

VicSESVA

Conduct and Culture Survey

For Volunteers and Staff

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VicSESVA Conduct and Culture Survey 2021

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	4
No longer silent.....	4
The extent of cultural problems.....	5
Engagement in the conversation	5
THE SURVEY.....	7
Assistance from VicSESVA.....	8
Constraints.....	8
Responses.....	9
Demographics.....	10
Data analysis.....	10
Identifying features.....	11
THEME 1: EXPERIENCES OF BULLYING/HARASSMENT/DISCRIMINATION/MISCONDUCT.....	12
General experiences.....	12
Type of bullying, harassment, discrimination, misconduct etc.....	12
Gender-related types of bullying, harassment, discrimination, misconduct etc.....	16
Staff experience of bullying, harassment, discrimination, misconduct etc.....	17
The effect of negative behaviours and culture.....	22
Support.....	25

VicSESVa Conduct and Culture Survey 2021

THEME 2: EVIDENCE.....	27
THEME 3: ACTION TAKEN.....	28
THEME 4: INVESTIGATION PROCESS.....	31
THEME 5: YOUR MENTAL HEALTH.....	36
RECOMMENDATIONS.....	44
Complaints process.....	44
Training for Managers and Controllers.....	44
External dispute resolution.....	45
Reporting and measuring.....	46
Accountability.....	48
Support.....	49
A bullying and harassment hotline.....	49
Sorry seems to be the hardest word.....	50
CONCLUSION.....	51
Costs of inaction.....	53
Why am I a VICSES volunteer?.....	54
SUPPORT: HELP LINES AND RESOURCES.....	55
REFERENCES.....	57
APPENDIX A: DEFINITIONS.....	60
APPENDIX B: SURVEY RESULTS SUMMARY	
<i>Appendix B is available on request as a separate document</i>	

VicSESVA Conduct and Culture Survey 2021

INTRODUCTION

“All I wanted was to be fairly treated”

In 2021, after extensive discussions with volunteers and staff, VicSESVA worked with individuals and groups to gain a greater understanding of issues of conduct and culture in VICSES.

VicSESVA received numerous complaints from members who believed issues they had experienced in their local Unit or which they had raised with VICSES had been inadequately managed. In some cases, the members had suffered significant detrimental mental health consequences.

VicSESVA developed the ‘Conduct and Culture Survey for Volunteers and Staff’ to allow all VICSES workers the opportunity to voice their concerns about their experiences in VICSES and to highlight issues which may negatively affect sector capability, recruitment, retention, member welfare, workplace practices, and more. The survey provides valuable insights into culture and conduct matters and VicSESVA suggests that it can form part of a solutions-based approach which can be repeated annually to gauge ongoing trends in cultural change.

No longer silent

In the 2 months from December 2020 to January 2021, VicSESVA received detailed submissions from members concerning 26 different cases of bullying, harassment, discrimination, misconduct; some of which affected many more people than the complainant. It was a period in which multiple workplaces were coming under increasing scrutiny for their unsatisfactory cultural

VicSESVA Conduct and Culture Survey 2021

practices and various cases received extensive media coverage, including some with allegations of physical and sexual assault, such as in Federal Parliament and other EM agencies such as the RFS, CFA and AV. People were no longer prepared to be silent.

The Extent of Cultural Problems

There is no systematic measurement of negative cultural issues or mental injury in VICSES, even though these may be critical incidents. While there is a large amount of WH&S data quantifying vehicle scratches and dents, trips and falls in the office, or minor bruising, there may be no mechanism for assessing mental injury. Many volunteers leave the service quietly rather than persist in a damaging work environment. Those who take their complaint further through formal processes often feel they are victimised, and that the process itself does little to resolve their complaint, or that the process compounds their stress and trauma. This survey of conduct and culture can provide a valuable voice for members, where the information can be systematically gathered and analysed.

Engagement in the Conversation

There is a widely held view that in the EM sector there are historical practices which may not reflect contemporary community expectations, and which fall short of accepted social and workplace standards of behaviour, gender equity and personal safety. VicSESVA continues to actively advocate in every possible forum for meaningful cultural change to be effected in VICSES and across the EM sector. VicSESVA has contacted and discussed these issues to varying degrees with volunteers; ministerial offices of the Minister for Police and Emergency Services, the Minister for Women and the Prevention of Family Violence and the Minister for Workplace Safety; with VHREOC, Phoenix Australia, the Centre for Innovative Justice, Justice Connect and

VicSESVA Conduct and Culture Survey 2021

EMV's Volunteer Consultative Forum (VCF); with the VICSES Board, VICSES Executive, VICSES staff; and with other EM agency representatives and colleagues¹. The conversation is important and has broad engagement.

¹ VicSESVA officers have been actively involved with EMV, AFAC's VMTG, BNHCRC, independent research etc., contributing to strategic plans such as EMV's Emergency Management Statement, Strategic Priorities for Volunteering in Emergency Management and 3Vs Uncovering the Hidden Value; the VMTG Volunteer Inclusion Guideline, the SES Fit for Task project and the Positive Mental Health in Young Adult Fire and Emergency Services Personnel project.

VicSESVA Conduct and Culture Survey 2021

The Survey

The survey asked:

While serving as a VICSES volunteer or staff member, have you experienced or been exposed to issues such as bullying, sexual harassment, discrimination, poor behaviour, cultural problems, unsatisfactory dispute outcomes or misconduct processes?²

The survey questions³ were designed around the following themes:

1. Experiences of bullying, harassment, discrimination, misconduct etc.
2. Evidence
3. Action taken
4. Investigation process
5. Your mental health
6. Workplace culture
7. Additional comments

The survey ran for 6 weeks in May-June 2021. It was anonymous, with questions that provided both quantitative and qualitative data. There was a total of **61 questions**, many of which could be answered with more than one choice. A total of **285 people participated** in the survey. Five of the questions provided text boxes for additional comments. The additional comments submitted by

² Definitions are attached in Appendix A. These were drawn from sources such as Fair Work Australia Guides.

³ A summary of survey question results is contained in Appendix B which is a separate document. This is available on request from VicSESVA.

VicSESVA Conduct and Culture Survey 2021

participants were numerous and detailed; **a total of 367 were provided**, ranging in detail from one line to one page in length. 144 of these comments are cited throughout this report.

