

2023 Public Description of Work for Action Collaborative on Preventing Sexual Harassment in Higher Education

Soteria Solutions

NOAA Fishery Observers Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment (SASH) Prevention: Strategic Resistance Curriculum

Relevant Rubric Area(s):

- Bystander Intervention Programs (specific to higher education or field, and/or audience).
- Other efforts to remediate the harm of sexual harassment and/or support those that experience sexual harassment

Description of Work:

Purpose and goals of project:

Under a federal contract with National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Soteria Solutions created the NOAA Fisheries Observers Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment (SASH) Prevention: Strategic Resistance Curriculum. Observers collect data from U.S. commercial fishing and processing vessels as well as from shoreside processing plants and receiving vessels. They are professionally trained biological technicians that gather data on what's caught and discarded by U.S. commercial fishing vessels. Like other field research settings, the environments in which Observers work can be socially isolating and presents physical, emotional, and psychological risk factors that increase risk of SASH. The Strategic Resistance Curriculum is grounded in evidence-based bystander intervention and strategic resistance strategies, empowers Observers to take action and seek support during SASH incidences, and enhances Observers' coping and resilience skills.

The term *strategic resistance skills* describes things that you can do to avert, minimize or deflect situations of harm directed at you. What is important is that you do whatever feels safe for you, including not doing anything. Actions can include a variety of skills/responses, depending on what is comfortable for you in the situation. For example, using humor or exaggeration in response to an inappropriate comment, asking the person to clarify, confronting them or letting them know that you are uncomfortable with what they said or did, or speaking to someone else, etc.

What we did and how it was done:

Stakeholder input - Working closely with NOAA's Workplace Violence Prevention and Response (WVPR) Office and NOAA Fisheries Observer Program staff members, we

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identified SASH risk and protective factors present in Observers' work environments. We conducted key stakeholder interviews with NOAA staff members who had previously served as Observers and currently provide Observers with technical training, support while deployed, and debriefing upon completion of their duties. We learned that Observers are often alone (sometimes there are two Observers) representing NOAA on commercial fishing vessels and in shoreside processing plants. This isolation decreases the likelihood of others intervening on Observers' behalf. Additionally, the conditions under which they work can be physically challenging with long shifts, unpredictable weather, and seasickness. Observers, particularly those on fishing vessels, work, live, sleep, and eat with crew members in very cramped spaces, with little to no privacy. These physical, emotional, and psychological situational factors increase the risk of Observers experiencing SASH.

Literature Review – Based on what we gathered from WVPR and key Observer stakeholders, we concluded that strategic resistance techniques to prevent SASH were needed when bystander intervention was not an option for Observers. Such techniques include verbal responses, building and leveraging a support network, assessment of risk and protective factors, and setting boundaries. We conducted an extensive literature review on the effectiveness of strategic resistance trainings, and approaches. Extensive research (Senn et al, 2022, Crann et al, 2021, Radtke et al, 2020, and Riquelme et al, 2020) has confirmed that strategic resistance is an important component of response training, along with bystander intervention and culture change, and that at-risk individuals who receive science-based strategic resistance skills training are less likely to experience harm, more able to respond effectively, less likely to blame themselves for what happened, and to heal more rapidly when harm occurs. Our literature review confirmed that resistance training is empowering and effective for those who receive it, that self-blame and harm is reduced, and that responsibility for change is not placed on the targeted person.

Curriculum Development – We developed the Strategic Resistance Curriculum using information gathered from key Observer stakeholders, WVPR staff members, and best practices and evidence-based elements of bystander intervention and strategic resistance prevention programs. We used an iterative approach to curriculum development, with WVPR and stakeholders providing feedback at several points in time, including during a pilot training where we demonstrated the program and solicited feedback that we later used to make course corrections. We created a train the trainer model where we first created the Strategic Resistance Curriculum and then built the train the trainer framework to support teaching NOAA WVPR and Fisheries Observer staff members how to implement the curriculum. We also developed a virtual resource toolkit for Observers to download on their phones so that they could access this important information when they did not have cell service.

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What you did and how it was done (this should be the primary focus of your description, and it should include how, and which stakeholder groups were involved in the work, and some information on when the work was done)

The goal of the Strategic Resistance Curriculum is for participants to identify themselves as empowered individuals and bystanders who can safely support victims/survivors and who can interrupt situations that could lead to SASH. This program is different from others in that it:

- Attempts to overcome resistance and defensiveness of participants,
- Does not send victim-blaming messages, intended or unintended,
- Promotes engagement of the broader community in prevention and response, and
- Acknowledges that factors of identity (how people perceive themselves and how other people may perceive them) play an important role in the strategies that someone may choose when deciding to intervene.

The curriculum creates an awareness of SASH, its prevalence and consequences and helps participants develop strategies for intervention: before SASH occurs thereby de-escalating risky situations, during a SASH incident that is happening, and after a SASH incident. We teach participants to be sensitive to survivors' needs and wants but driven by strategic resistance and bystander intervention perspectives and sense of responsibility. Participants are taught to balance responsibility to intervene with their own need for safety and self-care. We impart skills that decrease the ambiguity in situations where the risk for SASH is high and empower them to effectively intervene. We teach participants intervention skills for situations in which friends, acquaintances, or strangers may be involved.

Learning objectives include:

- Recognize sexual assault and/or sexual harassment (SASH),
- Appreciate the positives and benefits of being an Observer,
- Identify the potential effects of experiencing and witnessing SASH incidents, and
- Learn and practice strategic resistance and bystander intervention skills.

Current status, next steps and evaluation:

We have fully developed the Strategic Resistance Curriculum and the corresponding train the trainer curriculum. Soteria Solutions conducted a pilot of the train the trainer curriculum with WVPR staff members, and we used this feedback to make course corrections and adjustments to the curriculum and resource toolkit. Beyond the pilot, we have conducted two train the trainer sessions and distributed training evaluations.

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Based on evaluation feedback, we have made slight adjustments and finalized all curriculum and resource materials. NOAA trainers will implement the Strategic Resistance Curriculum during the mandatory Observer training in all regions.

Next steps for the work:

NOAA trainers will implement the Strategic Resistance Curriculum during the mandatory Observer training in all regions. Soteria Solutions plans to publish, either in a white paper or scholarly article, the strategic resistance literature review that we conducted to inform the development of the Strategic Resistance Curriculum. We welcome the opportunity to partner with another workplace that has employees or contractors who are working in isolated, high risk and low protective factor environments to adapt the Strategic Resistance Curriculum to meet their populations' needs.

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