

RCMP



ROYAL CANADIAN MOUNTED POLICE

Summary Report on Gender Based Harassment and Respectful Workplace Consultations

“E” Division
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ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This report could not have been accomplished without the participation of 426 employees in British Columbia who came forward to be part of the process. For the most part, the participants demonstrated a high level of engagement, fundamental trust and well founded opinions during the sessions.

It was evident that participants care about the RCMP and are committed to supporting the CO in making the workplace a safe work environment for all employees.

For those of you who were unable to attend a session but were committed to contributing to the process I appreciate your subsequent input.

The professionalism and dedication expressed toward improving the organization kept me encouraged and motivated to submit the report as soon as possible to the Commanding Officer.

I hope the report summary reflects your input, experiences and recommendations.
Thank you to all of the employees who came forward to participate in the process of determining the existence of harassment within the RCMP in “E” Division.

Respectfully submitted,



CM Simmie Smith, B.A., M.B.A.
Project Leader
Division Diversity Strategist

Royal Canadian Mounted Police
Pacific Region Headquarters
Operations Strategy Branch
Email: simmie.smith@rcmp-grc.gc.ca

Summary Report Gender-based Harassment and Respectful Workplace

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The RCMP has an anti-harassment policy (*Prevention and Resolution of Harassment in the Workplace Policy*) and a Harassment Unit in “E” Division. Most participants were aware of the policy and the mandatory on-line training. For the most part; employees who participated in this consultation process expressed their desire to continue contributing to making the RCMP a safe place for all employees but did express their continuing loss of pride in being a member of the Force.

This project was specifically focused on gender-based harassment. Some participants expressed a concern that they were being perceived as “jumping on the bandwagon” resulting from the broad media coverage of this issue. As a result, some of the participants expressed their discomfort in engaging in the process at all. Additionally, early in the consultation process, it became clear that the issue of harassment extends beyond gender. Some male members expressed an interest in participating and were initially accommodated. However, female members reported that this created an uncomfortable environment which significantly impacted their willingness to be entirely open. The majority of the participants acknowledged there was a need to have only female members participate in these focus group sessions. In particular, most participants did not feel comfortable discussing the often sensitive details of their experiences in front of their male counterparts.

There has been a ground swell among some male members who felt they should have been included. It is well recognized that all categories of employees may have experienced the effects of bullying and harassment and therefore it may be advisable to hold further sessions to accommodate input from male members who wish to do so. There may also be a need to encourage a broader public service representation.

This report is a summary of the discussions about evolving issues, themes and recommendations that occurred during focus groups and private one on one meetings.

The majority of the participants expressed that there is a serious issue with harassment within the RCMP, but did not feel it could be described as “rampant”. Participants expressed that harassment complaints go unreported due to the perceived negative potential impacts to complainants. They shared their personal experiences with encountering harassment or shared their observations of it happening to colleagues but felt helpless in trying to address it.

Those who took part in the focus groups described three main impediments:

- **Trust**

For the most part, the current perception of the employees who participated in the consultation process expressed that they have no faith in the current reporting process. Participants expressed a reluctance to come forward and access the current system. They outlined the following concerns: they described the system as not having credibility; there was difficulty in accessing information; they had no trust in the process; felt there was little or no confidentiality; that the process takes too long and that there is lack of communication once a harassment complaint is filed. There was an overwhelming perception, based on personal observations that there are no consequences for the harasser other than having to transfer and/or be promoted. This perception of no “real” consequences left participants feeling that coming forward was not worth it.

- **Supervision**

Many of the participants expressed a lack of faith in supervisors taking harassment seriously. Some supervisors are perceived to have lost trust when they are not seen to “walk the talk” but rather tend to minimize unprofessional conduct by not addressing the employee’s behavior immediately. Overall, the participants felt the consequences for filing a harassment complaint outweighed the complaint itself. They shared an overwhelming frustration that many supervisors appear to lack the skills to deal with conflict in the workplace which can create a real or perceived complaint of harassment. There was also a general consensus that harassment frequently stems from the misuse of power by some supervisors.

- **Transparency**

Participants expressed strong views on their disappointment about the number of female members who felt they had to report harassment allegations to the media in order to have their voices heard. They feel this speaks to the lack of transparency and accountability displayed by management. Participants felt they currently have no confidence in the fairness and objectivity of the harassment complaint process. Participants further expressed that the lack of transparency leaves employees to speculate that senior management is covering up highly sensitive issues. Participants felt that if the system lacks transparency and the climate of disrespect within the organization continues to increase, the more likely it is that certain inappropriate behaviors will be taken for granted and perceived as normal. There was general consensus that harassment does have a serious impact on employees involved and the section/unit it occurs within.