Assistance from VicSESVA

Throughout the consultation with members and the development of the survey, VicSESVA has continued to offer support to members wishing to access counselling or psychologist services, as many members expressed distrust with using VICSES agency staff for this, or reported that their confidences had been breached in the past, for example:

“Colleagues in my position have been sent to wellbeing counselling afterwards which exacerbates the problems and victimises them further - I have heard this from everyone I've talked to. One such colleague told me that she knows EVERYTHING I said to the person at State HQ - a very serious breach in highly confidential discussions”.

VicSESVA also publicised contact details for help lines such as Lifeline and Beyond Blue in emails, the VicSESVA magazine *Phoenix* and the survey itself.

Constraints

There were some considerations related to survey uptake:

- a) VicSESVA has a limited mailing list of individual members (only those who have actively signed up to our website) to whom we can directly promote the survey, as VicSESVA is

VicSESVA Conduct and Culture Survey 2021

not supported by VICSES⁴ to canvass the whole VICSES volunteer cohort.

Notwithstanding that limitation, 285 people have come forward to explain their individual experiences, which might indicate a more far-reaching cultural issue than previously assumed, with many more examples yet to be discovered;

- b) The survey was designed to specifically address the subject matter, and if participants answered that they had not experienced or witnessed any matters, the survey would be concluded, so only those participants with something specific to report completed the survey (i.e. the survey elicited a targeted response);
- c) VicSESVA has no mechanism for contacting VICSES staff members, so any employee participants were appraised of the survey because they also served as a volunteer, by word of mouth, or chance. VicSESVA notes VICSES' concern expressed to us that we had "no right" to survey staff⁵, but the survey was voluntary and no staff were pressured to complete it. VicSESVA considers that issues of culture affect the whole workforce, and both volunteers and paid staff can be actively engaged in change-making.

Responses

The survey was offered to both volunteers and staff, as VicSESVA had also been contacted by staff members who had described their unsatisfactory experiences. The survey was also open to

⁴ All Units are members of VicSESVA (this has been the case since the Association was formed in 1983), therefore individual members of all those Units are automatically joined. However, VicSESVA cannot contact individual members directly. VicSESVA can only send communications to a generic Unit email, which may not be forwarded to individual members. VICSES have declined our requests to be able to email all volunteers directly through their personal SES email accounts citing privacy concerns.

⁵ CEO, VicSESVA meeting with VICSES Executive, 10 June 2021

VicSESVA Conduct and Culture Survey 2021

former volunteers or staff, as there are many reports of people's mental health being significantly affected for extended periods of time. Although there was no way of contacting these people, many retain social links to their Unit or colleagues, and it is assumed they may have received the survey from current VICSES members.

Demographics

Of the 285 participants in the survey, almost 15% (42) were employees (or employees who also volunteered with a Unit).

66% of participants were Male, 30% were Female, 4% preferred not to say.

26% of participants were under 5 years' service, 25% had served from 5-10 years and 18% had served from 10-15 years.⁶

VicSESVA considers this a representative response rate and demographic.

Data Analysis

Figures are expressed in percentages (of answers to questions) where that can be accurately determined.

Figures are expressed in numbers for questions where participants may provide more than one response.

Each response is counted, i.e. while there is a total of 285 participants in the survey, they may tick more than one option in the questions, therefore there may be more responses than the survey's total number of participants. For those questions, the top 3-4 choices are highlighted in this report.

⁶ *This data approximates the demographics of the service*

VicSESVA Conduct and Culture Survey 2021

Identifying features

This anonymous survey is intended to be an open forum where people can raise issues without fear of retribution. Identifying features such as Unit names or people's names have been redacted. Job titles (e.g. 'Regional Manager') are retained for clarity. It is not inferred that any person who currently holds any such job titles should be identified as the subject of any of the qualitative comments, as staff changes occur on a regular basis and it is undetermined whether survey participants may be reflecting on historical issues.

THEME 1: EXPERIENCES OF BULLYING, HARASSMENT, DISCRIMINATION, MISCONDUCT ETC.

In this theme, participants were asked if they had ever witnessed, experienced or been involved in incidents involving bullying, harassment, sexual harassment, discrimination or misconduct etc. in the VICSES workplace (office or LHQ, or out on a RFA), as either a target, witness or perpetrator. They were asked what type of conduct occurred, whether it was repeated, how long it lasted, who was the perpetrator, who was the target, whether it affected their health and wellbeing, and whether they received support or took time off. These experiences can be grouped relating to categories of general, type, staff, or gender.

1. General experiences

There were 328 reports in the top three categories:

133 I have been the target of bullying etc.

109 I was a witness who observed bullying etc.

86 I have been a support person for someone who was the target of bullying etc.

2. Type of bullying, harassment, discrimination, misconduct etc.

The question provided a list of 26 categories to choose from and the participants selected multiple choices.

VicSESVA Conduct and Culture Survey 2021

There were 371 reports in the top 4 categories:

98 Negative comments in front of other volunteers, staff or the public

94 Belittling, patronising or condescending behaviours

90 Verbal abuse

89 Favouritism (e.g. being treated less favourably than others or excluded from aspects of work reserved for more favoured people)

The next range of most common types of behaviour (288 reports) were:

86 Discrimination

75 Exclusion or marginalisation

70 Unwarranted criticism

57 Aggression (e.g. shouting, ranting, swearing, thumping the desk)

There were many qualitative comments which articulated concerning experiences, for example:

- After 35 years with the VICSES and many years as a Controller, I was bitterly disappointed that the first time I requested some support from region, all I received was a lot of false promises and a false hope that I would be supported. My issues were that a small group of young volunteers believed they were entitled to do what they wanted. This included breaking VICSES policy and endangering their colleagues and themselves. The solution was very simple, but VICSES HR made a mess of it.
- No opportunity to voice my side of accusations made falsely about me. Damage to my personal reputation in a small rural community.

