Australian Human Rights Commission

Trusted Person Information Sheet and Consent Form

Project Title	Military Sexual Trauma Research Project
Principal Investigator	Hashini Panditharatne Erica Powell
Project Sponsor	Australian Human Rights Commission

What am I being invited to do?

We, the Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) are doing research on military sexual trauma in the Australian Defence Force (ADF). The AHRC is separate and independent from Defence. You can find out more about the AHRC on our website.

You have been invited to take part in this research because a participant has nominated you as their trusted person to provide support during their interview.

If you take part, we will ask you to join an interview with the AHRC to provide support for a participant.

Please read this information and ask us any questions.

What is the purpose of this project?

In this research project, we will do an online survey, hold interviews and take written submissions from current and ex-serving ADF members.

This form is about the interviews.

We are doing this research to understand how common military sexual trauma is among current and ex-serving members of the ADF and to learn directly from victim-survivors who have experienced it.

We want to understand:

- how common military sexual violence is
- how common military sexual trauma is
- the impacts of military sexual trauma
- what victim-survivors say they need
- what needs to change so responses are safer and more effective.

This project is organised and run by the AHRC as part of Recommendation 14 of the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide (RCDVS). The project team is led by the Sex Discrimination Commissioner.

If you are supporting a current serving member, you must have existing permission to access the base where interviews are held. The AHRC will not be able to assist you in accessing the base.

What is military sexual violence, and military sexual trauma?

Military sexual trauma refers to the lasting psychological harm that can result after experiences of sexual harassment or sexual assault during military service.

These experiences are often described as military sexual violence. This means unwanted or unwelcome sexual behaviours carried out against a service member in the course of their military service. It can happen on or off Defence premises, while a service member is on or off duty.

It may include behaviours used by fellow service members, ADF civilians, Defence civilians, ADF contractors, foreign military personnel, or others encountered in military settings.

Military sexual violence can include:

- sexual harassment
- sexual assault
- sex discrimination or discrimination based on sex
- sharing intimate images without consent
- stalking
- other sexually threatening behaviour.

Sexual violence in a military setting can feel different from civilian life because of things like rank, chain of command, close living and working conditions, a culture of silence, and expectations around service and loyalty. Military sexual trauma refers to the impact these experiences can have over time. It can include trauma responses, PTSD, anxiety, depression, and/or thoughts of suicide – especially when a person does not feel heard, protected, or properly responded to.

Not everyone who experiences military sexual violence will develop military sexual trauma. However, there is a strong link between the two, and understanding this link is important to improving how victim-survivors are treated within Defence and veteran systems.

Do I have to take part and can I change my mind?

Taking part is up to you

You get to decide whether you take part in this project as a trusted person. You can say yes or no.

You can change your mind at any time

If you do take part, you can stop at any time with no detriment to your career or future healthcare.

If you want to stop, you can do so at any time by leaving the room or video call. You do not have to tell us the reason. If you leave without checking in, someone from our team will check on you to make sure you're okay and offer support.

If you incidentally share information while supporting the participant, the information collected during the project will be de-identified and used for analysis. Once you stop taking part, we will not collect any more information about you.

Please only join this project if you are comfortable with this.

The project might stop for other reasons.

We might need to stop the project while you are taking part. If this happens, we will explain the reasons to you.

We may also ask you to stop taking part in the project if it is no longer in your best interests. If this happens, we will discuss this with you.

What do I have to do if I take part?

If you take part in this project as a trusted person, you will attend a 1-hour interview to provide support to the participant.

Defence members are deemed to be 'on duty' while participating in research.

The table below outlines what you will be asked to do in this project. For more information, please ask a member of the project team at mst.research@humanrights.gov.au.