The Perception Gap

There seems to be a significant body of opinion within the Force that harassment either does not exist or is substantially inflated. In fact, that opinion exists among some at all levels. Statistically, there is also support for this position. This has led some, even those tasked with addressing harassment, to muse about what all the fuss is about. It is easy to draw the conclusion that, “All is well.” As a result, there is an observable dichotomy of thought as to the veracity of complaints and why there is such a “fuss” being made by management and others.

The statistics relating to the number of harassment complaints do not seem to support the general observations and opinions expressed by the participants during the consultation process. Upon further examination of the results from these consultations however, it is clear that there is a close fit between the two seemingly opposing positions. That fit emerges as one listens to the anecdotes offered by the participants. In short, it relates to a broad-based discomfort with the reporting process, an unwillingness to be subjected to retribution or ridicule, a perceived lack of consequences, and a lack of trust and faith in confidentiality being maintained. The result is a significant failure to report incidents and an unwillingness to discuss the issues with supervisors or management. This failure has, in turn, resulted in the release of a pent up need to have the issues addressed. This, in part, seems to explain the recent spate of revelations to the media.

On balance, it should be recognized that often, complaints of harassment may involve bullying, workplace conflict, and/or performance management conflict. In order to be effective in dealing with the various types of complaints it is critical that we be able to differentiate among the different issues in order that they can be addressed in a manner that is appropriate to the specific circumstances of any incident.

Moving Forward

Majority of the participants strongly expressed the opinion that the issue of harassment cannot be dealt with by “tweaking” the current system. They have suggested a system that is independent of the current chain of command, investigators who are professionally trained specifically to deal with harassment and the sensitive issues involved, and the establishment of a confidential place to seek information and advice. In addition, there is a need to develop and conduct organization-wide education and awareness sessions with respect to harassment prevention and an enhanced complaint and support process. Participants felt the organization requires strong change leadership and not just strong change management to deal with the issues of harassment.

INTRODUCTION

Project Background

The Commanding Officer (CO) “E” Division requested a practical assessment of the Division’s current approaches to maintaining a respectful workplace; and expressed a strong interest in identifying and exploring new ways that victims of gender-based harassment can come forward and report incidents. In particular, he wanted to hear from a cross section of female regular members across the Division and indicated the need to have a report submitted as soon as possible. To accommodate the request in a timely fashion, focus groups were established across the Division to provide an opportunity for employees to come forward and express their concerns and recommendations aimed at creating a safe and healthy work environment.

This report is a summary of discussions of evolving issues, themes and recommendations that occurred during focus groups, private meetings and submissions by e-mail, the majority of which were received from female regular members ranging from the rank of constable to commissioned officers and civilian members from across the Division. Thirty-six female public service personnel and five male members also participated in the process. In total, 426 employees participated in the consultation process. Some employees expressed their discomfort in participating in an open focus group but indicated interest and willingness in offering personal experiences and suggestions for improving their work environment in more confidential circumstances. These employees offered written submissions or met in person with the project leader.

The role of the project leader was to engage employees, listen, record input and provide feedback to the CO. The focus groups provided an informal means of gathering data which was utilized to develop an aggregate perception based on input from a self-identified sample group of female employees within “E” Division.

It was noted early in the consultation process that harassment within the RCMP goes beyond gender however, for the purposes of the task assigned; the majority of the discussions were focused on issues of harassment that impacted female employees. Although concerns with sexual harassment were raised, the predominant theme raised by female members was with work place bullying. Further follow-up should be considered to address workplace bullying.

TYPES OF HARASSING BEHAVIOR

From the outset, all participants were given an assurance of confidentiality. For this reason, this report does not contain the specific details that were shared during the consultation sessions. Where quotes appear within the report, they have been shared with the express permission of the individual who made that comment. During the various sessions the types of concern, and specific examples that were shared ranged widely. There were examples of gender-based harassment which largely focused on male versus female work-performance attributes, e.g. strength, aggressiveness, communication styles, etc. There were also examples of inappropriate sexual behavior which ranged from unwanted and inappropriate innuendo to alleged criminal acts of indecent exposure. Also there were a variety of examples offered relating to individuals that perceived they were discriminated against based on gender, race and sexual orientation. Further there were examples of individuals who were only assigned menial tasks and were specifically excluded from the completion of the core assignments central to the job at hand.