VicSESVA Conduct and Culture Survey 2021

- I essentially feel like I wasted 8 years of my life.
- I raise this with my Controller and he dismisses it. I feel it's on me to call out all their s***** behaviour - transphobia, homophobia, sexism and racism - and it's exhausting. It's making me want to leave the service and I'm super over it.
- I have only begun in SES and have gone out of my way to fit in but I constantly come home upset, my partner advises me not to go but I keep going back in the hope that things will improve but they don't.
- Staff Officer told me "This is my patch and if you step out of line I will stand you down and send you home".
- I was told "if you don't like the way the unit is run then you should leave" and "we do not have to consult with members in anything".
- Unit management team perpetrating conduct unbecoming of leadership group in relation to transgender issues and personal relationship matters among members.
- I've been excluded, bullied and ultimately forced out of my role and physical membership in the unit along with many others.
- A, B, C and D (Regional Units) have a very toxic, unhealthy, discriminatory culture which is absolutely rife with bullying, favouritism, manipulation, exclusion and completely

VicSESVA Conduct and Culture Survey 2021

unprofessional behaviour. Members are leaving in droves after being bullied and harassed by the Controllers of these units and (staffer) at East Region.

- SES are scared of him as I am, but I'm just the little forgotten person in this and nobody wants to hear from me...SES just brush it under the carpet and hope it will go away but it won't as I won't be the last with this person.
- I no longer have the faith or pride in my uniform that I once had, and feel a great sense of loss at not being able to participate as I once did from the behaviour of others.
- Volunteers are the backbone of the past, present and future of SES existence yet we are poorly treated, our welfare and input disregarded as irrelevant, not supported whatsoever in times of crisis and need in favour of lying, misogynistic, micromanaging UMT⁷ members and regional members enabled by support of State⁸. Disappointing and disgusting to say the least. SES as a whole should be ashamed.
- VICSES is not to be trusted and resembles the NSW corrupt police department during the 1980s. VICSES needs a total overhaul. It needs an independent investigation body with powers from parliament and standardized procedures.

3. Gender-related types of bullying, harassment, discrimination, misconduct etc.

⁷ UMT = Unit Management Team, the volunteers with senior roles who meet and function as the management team for the running of the Unit. These roles may include Controller, Deputy Controllers, Section leaders (it varies from Unit to Unit).

⁸ Members often use the term 'State' to refer to the Victorian Head Office staff

VicSESVA Conduct and Culture Survey 2021

There were 134 reports in the top 4 categories most often associated with gender:

47 coercive control

41 unwanted attention

34 sexual harassment

12 stalking

It is more likely (although not excluding males) that female participants identified these 4 categories. As there was a total of 85 female survey participants and 134 reports, each female participant has clearly experienced more than one of these categories.

It must be emphasised that these categories are not inconsequential; in fact they are unlawful. Disturbingly, one report in the qualitative comments concerned assault and attempted rape by a Unit Controller. What appears to be the same matter was separately reported in another question in this survey by someone who was clearly a staff member.

There were numerous gender-related comments made, for example:

- I had the boys club of the unit make it very clear that as a female I was not fit to perform operational leadership roles. At least 2 of those members advised me they do not take kindly to management/direction from females or people younger than them. It made it very difficult to perform my role. This continued for a number of years with no support from the Controllers.

VicSESVA Conduct and Culture Survey 2021

- SES is a boys club, and they close ranks around 'preferred' volunteers who are boot-lickers and therefore protected - to the detriment of the unit and the service.
- Males got picked for jobs over me.
- As I confronted the perpetrator and said he is never to grab or touch me again, I did not register for workers comp. I was then a witness in an investigation about behaviour by the same person towards 2 other members. The perpetrator didn't touch me again, but I witnessed ongoing behaviour and coercive control to other members.
- Unnecessary touching and grabbing of behind neck...General creepy behaviour is consistent from this member. Makes myself and other volunteers uncomfortable.
- A member reported to me that a Unit Controller had sexually assaulted her and attempted to rape her.

4. Staff experiences of bullying, harassment, discrimination, misconduct etc.

There were numerous comments made by participants who, from the wording of their comments, VicSESVA assumes to be staff members⁹, describing types of workplace bullying. Some described their VICSES employment as negative, full of distrust, or among the worst experiences of their life:

⁹ This assumption may not be entirely accurate, however it makes little difference to the overall survey which is focused on general conduct and culture within the service, and is not seeking to identify degrees of difference between paid/unpaid workers.

VicSESVA Conduct and Culture Survey 2021

- Being the line manager of a person who is responsible to me reported a case of sexual assault or possible attempted rape¹⁰. This was reported to the Region who for whatever reason chose to do nothing. No investigation was held and the complainant was never spoken to by anyone in authority.
- Time sheets are altered with overtime not paid because you were on duty working from home and not in a ICC / SCC. Although your work was part of a declared operation. And I have been told I'm not a team player because I left the work car, laptop, pager and phone on my desk when not on duty.
- People whose contracts are ending are not given an opportunity to renegotiate before being bullied into signing new contracts. The new contracts are sent out to the staff member the day the old one ends, so people are given no time to decide if they are happy to sign the new agreements. Staff are being pushed into a corner to sign new contracts that they are not happy with.
- Managers have asked other staff to spy and report back (dob in) other staff in office. No trust in work environment.
- It was one of the worst experiences I have gone through in an work environment, it was even more disappointing when the line manager had all the support from the

¹⁰ This comment refers to an example also raised separately by a volunteer and mentioned previously. The use of the term 'line manager' with a supervisory role might reflect that this comment is written by a staff member.

VicSESVA Conduct and Culture Survey 2021

organisation but there was little support for myself. It felt as though the organisation was trying to cover up the issues.

- I was harassed by my line manager regarding my living arrangements, this continued for a number of months. Another staff member was bullied and harassed to the point where they had no other option but to leave the organisation.
- I was required to continue managing this person despite me fearing for my safety.
- I believe that there is a significant cultural issue within the organisation from the very top of the organisation and down to the Regional Management. Managers appear to be a protected species and when issues occur, the Manager (who is the problem) is moved to another Region hoping this will resolve the issue instead of dealing with the Manager (who is the issue). Staff are made to feel worthless within VICSES with Managers micro-managing their staff BAU roles and dictating when staff are to take TIL which is not in line with the EBA.
- Historic indecision lack of awareness/ understanding and/or fear of utilising the VICSES Act and Regulations to their full authority by some Management has allowed some issues to persist longer than necessary.
- Being a staff member was one of the most horrific experiences of my life - the abuse I received from other staff and volunteers was something I was expected to accept.