What part of the research project?	What do I have to do?
When you start the project	Before the interview, you will receive information about the project and the role of a trusted person via the participant. On the day of the interview, you will: • receive a briefing from the AHRC • have an opportunity to ask questions • be asked to sign a consent form

	• agree to respect the privacy and confidentiality of the person you are supporting If you have any accessibility needs, accommodations or preferences, please let us know by emailing mst.research@humanrights.gov.au or speaking to us on the day.
During the project	In the interviews, we will ask the participant questions around three key themes: 1. What do you think is **helpful** when dealing with military sexual violence? 2. What do you think is **not helpful** when dealing with military sexual violence? 3. What **responses and supports do you think should change** to help people who have experienced or are experiencing military sexual violence? Participants are not required to discuss their personal experiences. What they choose to share is entirely up to them. Your role is to support the participant's wellbeing and participation. A trusted person is not the same as a legal representative or advocate. The project is not connected to, and cannot help participants with any legal proceedings or claims processes. You may: • sit with the participant throughout the interview • provide emotional and/or cultural support • help the participant feel comfortable and safe. You should: • respect the participant's choices about what they do or don't want to share • respect the privacy and confidentiality of everyone involved • behave respectfully throughout the interview. As a trusted person, you are not attending as a participant, legal representative or advocate. You should not:

	• answer questions for the participant • influence or direct their responses • pressure them to share information • speak on their behalf unless, requested by them i.e. as an accessibility accommodation • share information from the interview with others afterwards.
After the project completes	You can find project updates, including a report when published, on the AHRC website.



What are the benefits of taking part?

By supporting a participant to take part, you will help the researchers understand more about military sexual trauma, including:

- the systems and culture that leads to military sexual trauma
- the factors and conditions that may increase risk of military sexual trauma
- how responses can help or hinder victim-survivors' mental health.

This will help inform decisions about improving systems, services and outcomes for people who have been affected by military sexual trauma.

This knowledge may help people in the future.

You might not directly benefit from taking part in this project.



What are the risks and discomforts of taking part?

There are potential risks to you from taking part in this research project.

Chance of distress

The questions in the interviews cover sensitive topics and this may cause you and/or the participant distress. If this happens, you can take a break or leave the interview at any time.

Access a list of free services that provide counselling or psychological help. We will give you a copy of this list during the interviews.

Pressure to participate

It is unlikely, but you may feel pressured to participate in the project. Whether you participate is entirely your decision. If you choose not to participate there will be no detriment to your career or future healthcare. You may leave the interview at any time.

Breach of confidentiality

If you are attending the interview as a trusted person, there is a chance that the participant could share information from the interview with others outside of this project. All attendees are requested to:

- demonstrate respectful behaviour in the interview
- respect the privacy of the other people in the interview
- commit to the confidentiality of the interview.

Identification and re-identification

If you attend an in-person interview, others on your base including peers or leaders, may see you attending.

Please do not share identifying information during the interview. While interviews are confidential, the AHRC cannot guarantee that you cannot be re-identified from the information you share.

You should only share information that you are permitted to disclose. For example, do not disclose legal advice, communications with lawyers, litigation strategy, draft evidence, confidential settlements or settlement discussions, information covered by a confidentiality clause or non-disclosure agreement, or any information subject to a court order or other legal restriction. If you are unsure whether you can disclose information, you should seek independent legal advice.

What if I am, or want to be, part of the Class Action?

In October 2025, a class action was filed in the Federal Court of Australia against the Commonwealth of Australia on behalf of current and ex-serving ADF members who are women. They are seeking compensation for those who may have experienced gender-based sexual assault, harassment and/or discrimination whilst serving in the ADF at any point between 13 November 2003 and 25 May 2025.

Being part of, or wanting to be a part of, the Class Action does not prevent you from taking part in this project. Similarly, you can take part in the Class Action even if you have already contributed to this project.

The project is not related to the Class Action and was not influenced by the Class Action. We will not ask you about the Class Action. We ask that you don't share information about the Class Action during the survey, in interviews, or in your written submission. Further information, can be found on the ComCover website.

AHRC may have an obligation to disclose your personal information to a third party under certain circumstances

The AHRC will comply with our obligations under the *Privacy Act 1988 (Cth)* to keep your personal information private. There are some circumstances where the AHRC project team must disclose personal information you share with us to a third party. These circumstances are outlined below.