Additionally, examples included members sensing that their input was being visibly diminished, and/or dismissed during briefings, debriefings, or meetings. This, most often, involved individuals who were visibly demeaned for their input in front of their peers. Participants explained that this became a problem when the incidents developed into a pattern of behavior. At least some of these examples related to poor leadership on the part of supervisors and lead-hand investigators.

There were various examples offered of a variety of behaviors which can best be described as bullying, workplace conflict, and issues relating to performance accountability.

COMMON THEMES EXPRESSED

Throughout the consultation process the involved employees participated enthusiastically and with great commitment to the Force. Discussions were wide-ranging and involved topics which, while important and of valid concern, were not within the scope of the objectives established for this project. These included but were not confined to such topics as recruiting, promotion, retention and the RCMP Act. Comments in these and similar areas have not been included.

What appear below are the aggregated common themes relevant to the issues of gender-based harassment. They represent general, consistent, and recurring issues that were commonly expressed by a clear majority of the participants.

Fear of retribution on the part of those that come forward

This concern arose consistently throughout the focus group sessions and clearly demonstrated that the current system does not provide an environment within which concerns can be explored and resolved before they become more serious or within which a complaint can be validated and resolved.

1. Participants strongly expressed that they were fearful of coming forward to report harassment as it could hinder promotional opportunities, have a negative impact on their careers, and possibly cause them to become a scapegoat for anything supervisors wanted to find fault with. They shared first hand experiences of those who did report harassment or made enquires and who were marginalized or perceived as witnessing a weak member.
2. The perception is that if you complain you're often moved from a desirable job or the work environment is made so difficult that individuals request a transfer.
3. The opinion was also expressed that the RCMP is known for moving the complainant rather than dealing with the problem.

A widely held perception that the “old boys club” is alive and well

A significant number of participants identified the “Old Boys Club” as the underlying problem with the failure to address harassment allegations. The reference to a “Club” expresses a reasonably widely-held belief that the current system delivers a response that pre-judges complaints and draws conclusions in a collusive manner. There is a belief that this impacts such things as how work assignments are given, how mediocre performers

and workplace conflicts are handled, how promotions are granted, how training opportunities are offered and in particular how some employees are treated within the organization.

The “Old Boys Club” may no longer be an appropriate descriptor for what the participants were relaying but many feel there is still a privileged group of individuals who receive benefits and opportunities which are not available to others. The perceived “Club” has expanded its membership to include women and men of different ages, years of service and category of employee, where outmoded ideas and behaviors persist, and at times poor performance is overlooked, condescending language is used, and friends get preferential treatment.

1. An important consideration in analyzing this perception is to examine whether poor performing “club members” are dealt with as effectively as they should be, rather than focusing solely on how rewards and privileges are assigned. In other words, is there an easily perceivable difference in the consequences that ensue from either positive or inadequate performance between employees?
2. Participants expressed the belief that the RCMP has a systemic problem with an inability to deal with poor performing “club members” and inappropriate behaviors. These are believed to eventually end in a harassment complaint initiated by employees who believe they have no other recourse and as a result become disengaged.
3. There is a belief that, in some cases, if you are a friend of your supervisor, you never have to worry about being held accountable.
4. Participants expressed frustration and other strong emotions when discussing their own personal experiences.
5. Participants expressed a perception that if a complaint is made, the harasser will simply be moved to another unit or promoted. Essentially, the impact on the complainant and the importance of the complaint itself is diminished.

Supervisors lack the skills to deal with conflict

Participants recognized that supervisors may be very knowledgeable in dealing with complex investigations and ensuring diary dates are met. However, some supervisors may not have all of the skills necessary or interest in dealing with conflict or harassment issues. There was a common perception that supervisors have the tendency to deflect the responsibility of dealing with harassment by portraying “it as a personality or workplace conflict.”

1. Participants commonly expressed an opinion that despite being an organization that is highly trained and equipped, the Force is unable to deal with conflict within itself.
2. Participants observed that not infrequently, when a supervisor observes or is approached about unacceptable, inappropriate or demeaning behaviors the employee is often told to “suck it up”, “get over it” or “rumor mongering” begins.
3. Participants expressed the opinion that supervisors should be able to truly understand and explain to employees the difference between harassment, workplace conflict, and work performance issues.
4. Participants stated the current policy provides employees the opportunity to speak out but remains ineffective due to supervisors not supporting it. It was further stated the organizational culture discourages speaking frankly and honestly about disrespectful behaviors especially concerning those of a higher rank.

