failing to support victim-survivors of sexual violence and responses within the military community and institution, at multiple levels, are

actively making things worse. This goes far beyond the recognised limitations of the SJS. As such, the British military's reckoning with sexual violence needs to go far beyond the present reforms to its system of criminal justice. At the very least, it must pay attention to victim-survivors' experiences of blame, shame and betrayal. ■

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70. DHCSTC, 'TIN 2.101 Defence Inclusivity Phase 2', pp. 58–77.