1. In all states and territories, if the AHRC project team reasonably believes we need to disclose information you have shared with us to a third party to lessen or prevent a **serious threat** to life, health or safety of any individual or public safety, we may do so. The AHRC project team must take all reasonable steps to seek your consent **before** disclosing your information to a third party.

2. If you share information about harm that has happened or is likely to happen to you or another person because of domestic and family violence **in the Northern Territory** and the police have not been notified yet, we must report what you have told us to the police. The AHRC project team will take all steps to inform you of our obligation **before** contacting the police. We will be guided by you, as much as possible, about how and when the police should be told.

The AHRC has obligations under the *Freedom of Information Act 1982 (Cth)* and documents provided to or created by the AHRC may have to be disclosed by the AHRC in response to a Freedom of Information request, noting there may be relevant exemptions to disclosure.

AHRC will not share your information with Defence. However, other attendees, such as the participant, may be required to report to Defence if you mention something that meets the definition of a "notifiable incident" under *Defence Instruction (AG4) Incident Reporting and Management (2026)*, or if a current serving member is at risk of suicide. These reporting obligations are set out in the Instruction and the *Defence Complaints and Alternative Resolution Manual* (Chapter 9, Part 2).

Participants are advised of the above reporting obligations and participants should avoid disclosing any information that may cause harm to themselves or others.

How will my information be used for this project?

This section tells you how this research project will collect, store, use, share and/or dispose of your information. If you do not want us to collect this information, you cannot participate in this project. If you would like to know more, see our Privacy Policy.

As a trusted person, you are not expected to answer questions or share your experiences. If you incidentally share information while supporting the participant, the information collected during the project will be de-identified and used to:

- analyse and identify key themes and findings

- develop case study examples for the purpose of communicating about the findings of the Project
- prepare policy or practice recommendations for the ADF
- compose and publish resources and a final report.

Collecting your information

We will collect information for the project directly from you when you participate in an interview. As a trusted person, we will collect information such as:

- your preferred name
- any relevant information you may incidentally share while supporting the participant.

Keeping your information safe

To keep your information safe, we will:

- follow all relevant privacy requirements
- store information securely on the AHRC's SharePoint workspace with access restricted to the Project Team
- take steps to prevent anyone from accessing information that identifies you unless they are authorised to do so
- give information a code and keep them separate from your name or contact information.

You can ask us to tell you what information we have collected about you as part of this project. If your information is not correct, you can also ask us to change it. For privacy-related complaints, requests and enquiries, you can contact the AHRC's Privacy Officer at privacy@humanrights.gov.au.
If you have any complaints about how we are managing your personal information, you can also contact ddva.hrec@defence.gov.au.

AHRC collects and handles personal information in line with the *Privacy Act 1988* (*Cth*), the *Archives Act 1983* (Cth), and our Privacy Policy. Under Records Disposal Authority 2003/00211156 – 'Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission: Complaints handling; Human rights compliance', issued by the National Archives of Australia, we will keep your information for a minimum of 5-10 years. The National Archives of Australia requires ongoing retention of records on ADF and veteran suicides, suicide prevention, and Defence abuse allegations. Project data is included and may need to be kept beyond 10 years while these requirements remain in place.

After this, we will permanently remove any information that directly identifies you but keep the de-identified information.

Sharing your information with others

We will share some of your information with these organisations:

- **A transcription service provider (DAATS)** will transcribe audio from interviews to help us use what you share with us.
- The project's **Expert Advisory Committee** and **Government Committee**: we will share de-identified data via updates to these key governance committees.
- **The Defence and Veterans' Services Commission (DVSC)**: we will share de-identified data for the Inquiry into Military Sexual Violence (see below).
- **Departments of Defence and Veterans' Affairs High Risk Ethics Committee (DDVA HREC)**: in accordance with DDVA HREC Standard Operating Procedures, we may be asked to share study documentation as part of monitoring, auditing or inspections. This will not include sharing any identifiable data.
- **Other parties if legally required**: By law, we may be required to share your information with others in certain circumstances as outlined on pg 7.