5. Participants observed that some supervisors feel that if there are any harassment complaints within their unit it is a direct reflection on their managerial skill and are more concerned about that and its potential impact on possible future promotional opportunities.

The current reporting process is seen as lacking credibility

Participants shared a variety of frustrations they experienced when dealing with “the system” and stated they have no faith or trust in the process.

1. Investigations take too long and there is no feedback during the process about the status of the investigation and no clear direction or communication from anyone in the organization.
2. There is a sense that the accused members receive all the support and the victim is perceived as a trouble maker.
3. Complainants felt further victimized and treated with no respect for accessing the system.
4. The lack of definitive action also caused participants to start second guessing everybody around them.
5. Due to a lack of communication participants expressed feelings of disappointment, distrust, and lack of engagement.
6. It is perceived that there is a lack of consequence for harassment.
7. Participants are concerned with the stigma attached to filing a harassment complaint in the first place and are further dissuaded from filing a complaint given the perceived lack of likely consequences.

Lack of access to reliable and confidential advice

Participants expressed the need to have a confidential and reliable resource(s) upon whom they can rely to provide advice, support, and assistance.

1. There is a clear recognition that it is not always necessary to lodge a harassment complaint but there is often a need to have a reliable sounding board to talk with and from whom to get advice.
2. There is a concern that if someone discusses an issue with their supervisor or someone in HR that person may, in turn, breach confidentiality. In other words, there is no guarantee of confidentiality.
3. Members expressed that there is a lack of a reliable network upon which to rely for advice and support. This was especially acute at smaller isolated detachments.

Current on-line harassment training is inadequate

Participants stated their belief that the inadequate training provided on harassment is a reflection on how seriously senior management takes harassment. The current training is perceived as satisfying a mandatory requirement rather than addressing the real needs. Participants further expressed the opinion that current training provides supervisors and others a false sense of competency in addressing and dealing with harassment.

Some employees are taking advantage of the current environment

The publicity surrounding recent events of harassment within the RCMP has created an opportunity for some employees to take advantage of the situation. Participants feel the individuals who are taking advantage have minimized the seriousness of legitimate harassment complaints. Participants have witnessed members being held accountable for poor performance who are putting in harassment complaints against their supervisor. Essentially the concern expressed here is recognition that not all complaints of harassment are valid and that without a means of differentiating the valid from the frivolous complaints, the validity and import of all complaints is significantly diminished.

A hope that this is not a “flavor of the month” but will result in a long-term sustainable solution

Participants expressed a strong sense of engagement while attending the focus group sessions. Further, participants were encouraged by the level of commitment the CO has demonstrated toward addressing harassment. They are, however, concerned that once the media attention diminishes the issue will go away and, as a result, no real changes will be implemented. Finally, they expressed the hope that senior management will realize that it is important to continue with efforts toward the development of an effective means of dealing with harassment.

Care about the RCMP but losing pride in being a member

Many participants shared that they are embarrassed to admit they are a member of the RCMP. The negative publicity and the lack of leadership shown within the RCMP were identified as two contributing factors. Members, irrespective of gender, expressed their pride in being a member of the Force however, with increasing frequency they are finding fewer and fewer opportunities to express that pride publicly as a direct result of the overwhelming negative publicity that is so pervasive.

On numerous occasions the following comment was referred to: “1974 was the darkest year in the R.C.M.P. when females were granted permission to join.” This oft-repeated comment belies an attitude among some male members that is seen as demeaning and that undermines the value and considerable contributions of female members. It appears to be a symptom of an internal failure to address the concern of members of both genders as it relates to the admission of female members.

CONTRIBUTING FACTORS THAT LEAD TO HARASSMENT AND BULLYING IN THE WORKPLACE

There was discussion amongst participants who shared their experiences and perceptions when trying to deal with harassment or bullies in the workplace. At times this was emotional and very personal for participants to share with the rest of the group. The quotes provided below occurred over a number of years and are representative of the common themes that emerged during the consultation process. Four common factors that contribute to harassment and bullying supervisors were identified.

Power – A person uses his/her position or physical dominance over those who are perceived to be weaker to intimidate. The rank structure within the organization makes it more challenging for employees to identify when supervisors are abusing their power. Participants shared personal experiences of supervisors’ behaviors and actions.

“I am a two year member who knows better not to make a suggestion on how to do things differently even though it would improve the work environment. I experienced a “time out” with my supervisor who explained he was the boss and I was to learn the job before making suggestions. I was told what I learned in Depot was a social experiment and has nothing to do with real police work. I was embarrassed and humiliated in front of my coworkers.”