VicSESVA Conduct and Culture Survey 2021

- I feel that there is a history of workplace bullying and targeted approach at trying to discredit staff who speak up about issues. We are certainly in a dictatorial style of management. Mental health is well documented with advice of how and where to seek support to treat the symptoms. Analysis within our organisation has shown we have a high number of staff seeking support for mental health¹¹ but a true analysis of what is causing the high numbers and treating the cause is not forthcoming.
- Service has lost focus on volunteers, pushing too much to vols to save money and free up staff so they don't build up time or payments as per EBA...Lack of trust between staff and management and State causing issues, leading to unnecessary scrutiny and micro management.

Questions were asked about who was doing the bullying, harassment, discrimination, misconduct etc.

There were 219 reports in the top 3 categories:

110 said it was another volunteer

80 said it was a line manager¹²

29 said it was a direct supervisor

There were further questions about how long inappropriate or unsafe behaviour lasted; if it was repeated or a single incident:

85% of participants answering this question reported that the behaviour was repeated

¹¹ See, for example, the Beyond Blue report 'Answering the Call' (2018)

¹² Note on terminology: for staff, 'Line manager' is an understood term, but volunteers would not generally use this term. For volunteers, 'direct supervisor' may refer to a Unit Controller.

VicSESVA Conduct and Culture Survey 2021

40% reported that it was still ongoing

27% reported that it lasted months and

25% reported that it lasted years

There were many comments on (volunteer) Controllers being identified as the bully:

- The person involved in bullying behaviour was the Controller of our unit. He was eventually replaced with an administrator. This person's behaviour was not confined to me but he targeted any members who he felt were not sufficiently compliant or who he felt were challenging his position. Approximately 5 to 6 members left the service as a result.
- This was from the Controller of one of my previous units. Our entire sub-unit was constantly ridiculed, belittled, bullied and denigrated on a regular basis because we did not agree with the way we were treated. We were threatened with getting thrown out of the SES because he was mates with the Regional Manager. We were used as scapegoats for gossip, and quite often unfounded accusations of misconduct.
- The Controller is the bully and many members have left the service. I transferred to another unit.
- The complaints made about the Controller were never followed up by Region, the Controller was always defended and excuses made. The Regional Manager had said to one member that he will always support the Controller no matter what.

VicSESVA Conduct and Culture Survey 2021

- Controller does not like confrontation and will not investigate even minor bullying within the unit. When questioned, reply is “outside my pay grade”.
- Where ‘bully’ is written in this survey, please insert ‘Unit Controller’.

The effect of negative behaviours and culture

75% of participants replied that it had affected their general health, wellbeing or ability to undertake normal work-related duties. They further noted specific categories, from a list of 20 choices, where their health/wellbeing had been adversely affected. There was a total of 1,196 reports selected from these 20 categories, so it is clear that people suffer multiple adverse affects.

The top 4 categories were:

Trust in VICSES	99 reports
Mood	97 reports
Sleep	91 reports
Intention to remain in your job or volunteering role	90 reports

It is notable that ‘Trust in VICSES’ (99 reports) and ‘Intention to remain in your job or volunteering role’ (90 reports) do not augur well for and skills and capability retention, which are critical to organisational development in VICSES.

The qualitative comments record many examples of people leaving VICSES because of their experiences, and –more alarming- some references to self harm:

VicSESVA Conduct and Culture Survey 2021

- I thought about taking my own life on many occasions.
- This is an ongoing process of the last 5-6 years in particular with a number of mental health issues including at my worst, the thought of self harm.
- The treatment by the service in particular (Executive Officer, staff), (Regional Manager, staff), (Regional Manager, staff) and (Regional Manager, staff), as well as the incompetent POD team, has often left me wanting to end my life.
- (Executive Officer, staff) is the worst bully of all of them. He has no remorse in his actions and supports bullying by his managers.
- I went through prolonged targeted bullying supported by both Operations Managers and ignored by the then Regional Manager. The system supports those people in higher positions. I suffered from suicidal thoughts and was thrown under the bus. I only survived because I had support from other volunteers.
- Leaving the organisation is looking like the best option.
- I resigned from the unit for my own mental health.
- Other members have clearly suffered mental health issues due to their bullying and they've either left or been pushed aside.

VicSESVA Conduct and Culture Survey 2021

- After 25 years of service, I felt I could no longer continue in my volunteer role as I am unwilling to be made to feel bad because of my age in any workplace.
- I feel a lot better that I have left the service and feel more valued in my community in other volunteer roles.
- After receiving this threat I vomited, was unable to eat and slept badly. I replayed this conversation in my mind for at least a week.
- Feeling of 'being blamed' by VICSES i.e. victim blaming. Feeling of being lied to or information being covered up by VICSES.
- Horrified and fearful that perpetrator would return to unit after investigation fail, fear of safety and retaliation.
- I was appointed to the role in the Unit despite the Regional Manager knowing I was in the middle of cancer treatment and offering "total support" with anything I needed. That turned out to be hot air designed to get someone into the job... (describing a comment from a fellow volunteer): on hearing of my appointment saying he had not been consulted and because I had cancer I should have just "gone away and died quietly".
- Due to the situation I have been seeing a mental health professional at my own cost.

VicSESVA Conduct and Culture Survey 2021

- I felt withdrawn and at all times felt I couldn't stop thinking about it. Legitimate issues of behaviour often dismissed.
- As a result of the whole process, I feel very diminished. I am not the confident person I was. I struggle to remain positive as I feel so let down by VICSES. I trusted them to do the right thing, I provided all the evidence I could to help them do their job and they failed.
- I was alone, I was being watched, I didn't feel safe and I was unable to escape.

Support

Participants reported that they received little or no support internally. Many sought help from outside health professionals, and the majority did not take time off work, either as a break from volunteering, or using sick leave or worker's compensation leave:

- 79% (139 people) stated they did not receive support from their direct manager (Line Manager or Unit Controller).
37 people stated they did receive support
- 61% (142 people) did not receive any form of professional support
33 people did, with 16 of these seeing an external psychologist¹³
- 67% (118 people) did not take time off work

¹³ VICSES offers the services of a staff psychologist and peer support, however many prefer to seek help outside the service, fearing lack of confidentiality.

VicSESVA Conduct and Culture Survey 2021

57 did, and 36 of these took more than one month off

In this theme, a question was asked 'Do you believe that there have been occasions when you have bullied, harassed or intimidated others – either deliberately or inadvertently?'