Publishing project information

We will share certain information from this project so that others can use it and understand the study findings. We may use quotes, excerpts, summaries or case examples taken from what was shared in the interview, which may include something you said as a trusted person, but no information that may identify you will be published. We will make this project information available through an AHRC report and resources. **By being in this project, you agree to us sharing project information for these purposes**.

If you could potentially be identified in any public reports, we will ask for your consent before publication.

How will my information be shared for future research?

Sharing this data may help improve new research projects in the future. When we share interview data, we will take steps to make it difficult for anyone to link this data back to you and the participant. This includes removing information that could easily identify you or the participant, like your names or contact information. There is still a small chance that someone could identify you again.

By participating in this project as a trusted person, you agree to us sharing your de-identified data for research that is closely related to this project, namely the DVSC Inquiry into Military Sexual Violence (RCDVS Recommendation 25). This Commission is separate and independent from Defence and from the AHRC. Information about the Inquiry is available here.

If you agree to share your data, you will not be told about any results from this project.

More information about how we will handle your personal data is available in the AHRC Privacy Policy.

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Who is running and paying for this project?

This project is being organised and run by the AHRC.

The project is receiving funding from The Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet.

Who has reviewed and approved this project?

The ethical aspects of this research project have been approved by the DDVA HREC.

This project will be carried out according to the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2025). This statement has been developed to protect the interests of people who agree to participate in human research studies.

Comments or complaints about how this project is being run

If you have any complaints or concerns about the way this project is conducted, please do not hesitate to contact the researchers at mst.research@humanrights.gov.au, or you may prefer to contact the DDVA HREC Secretariat on Telephone: 0473 659 822 or via ddva.hrec@defence.gov.au.

Key contacts and where to find more information.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information about our project. You can contact a member of the project team at any time to ask questions.

Phone: (02) 9284 9600 to reach:

Hashini Panditharatne	Lead, Director (Prevalence)
Erica Powell	Director (Consultation and Engagement)

You can find out more information about the project by visiting our website: Military Sexual Trauma Research Project.

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Consent to take part in this research project: This means you can say yes or no.

By signing this consent form, I acknowledge that:

- I freely agree to take part in this research project as a trusted person.
- If I choose not to participate there will be no detriment to my career or future health care.
- I am free to leave the interview with no detriment to my career or future health care.
- I am deemed to be on duty whilst participating in this research.
- I have read, or have had read to me, the Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form and understand what is involved including the collection and use of my personal and sensitive information.
- I understand that an audio recording of the interview will be made for the purposes of transcription with the participants' consent.
- I consent to the information I share, including personal information and sensitive information, being collected and used by the AHRC for the purposes of the Project.
- I agree to my de-identified data being used for the DVSC Inquiry into Military Sexual Violence (RCDVS Recommendation 25), and shared with the project's governance committees.
- I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and am satisfied with the answers I received.
- I understand the potential risks of participating, including that the AHRC cannot guarantee I cannot be identified or re-identified as a participant in this project.
- I am required to respect the privacy and confidentiality of others in the interview by not discussing opinions or events raised in the discussion or identifying participants outside of that environment.
- If I share information that raises concerns about my safety or the safety of others, it may be necessary for the AHRC to disclose this information to the police and/or other relevant authorities to ensure a person's safety.
- I understand the AHRC's obligations under the *Freedom of Information Act 1982 (Cth)*.
- I understand the information I share will be destroyed between 5-10 years after the end date of the Project unless the National Archives of Australia requires ongoing retention of the information.

- I understand that the information I share will be kept confidential, except as set out above in the Participant Information Sheet & Consent Form provided to me, and as required by law.
- I understand that the findings of this Project and case studies and examples may be published, and that publications will not contain my name or any identifiable information about me.
- I will receive a signed copy of the Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form~~,~~ to keep.

☐ I have read and understood the above, and consent to participating in an interview.

Person taking part in the research project

Name: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____