“I am at high risk being the single female on the unit. My boss makes inappropriate comments but I know better not to say anything”. I’ve talked to my peers about the inappropriate behavior but was told not to say anything or I would be sidelined.”

“I am tired of hearing some supervisors laugh at the employees who have reported harassment to the media. These were confident and committed members who are now feeling vulnerable. Why do we continue to hurt our own?”

“Not all of the claims brought forward are about suing the Force. Do our supervisors and others really think everyone who has experienced harassment are liars and if they do we have a bigger problem in our organization.”

“The RCMP need to recognize that what makes an aggressive, competitive and successful investigator may not necessarily translate to an effect supervisor, team leader or manager. These are separate skills. The manager needs to remember they are managing employees and not informants or agents.”

Self-esteem – a supervisor putting others down to boost one’s own self-esteem and confidence to help deal with personal feeling of inadequacy. Participants shared the frustrations of how uniform supervisors appear to have confidence when dealing with the public but when inside the organization the bullying mentality appears.

“I hear my boss laugh and put my co-worker down because he is off ODS for a legitimate reason. This shows no respect or compassion toward members who really need to be off.”

“My boss finds someone in the section to pick on and belittle. I feel for the new person that is transferred into our section.”

“The women I know that have encountered difficulty were strong independent and confident. These women were pushed out of jobs where they had expertise and interest and had to start over at an advanced point in their careers at jobs they did not choose. This is a serious and very real problem, going well beyond an unwelcome joke. It is uglier than most people think.”

“Harassment can be debilitating leaving a person to feel shaken, victimized, humiliated, angry and afraid. It erodes confidence and self-esteem. It requires debriefing at the very least.”

Difference – some have been targeted due to being different than the rest of the Unit. Participants expressed their strong commitment to having a work-life balance which often times does not provide them the time to engage in social activities with coworkers.

“I know by not attending the social functions I am perceived as an outsider and not trustworthy. I have a family that expects me to be home when not working.”

“My sexual orientation should make no difference to the members I am working with. I am a competent investigator. I am tired of hearing jokes and feeling excluded from the Unit.”

“I joined the RCMP to do a good job and I do not need to socialize with the people I work with off duty. I come to work after the rest of the Unit was together and I am made to feel like a loser. This is unnecessary stress to a job that requires so much out of you. Why is there an underlining rule that you must be at non work related functions that the boss sets up”?

“As an aboriginal member who has been around in the Force I am amazed at the racist jokes I continue to hear about aboriginals and other cultural groups. Why is this being tolerated in this day and age?”

“The RCMP is a reflection of Canada’s multiculturalism and we should be proud. Having members who reflect the communities we serve make us better at investigating crimes and understanding the communities. We need to embrace the differences and I want to feel part of the organization and not feel I am being tolerated.”

Historically a male dominated culture – participants expressed that they find themselves in a culture where inappropriate and dismissive behaviors are condoned by some supervisors and are seen as a normal behavior for many others in the workplace. The supervisors model the behavior which many others consider acceptable. This may, at least in part, be due to the paramilitary environment. It should be recognized that some elements of military and paramilitary training and discipline have traditionally been based on behaviors which now may be viewed as harassment and disrespectful.

“I attend a call and am thinking how to deescalate the situation. My male counterpart tells me to get the person in the PC and we will talk to him later.”

“I get back to the office and my supervisor calls me into his office and asks why it takes me so long before I attend another call. I use my communication skills rather than hand cuffing everyone I come in contact with. Why is this perceived to be the wrong way to police?”

“The attitude is buck up, shut up or get out.”

“If you do report harassment get ready to receive no support or back up from the RCMP. It’s an old boys club that is perceived to only support each other.”

“Such a great organization should not be abandoned because of the actions of a handful of dark hearted people. The problem arises, when the organization ineffectively deals with its problems forcing members to wits end in the media or with lawyers, having been abandoned otherwise. It is now that we have members harassing each other that harms us most, it is that we have manager ignoring it and allowing it to go on.”

“Utopia like statement made by the RCMP leadership that talk about the RCMP “family” leave employees with the false sense of security and safety. Facts are that not all employees see their coworkers as valued people never mind “family” members. When we tell our recruits they are part of a “family”, it disarms them, and leaves them less able to understand or cope afterwards.”

The majority of workplace bullying identified above is done by a supervisor to a subordinate. The fear of identifying and addressing harassment, for many of the participants, means speaking up about the inappropriate behaviors of their superiors. The concern of being sidelined and of having potential promotional opportunities disappear discourages participants from coming forward.