136 participants replied No

38 (22%) replied Yes

The question presented a range of 16 options, with the most common being:

10 frustration due to other issues at work

9 part of my strong personal style

7 being inadequately trained

Of the 38 who replied Yes, 32 (84%) were not subject to any disciplinary action, complaint or investigation. Of the 6 who were investigated, in 4 cases the matter was determined to be frivolous or vexatious, and in 2 cases no evidence was found and the complaint was dismissed.

THEME 2: EVIDENCE

In this theme, participants were asked if they had kept any documentation regarding the bullying/harassment/discrimination/misconduct etc., and if they kept a diary or log of events.

65% of participants did not keep a diary or log¹⁴, although 64 kept some kind of informal notes. Where documentation was easier to source or automatically retained (e.g. emails), there was a greater degree of documentation available:

78 kept emails

41 kept text messages

23 kept letters

¹⁴ This is not surprising as often events unfold over time and people do not anticipate that it may become a serious matter.

THEME 3: ACTION TAKEN

Many participants did take action, often attempting to deal with matters at the local level, such as supporting someone who they saw was being bullied (46), or approaching the bully to sort it out (52) or approaching the bully's supervisor (44).

Participants also stated that they made formal reports, usually in the first instance approaching or making a formal report to the Regional Manager or Unit Controller (which reflects VICSES 'chain of command' procedures):

76 approached the Regional level Manager

56 made a formal report to the Regional Manager

38 made a formal report to their Controller or Deputy Controller

Outcome:

In 45 cases the issue was not resolved

in 35 cases the issue is still ongoing

in 16 cases the person (complainant) left SES

Where no formal report was made, 62 participants reported concerns about personal impact or repercussions; 55 stated they had raised the concern before and felt they had not been listened to; and 55 stated there was no way to raise the concern anonymously. The fear of retribution was evident in the qualitative comments, for example:

VicSESVA Conduct and Culture Survey 2021

- I was threatened with disciplinary action if I took a complaint further.
- If you complain about bullying at any level, the standard response is victimisation. Culture is set by the Executive and it will not change whilst the current CEO lacks the integrity to rein in the COO, an individual who allows a bullying culture to perpetuate due to his lack of leadership.
- I'm about to leave the organisation, as it is too small and any discussions with management place a troublesome tag against your name.
- If you say anything in a lot of cases you receive retribution; examples such as not being up-skilled for roles even when requested, segregation and isolation.
- What is the point? Regularly dismissed, different standard for some than others. If you speak out you can say goodbye to any opportunities as well as getting put in the corner labelled as a troublemaker. It's easier to accept the culture and bullying than to go to the organisation for support.
- Fear of retribution leads to inaction.
- Given that it was the Controller, I felt there was nowhere I could go and it would make me a target and a scapegoat. I have since found out there are actually avenues that could

VicSESVA Conduct and Culture Survey 2021

have been taken. However, I think that once you raise an issue, you get a target painted on you.

- The grievance policy re volunteers is a joke and waste of time and serves to make one a further target.
- There has been repeated times of retribution for speaking up for others, both volunteers and staff... Constant retaliation for very minor infractions which appears to be a targeted response from Managers to get me to leave or build up a case for dismissal.

THEME 4: INVESTIGATION PROCESS

Making a formal complaint and being part of an investigation in any workplace is difficult, time consuming and stressful. As seen earlier, many in VICSES are reluctant to make official reports for fear of retribution or discrimination.

In this theme, 48 people reported being part of a formal investigation.

- 57% reported they received no training on general grievance/misconduct/workplace bullying etc. procedures¹⁵ and
- 58% reported they had received no training in the VICSES misconduct policy and procedures.
- 56 participants said they found out about the procedures by searching the VICSES Hub (website) although one person reported that:
“The serious misconduct process was not available on the VICSES Hub when I tried to find it. I had to lodge a request with the ICT team to get access to it”.
- 23 received advice from VICSES staff,
- 23 people sought advice from friends or colleagues.

Most participants regarded the process as unsatisfactory:

79% said they thought the procedures had not been followed

70% said they thought the procedures were not fair and equitable

63% said no timeframe was given for the different stages of the investigation process

¹⁵ VICSES provides online training on ‘Respect and Equity at VICSES’ and expects all members to complete this.

VicSESVA Conduct and Culture Survey 2021

76% said the timeframes were not complied with

43% said they were not informed of the findings

There were many qualitative comments reflecting on how VICSES staff had dealt with complaints:

- Staff at VHO are completely dismissive and did not want to do anything to help the situation.
- Formal investigation completed by Regional staff but no formal paperwork completed to my knowledge and feedback over a cup of coffee as a result.
- I recorded the meeting in my diary and reported the incident to Region asking for advice and assistance. I did not even receive a phone call and certainly no assistance.
- Some of the issues I raised were taken on by other volunteer members and included lodging a complaint to the Ombudsman which found failure by Unit management to adhere to financial procedures and included retraining of the Unit management team, including on ethical issues...This (matter) later resulted in service misconduct charges being laid against me. However, these were ultimately dropped in VCAT after the COO refused to lead evidence. During the process VICSES witnesses on behalf of the COO spoke outside the misconduct charges to attack my character.
- No apologies. No correction was made. The complaints were taken as a joke.

VicSESVA Conduct and Culture Survey 2021

- The manner in which regional staff conduct investigations is woeful. It is clearly a guilty before any evidence is heard scenario and very heavy handed.
- As a Unit Controller trying to maintain a large unit, the lack of proper support and ability of VICSES HR to professionally resolve conflict within our unit was extremely difficult. VICSES HR was completely useless.
- The Regional Manager should be stood down. To this day members who had allegations made against them were given no chance to defend themselves and no one has been informed of the outcome of the investigation.
- No point reporting, SES does nothing.
- It felt like a David and Goliath battle. VICSES had paid professional staff and lawyers, not to protect me but to protect their brand and reputation.
- 1st Regional Manager laughed it off and teased me about it, 2nd Regional Manager spoke to the perpetrator.
- HR are completely useless, do not investigate, placate with mothering statements and then nothing is done. Why should I have to fight just to volunteer my time? It's ridiculous, and way easier to just walk away from it and view it all on the sidelines like everyone else.

VicSESVA Conduct and Culture Survey 2021

- This survey will be swept under the carpet. (Executive Officer, staff) knows what's going on and does nothing but promote those that continue to do his dirty work. The old saying 'bad behaviour gets rewarded' should be VICSES' mantra, it's now an embarrassment of an organization amongst all the other agencies.
- When it comes from the Chief Officer and from the HR department you can't win either way.
- Have now contacted WorkSafe. Originally a complaint was made to the COO; he found that there was no reason to lay service charges. This complaint was about the COO - he considered a complaint against himself.
- Regional Staff members regularly leak information about complaints to (local volunteer) unit management teams, so any complaints are not confidential ever.

Some participants offered suggestions for alternative conflict resolution processes (although the survey did not ask this as a direct question):

- I also strongly believe the first principle of conflict resolution should be mandatory round table discussion/mediation until all grievances are aired and a mutually acceptable solution can be found, should be the norm before the dispute escalates. A lot of issues in our unit would have been avoided if only this was applied.

VicSESVA Conduct and Culture Survey 2021

- The Controllers and trainers in our area have created a Controller and Trainers site we can ask questions and support each other with input from Regional VSO if needed.
- Make reporting this type of thing MUCH easier. Put a button on the hub or something. Consider those who are being mistreated by staff and/or UMT¹⁶, they will not necessarily know where else to go to report (how many volunteers know who the people and culture manager is or how to contact them?).
- Give some HR training to the UMT. Provide proper support from a state level in managing these issues instead of pushing the responsibility back to the volunteer UMT members who do not have the training or knowledge to manage complaints and these sorts of issues.

¹⁶ UMT=volunteer Unit Management Team.

THEME 5: YOUR MENTAL HEALTH

Questions in this theme asked if participants had sought medical advice or counselling, if they are still seeking professional support, who is paying, if they had lodged a worker's compensation claim (and if not, why not), and how the matter has affected overall mental health and wellbeing.

- 121 reported not seeking medical advice or counselling
- 57 reported they sought medical advice or counselling. Of these, 32 are still seeking support.
- From the 57 who sought support, 49 paid for it themselves; only 5 were paid for by VICSES.
- 161 reported they did not lodge a worker's compensation claim
- 145 were not aware of the Victorian Government Provisional Payment Pilot scheme, designed to pay emergency service workers suffering from mental injury as soon as they lodge a WorkCover claim.

In terms of overall mental health and wellbeing, a majority of participants reported dissatisfaction with the process, many had given up volunteering and/or had long term emotional effects:

- 63 I am not satisfied, I believe the process was unfair
- 27 I have long term emotional, psychological effects
- 27 I have given up volunteering, which was an important part of my life
- 26 I am satisfied with a fair and just outcome and have moved on

VicSESVA Conduct and Culture Survey 2021

- 19 I have been diagnosed with a condition because of it (e.g. depression, anxiety)
- 42 other

The qualitative comments reveal further insights:

- It is extremely unfair. The organisation pays professionals to undermine volunteers. Staff also undermine volunteers. None of the process is kept confidential or private and the organisation does not follow its own process. It extends timeframes and does not inform you, it does not allow for your concerns or safety either mentally or physically throughout the process. The organisation basically throws you under the bus. The organisation isolates you, and prevents you from accessing the support you need.
- The process has taken about 14 months and is still not resolved. This is unacceptable.
- The Executive make processes to achieve a desired outcome rather than in the course of justice, fairness and objectivity.
- It's pathetic. Needs to be outsourced to an ombudsman.
- Needs to be investigated outside of SES.
- Took too long and felt like it escalated the issue rather than resolved it. Seemed like the process was focused on finding no fault and keeping the peace.

VicSESVA Conduct and Culture Survey 2021

- (Staffer comment): Poorly run and the process also stifled the right of the Union Rep to support me as they were directed by management that they were there as a 'Support Person' only and had no right to intervene or speak.
- The bully is allowed to continue their bullying (in fact it generally escalates when an investigation is launched) while the investigation is underway as they are not suspended generally.
- It is rigged towards silencing those who complain. Investigators never speak to members again once they have done a formal investigation. Lies are often told "I will call you back". It never happens. This is common from the COO down. Verbal or emailed steps are not followed up. But a paper trail is created to give the facade that action was taken.
- Key witnesses have not been interviewed as management didn't want their statements as they only went on the accused side. As a result of the lack of transparency when it comes time for the interview to be conducted, the investigator can embellish the truth to ensure they get the outcome they want. People who the accuser says are witnesses are not even followed up to back up the statements. A completely independent (person) needs to conduct the investigation procedures.
- The matter was taken to mediation twice. The first time Region was involved with an ineffective mediator and the second time was with Region and State HR. No feedback has been given. State HR was completely unhelpful. They did not return phone calls, did not organise the mediator, and did not follow up from the second mediation.

VicSESVA Conduct and Culture Survey 2021

- Well there wasn't an investigation into the bullying that happened to me. I never completed a formal report. I only made an initial report to Region which was never followed up.
- The investigation process was biased as I was not interviewed.
- Poorly investigated, poorly conducted and poorly resolved (i.e. not resolved after 18 months).
- Not impartial - the investigator was employed by VICSES, was briefed by VICSES, was not given all the information, and it felt like they were trying to blame me instead of objectively find out facts.

161 participants reported they did not lodge a WorkCover claim. Of these, 99 replied to the question why not? The most common reasons were:

15% believed volunteers could not lodge a WorkCover claim

15% thought it would be too hard or too stressful

11% were concerned about retribution or future employment prospects

Qualitative comments illustrate participants' concerns about stress, retribution, loss of trust, etc.:

VicSESVA Conduct and Culture Survey 2021

- I am too scared to say anything. Organisation has an appalling record of managing mental health. People are dumped and put in the too hard basket. There is no confidence, people are reduced to nothing. I have seen others go through the process and it's easier to keep quiet. I don't want to use the provisional payment pilot because SES will find out about it and will no doubt use it adversely against me.
- Lack of trust in the system.
- The other person has more money than me to fight this.
- For me, this only adds to the negative experience. I did not want to go down the path of being anxious about filling things in that can be too hard to explain.
- Too much stress.
- I walked away from the service.
- I didn't know you could.
- Really-as a Volunteer!!!
- No loss of work as a result of the issues.
- Because a WorkCover claim for this could impact on my career stability or progression.