Senior management should not be insulated from the issues of bullying and harassment by those who report to them. There is a broadly-held perception within the Division that many, including supervisors, are not prepared to report these occurrences through their chain of command as these concerns could be viewed negatively.

PERSONAL CONSEQUENCES OF HARASSMENT

Many of the participants shared their experiences of trying to deal with workplace harassment and the effects it had on them personally. Participants observe that there seems to be lack of knowledge and compassion for those who have legitimate harassment complaints. The stress caused at work is often translated into the home life which seems to be forgotten. Some of the common effects were:

Stress, anxiety and sleep disturbance. – knowing that making a complaint will only add additional stress to the harassment experienced.

“I come to work and sit at my desk. I have no idea where the harassment complaint is at so I sit and wait. I try working on my files but cannot seem to stop thinking of what is going to happen to me for making a complaint.”

Inability to concentrate and make decisions at work – employees are left feeling not supported and left with no safe place within the organization to discuss how they are feeling. They start to doubt their abilities and competencies to do the job. This starts to affect their self esteem.

“I have no desire to work harder. Nobody has shown that they care about how I am feeling so why should I give more back to an organization that cannot deal with unprofessional members?”

Sense of isolation – after making a complaint employees feel they are perceived as a complainer and the employees within the Unit become aware of the complaint. They feel isolated by not being included in meetings, coffee breaks and social events.

“My supervisor is aware of my harassment complaint and expressed that I am on my own to deal with the stink eye from those who have become aware of my complaint.”

“When I come in the office I hear colleagues say, “here she comes ...shhhhhh.”

“I would never report harassment. I have seen what happens to those who have and their life was made hell by those in management positions who have used their authority to intimidate.”

“We wear a bullet proof vest to protect ourselves from the bad guys out there but really we need to be wearing the vest to protect ourselves from the bad guys inside our own organization.”

Reduced quality of home and family life – the level of frustration continues when employees are at home. Their spouse and kids become less important and they have no energy left to be involved in family events or decisions.

“After my shift, I go home and yell at my husband and kids. I am left feeling awful but I am so frustrated and have no place to go.”

“I am disinterested in my kid’s soccer games and attending any family functions.”

CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS

The participants appreciate that changing the culture will take time but expressed that the following critical success factors must be considered:

- A strong visible commitment from top management that is demonstrated by their behavior.
- Employees expressed that they are looking for supervisors who are empathetic, interested in their well-being, and prepared to take firm decisive action when harassment is identified. Supervisors need to understand their role and responsibility by demonstrating a commitment to the principles of a harassment-free workplace.
- The participants expressed a concern that often the problem is seen as an isolated situation that is local and confined in nature. In fact, they observed that individuals transfer within the Force, and as they do, so does the problem. Harassment is an organization-wide problem that affects all employees and should be addressed as a systemic issue.
- There is an onus on all employees to promptly address workplace harassment. Those who are the target of harassment need to have strategies to push back, and those who observe or receive reports of harassment need to understand that they must intervene and know how to intervene effectively.
- Information, advice, support, and assistance must be accessible, easily understood and utilized.
- All employees should be equipped with the skills to deal competently with bullying and harassment.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. IMPLEMENT GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR AN IMPROVED SYSTEM

The system that results from these consultations must be capable of inspiring confidence, trust, and engagement in all employees. This, in turn requires that the initiative must bring about lasting organizational change rather than simply updating the current policy. In order to accomplish this, that system will need to embrace four guiding principles as noted below.

FACTS:

Our process must be able to provide information that defines harassment, the process, and expected outcomes. It must also provide an opportunity to examine the specifics of any given situation against a factual understanding of how the system works and what options may be available to an employee. Easily understood information needs to be available to all employees so that they know that a system exists and, in general terms, what it is designed to accomplish. Additionally, employees have expressed a critical need for information that permits them to make a personal assessment of their unique situation and make a reasoned decision about what option to pursue towards resolution. This should include but not be limited to differentiation between harassment, workplace conflict, code of conduct, and performance management.

ACCESS:

Employees have an expectation of confidentiality and have asked for a portal which permits access to two key components, namely: 1) a sounding board with whom they can have a confidential discussion and through which they can receive factual information about the elements of their concern and guidance about available options for resolution; AND 2) a confidential means through which they can pursue resolution, formal or otherwise.

INDEPENDENCE:

While resolution of harassment concerns is an internal process under the direction of the C.O. and should remain so, it is necessary to provide assurance of equanimity, fairness, and transparency. Currently the perception exists that decisions are made within the chain of command (HR – Harassment Unit). Supervisors are often perceived as having a vested interest in ensuring a predetermined outcome. This leaves many employees without an independent sounding board with whom to discuss how best to proceed. The result is a lack of trust and confidence that a complainant's concerns will receive a fair evaluation. Whether this is true or not is of less importance than acknowledging that the perception has become the reality which, in turn, precludes having a system in which employees have the requisite confidences. In order to address this it is necessary to have concerns and complaints considered by a visibly independent unit outside of the everyday chain of command but under the overall umbrella of the C.O.'s oversight.

RESOLUTION:

Employees are asking for a resolution process that is fair, responsive, transparent, and that produces results in a timely manner while keeping all involved aware of progress as it is achieved. A fulsome review of the needs in this regard will require another initiative which exceeds the parameters of this project.

2. PROPOSED INITIATIVES

Participants acknowledged that the issue of harassment and bullying behavior cannot be resolved easily and may never be entirely resolved, but strongly suggested the CO provide direction and leadership in the following areas listed below.

A. FACTS

InfoWeb

- Provide a tool on the info web that assists employees in assessing the differences between harassment, work place conflict and or performance discipline.
- Provide the policy and some examples of harassment and suggestions on how to address the issue.

TOLL-FREE NUMBER

- Implement a toll-free confidential telephone service across B.C. that provides access to information and advice.

TRAINING

Voluntary

- Participants strongly felt every employee should be given the opportunity to attend training to gain the skills required when dealing with bullies and conflict in the workplace. There was discussion about the different skills needed when dealing with the public as opposed to dealing with work-oriented concerns. Issues that affect an individual's work environment, career opportunities and personal life are much more personal and are far more emotionally challenging than dealing with a conflict that is external to the organization and that is not connected personally to the employee.
- Provide equity training to address gender-specific communication styles in order to promote understanding and appreciation for those differences. This training would also cover stereotypes and discrimination relating to ethnicity, sexual orientation, and people with disabilities. Further, this training would be designed to address issues related to what is commonly referred to as "The Glass Ceiling". This would address such myths as: females are too emotional, too weak physically, not task oriented enough, and/or too dependent on feed-back from others.

Mandatory

- Provide mandatory in-classroom training that is delivered by people who are professionally trained and not RCMP members. Real life scenarios should be used without identifying names. More training and education for senior managers and supervisors so they know how to detect the signs and how to handle these types of situations when an employee reports these types of incidents.
- New employees should have anti-harassment education as part of their job training. Force wide refresher courses from year to year should also be available to make sure no one misses or forgets this important information.

Mentorship

- Establish a mentorship program so that more experienced employees are encouraged to share their knowledge with less experienced co-workers. This would provide a definitive means by which to address widely-held concerns about the “Old Boys Club” in that it would provide a network and easily accessed support for those who believe they are not part of that group when they require a sounding board, advice, and direction.

INFORMATION SESSIONS

- Utilize the opportunity to discuss harassment prevention, trends and issues during Supervisors’ Development Program, Management Development Program, Officer Safety Training, and Detachment Commanders’ Course etc.
- It was suggested that the supervisors need to have discussions with all employees about the seriousness of harassment and bullying behaviors that impact employees and eventually poison the unit.
- Provide clear guidelines to all employees regarding where to lodge a complaint.

B. ACCESS

INDEPENDENT ADVISOR – DISTRICT/HQ

One of the most common suggestions expressed by the participants was the need for support and advice without being judged. Confidentiality was identified as a major concern.

- Identify a person(s) that demonstrates a strong commitment to the issue of harassment. The current harassment unit requires more resources but is not the place where participants suggested they could go to seek confidential advice. It was recommended this person not be a regular or retired member as the RCMP members are perceived to be closely associated and not as independent as might be desired.
- As interim recommendation participants suggested every District have a key person to contact.

RESOLUTION PROCESS – Harassment, Workplace Conflict, Code of Conduct or Work Performance Issues

It is important to understand that, currently, complaints about a variety of inappropriate or unacceptable behaviors are being reported as “harassment.” These include workplace conflicts, bullying, behaviors that may constitute a breach of the code of conduct, or conflicts relating to work performance issues. While all such complaints deserve proper redress, each has very specific characteristics and sensitivities. The term bullying inserts yet another element which must be carefully addressed. It will be relatively easy to define what types of behavior constitute each concern. It will be considerably more difficult to be able to differentiate between each concern as well as, in some cases, being able to differentiate between harassment or bullying and appropriate, firm, unequivocal supervision and direction.