VicSESVA Conduct and Culture Survey 2021

- Easier to walk away.
- I was not aware I could.
- Fear of discrimination by VICSES.
- I do not want to jeopardise any job I may seek in the future.
- Why bother, nothing would happen as in other cases I know of.
- Because of the hurdles and blockages that are put up you eventually have the feeling it is all too hard. Increased stress levels and the impact on personal life and relationships.
- Didn't know it was an option, didn't want others to know of conflict, didn't know if it was serious enough, didn't want to be seen as 'weak' by other volunteers as it will affect tasks given to me in the field.
- As the unit would then discriminate against me as they have done to others.
- I am retired thus not losing income.
- Because I'm retired and didn't think it applied.

VicSESVA Conduct and Culture Survey 2021

- Too much mucking around and not wanting to be a target.
- I don't ever want to deal with VICSES ever again.
- Don't want to affect future employment.
- I left for my health's sake.
- Retired, can't be bothered with all the crap involved.
- Waste of time dealing with VICSES management when not on their terms.
- All I wanted was to be fairly treated.
- I did not know I could.
- ? A volunteer cannot lodge a claim?
- Not required or relevant as a volunteer.
- I'm a volunteer, I thought you had to be paid staff to get it.
- Repercussions to my future employment and promotion.

VicSESVA Conduct and Culture Survey 2021

- (Staffer comment): Have witnessed other staff do claim and is taken negatively by managers. Also fear of future opportunities.
- Why? VICSES don't care about us little people they only care about their own image and how good they look.
- I don't want this to affect future employment.

The final question listed a selection of 14 statements and asked participants to indicate how strongly they agree/disagree with them.

Among the statements which had the most 'strongly disagree' ratings along with the fewest 'strongly agree' ratings were:

- Workers (volunteers or staff) are involved in developing actions on bullying/misconduct etc.
- Adequate resources are allocated to prevent workplace bullying, misconduct etc.
- Matters are discussed openly and transparently
- Workers (volunteers or staff) can have a say in the development of policies and procedures

RECOMMENDATIONS

What measures can be taken to improve conduct and culture? VicSESVA suggests the following recommendations, many of which we have also advocated for in relation to VICSES' proposed changes to Regulations in 2021, and in other forums.

Complaints process

Many members report that disputes or complaints are inadequately handled at the local level and because of this failure, they then progress to a formal grievance. This process inevitably causes increased stress, delays and costs. Local Unit Controllers and VICSES staff managers are typically ill-equipped to deal with complex personnel issues, and many members have raised complaints with VicSESVA about how senior staff, in their opinion, mismanaged their grievance, bullied them instead ('blame the victim'), encouraged them to leave the service (the problem disappears), or just moved the perpetrator on (putting other members in other Units at risk).

Recommendation

1. Revise the process, and/or
2. Engage an independent entity to manage dispute resolution.

Training for Managers and Controllers

Controllers are even less likely to have the requisite HR skills, as there is no training for the Controller role; they receive no training in leadership, no advice in dispute resolution, no guidance with cultural issues, and they are volunteers who take on the Controller role in their

VicSESVA Conduct and Culture Survey 2021

spare time, not to become full time mediators. On many occasions, the disputes raised in Units have been time consuming and overwhelming; beyond the reasonable demands on a volunteer's time and experience. This survey also highlights many instances of Controllers who are identified as the bully, raising questions as to how Controllers are selected and appointed in VICSES and again, what the deficiencies in training are.

Recommendation

1. Provide appropriate and timely training on people management to staff managers and volunteer Controllers, and/or
2. Remove the dispute resolution process from local personnel and direct it to an independent entity

External Dispute Resolution

VicSESVA submits that there should be a comprehensive overhaul of the VICSES internal process and that disputes be referred to an outside independent body skilled in dispute resolution and with the objective of early intervention before matters escalate.

VicSESVA refers to our repeated submissions to the VICSES Executive that the RMIT Centre for Innovative Justice be engaged to fulfil this role, and that principles of restorative engagement be developed to guide policy. VicSESVA believes this should be a sector-wide initiative and has been advocating for this change for a number of years, including through our membership of EMV's Volunteer Consultative Forum and our national Association NSESVA.

Recommendation

VicSESVA Conduct and Culture Survey 2021

Engage an independent entity for dispute resolution matters

Reporting and Measuring

a. Safegate

VICSES does not, and to our knowledge has never, collated incidents of behaviour and culture in the VICSES incident and hazard reporting system Safegate. So how does VICSES assess the extent of bullying, harassment, sexual harassment, discrimination etc. within the service? VicSESVA submits that all such incidents be logged on Safegate and that the statistics be routinely analysed, just as they now are for other types of incidents (many of which are minor and far less damaging than these).

VicSESVA notes that there is provision for these to be logged as an incident in Safegate (VICSES Misconduct and Grievance Procedure, p. 6 first para, [d]), although:

- we have not had any reports of any volunteers doing this
- volunteers are often advised that they are not able or not permitted to log such incidents on Safegate, or even that the only person who can complete a Safegate report is a Controller¹⁷, and
- Despite VicSESVA raising this and advocating for it at numerous meetings with State WHS, State Operations and VICSES Executive, it has never been acknowledged that this is possible.

Therefore, VicSESVA submits that this be widely advertised, actively promoted and that volunteers be counselled to use this mechanism as a way of reporting bullying/harassment/

¹⁷ This is incorrect advice; anyone can log a Safegate report, and are encouraged to do so by VICSES

VicSESVA Conduct and Culture Survey 2021

discrimination etc. Currently it sits at the end of a sentence in the Procedure which refers volunteers to Peer Support, so it is easy to miss.

Educating volunteers and staff on using the Safegate reporting system for mental injury/bullying etc. will assist VICSES to comply with the Victorian Occupational Health and Safety Act, whose Objects include:

- (a) to secure the health, safety and welfare of employees and other persons at work; and
- (b) to eliminate, at the source, risks to the health, safety or welfare of employees and other persons at work; and...
- (d) to provide for the involvement of employees, employers, and organisations representing those persons, in the formulation and implementation of health, safety and welfare standards.¹⁸

b) Conduct and Culture Survey for Volunteers and Staff

VicSESVA recommends that VICSES endorses the Conduct and Culture Survey for Volunteers and Staff, and that it be offered to all volunteers and staff annually. VicSESVA is prepared to administer the survey and asks that VicSESVA be allowed to contact members direct through the SES email system, as the survey is a legitimate and important resource supporting members' welfare and interests.