C. INDEPENDENCE

Confidentiality is identified as a major concern. The employee grapevine is part of the organization and can further isolate the victim. There were ample examples shared among the participants which indicate that some confidential information does get shared through the rumor mill resulting in isolation and ridicule.

CREATE A STANDALONE HARASSMENT RESOLUTION UNIT

- A divisional or national process to track the identities of those members who are the repeat subject of harassment complaints. Follow up to identify why this person is the repeat subject of complaints and if there are similarities in whom they harass, or what the harassment looks like. If the harassment is of an historical nature, follow up with current subordinates or co-workers to ensure the work environment is safe and healthy.
- All harassment complaints, whether “formal” or “informal”, should be recorded in an approved confidential system, noting the parties involved, the resolution, and other pertinent information.
- The investigation decision processes involved in harassment resolution should be streamlined to be concluded within “a reasonable time.”
- Consistent with the principles of administrative fairness, the complainant should be given periodic updates on the status of the internal investigation, and be provided a copy of the written defense/ counter-accusations from the respondent, if any.
- Consistent with the principles of administrative fairness, at the conclusion of the investigation into each complaint, the complainant should be provided with a report detailing the decision as to the validity of the complaint, the reasons for that decision, and a general description of the final outcome.
- Dishonesty, and attempts at coercion by an accused member should result in clear sanctions, while a respondent whose attitude drastically changes from being confrontational to becoming “remorseful” all of a sudden upon knowing his or her story is found untrue, should have all such behavior reflected in the final decision.
- If a member or employee reports harassment and chooses to relocate to a new work environment, what is done to follow up with that member to ensure they are well? Harassment can be debilitating, leaving a person to feel shaken, victimized, humiliated, angry and afraid. It erodes confidence and self-esteem. It requires debriefing at the very least.
- More regular Detachment or Unit audits/managerial reviews that ask specific questions about morale and harassment and a plan for how to manage harassment disclosures expediently.
- Participants expressed the need for supervisors to ask employees how they are doing so they become more aware of bullying behaviors in their respective units. There is an expectation that as a supervisor you will deal with unprofessional and offensive behaviors. It was also felt that too much has gone on

with the RCMP that is reported in the media which is eroding the public confidence in our ability to solve crimes and act professionally with victims of crime.

D. RESOLUTION

FAIR, RESPONSIVE, TRANSPARENT, TIMELY

Employees want to be treated fairly. Their lack of trust has been founded in a perceived lack of response from the current system. This, in turn, has arisen from examples of complaints that have been minimized, instances of being discouraged from raising concerns, and a perceived lack of consequences arising from complaints. In contrast employees want a system that responds to their concerns so that unwanted behaviors cease and are prevented. Further, they want a system that is transparent so that everyone understands what is and what is not considered harassment, understands how to access information, advice, and support, and that makes a clear unequivocal statement about the consequences that will result from harassing behavior. Finally, members want a system that provides a final resolution within a reasonable timeframe.

CONCLUSION

In general, the participants expressed a commitment and loyalty to the Force as well as an interest in supporting the necessary changes. They are seeking support from their supervisors and leadership from senior management in order to work cooperatively towards a professional work environment.

There seems to be a lack of understanding about the differences between harassment, workplace conflict and work performance issues. There is a clear need to define these types of concerns, recognize the unique issues within each and effectively address concerns as they arise. Additionally, it will be important to understand the gap between perception and reality, recognizing that harassment does exist, acknowledging it when it is reported, and supporting employees by ensuring timely resolution and a safe and respectful workplace. This may be a challenging task given that there are frequent situations where clear direction and discipline must be demonstrated in a policing environment. Throughout the consultation process, participants made it clear that there is a general recognition that not all complaints of harassment are valid and that there are those who will be willing to complain of harassment to avoid accepting their responsibility in a conflict. This too is a concern which must be addressed as we move forward.

In summary, the consultation process concluded that harassment does exist; however, it is an exaggeration to suggest that it is “rampant” in every aspect of the workplace. Employees want the opportunity to discuss their concerns and receive advice in a confidential and respectful setting and expect that when a legitimate complaint is identified that it will be taken seriously and resolved effectively in a timely manner. Employees also recognize that there is a problem with those who wish to take advantage of the system and understand that in doing so; those employees significantly undermine the Force’s ability to effectively address legitimate concerns.

There is an outstanding opportunity to join with all employees to design an improved response to harassment while at the same time, deal with poor performance and disingenuous attempts at avoiding responsibility.