Recommendation

1. Educate members to use Safegate for mental injury incidents

¹⁸ *Victoria OHS Act 2004, version No. 036, Part 1 (2) Objects*

VicSESVA Conduct and Culture Survey 2021

2. Survey members annually on conduct and culture in VICSES

Accountability

In this survey, many members describe how their misconduct process was not dealt with in a timely or effective manner. Not meeting timeframes as set out in the Regulations may have led to an incomplete investigation, or what members perceive to be an inequitable process.

In the event that disputes continue to be handled internally, VicSESVA submits that VICSES staff and the responsible Executive Officer¹⁹ be held to account for any failings in not meeting timeframes, and that there should be an appeal process in the Regulations for any cases where VICSES does not meet the required timeframes, that is, that a complainant's matter should be enabled to proceed and not be derailed because any VICSES Officer did not comply with timeframes.

VicSESVA also suggest there should be provision in the Regulations for the COO to delegate the grievance process to another officer where a specific conflict of interest arises, such as where the complaint being lodged is about the COO.

Recommendation

1. Amend the Regulations and VICSES procedures to ensure not meeting timeframes does not become an impediment to a complainant's right to have their matter heard.
2. Include a specific provision for delegation by the COO where there is a conflict of interest.

¹⁹ This is the role of the COO, who may also appoint an external investigator to investigate a complaint on his behalf (VICSES Service Regulations - Reg 14)

VicSESVA Conduct and Culture Survey 2021

Support

Many members report that the complaints/grievance process caused additional stress and trauma. VicSESVA submits that there should be an experienced mentor/advocate assigned to all complainants who acts in their interests, not the legal interests of VICSES. The mentor should provide guidance and advice on the process (not necessarily the subject matter of the complaint) and be able to refer the complainant to internal information, external sources of advice, assist them in reports and form filling if needed, direct them to relevant sections of VICSES policies, procedures, regulations etc. and assist them with understanding their rights, particularly related to WorkCover.

That person should not be required to report to senior VICSES supervisors but should remain independent. Members have reported where they have disclosed personal sensitive information to employees of VICSES in the course of an investigation (including in the past, a staff psychologist) which has then been divulged to other staffers, who have used that information negatively against the volunteer, causing further vicarious stress and anxiety. It also causes a generalised loss of confidence by other members in VICSES' ability to provide procedural fairness.

Recommendation

Provide mentors to volunteers who can advise and advocate in their interests

A Bullying and Harassment Hotline

A Bullying and Harassment Hotline could be established to receive and triage members' initial complaints. Early intervention may prevent escalation and prolonged stress. In 2021, behavioural

VicSESVA Conduct and Culture Survey 2021

issues reported in CFA were decried by their senior management and on 13 March they encouraged all members with anything to report to contact their Bullying and Harassment Hotline. CEO Natalie MacDonald stated “We should all expect to be part of a culture where every one of us feels safe, respected and empowered to undertake their roles”²⁰.

Recommendation

Set up a Bullying and Harassment Hotline

Sorry Seems to be the Hardest Word

Many members report that they all they wanted was an apology; their greatest frustration was not being heard or acknowledged:

“No apologies. No correction was made. The complaints were taken as a joke”

Contemporary business practice recognises the benefits of empathy: “Most apologies are low cost and many create substantial value. They can help defuse a tense situation, and fears of litigation are often unfounded”²¹. An open restorative conference on members who have raised conduct and culture issues could be convened where diverse voices can be heard and multiple perspectives considered. People want transparency and fairness and that victims are listened to effectively.

Recommendation

Consider issuing an organisational apology, in the context of restorative conferencing

²⁰ CFA, *Update from the CEO and Chief Officer*, 13 March 2021

²¹ Schweitzer, M.; Wood Brooks, A.; Galinsky, D.: ‘The Organizational Apology’, *Harvard Business Review*, September 2015.

CONCLUSION

This first VicSESVA Conduct and Culture Survey for Volunteers and Staff in 2021 has revealed many insights into the members' experiences of bullying/harassment/discrimination/misconduct etc.

It is unsurprising that EM workers report that they experience unacceptable behaviours in their workplace, as they are part of the broader community which itself is now demanding action against entrenched discriminatory or damaging practices.

It is self-evident that organisations which reflect contemporary community expectations and which build cultural cohesiveness will be stronger and more effective. This is even more critical in large organisations whose workforce is 85-90% volunteer, as volunteers do not have to stay.

In comments written by survey participants and from subsequent conversations with groups of volunteers, the Conduct and Culture Survey was welcomed and seen as a positive resource for explicating cultural issues, for example:

- Really good survey, hope the results lead to action in VICSES
- Thank you for this important Survey as VICSES seems more interested in protecting Jobs, careers, brand and reputation.

VicSESVA Conduct and Culture Survey 2021

- What was once a great organisation to be a part of where people were valued and friendships cherished has become a disaster in itself through poor management and poor treatment of staff and volunteers. It really needs a full enquiry to determine what went wrong and a major commitment to fix the disease it currently suffers.
- Thank you for the opportunity to list my thoughts. I wish you the best of luck trying to find a less complicated procedure to deal with these issues.
- As a volunteer I think SES is now at a positive turning point and that there is momentum for cultural reform...Thanks for offering this survey.

VicSESVA's position is that members' experiences should be believed and their complaints taken seriously. VicSESVA does not accept the view that because the number of complaints is raised by a minority of members, then the issues lack significance. It is not a simple binary majority/minority matter, rather, negative behaviours (and systems which do not deal with them adequately) can be cumulative. Isolated incidents may appear trivial, but when taken together a pattern can be seen which contributes to a decline in occupational health and safety. This survey reveals that many experiences of people in VICSES (volunteers or staff) can be negative, discriminatory, unlawful, or lead to long term damage to mental health and wellbeing.

Of immense concern to VicSESVA are the comments by participants who spoke of ongoing mental illness or self harm. There should be no more examples of people leaving the service rather than be re-traumatised by an investigation process. There should never be instances of people talking of suicide.

VicSESVA Conduct and Culture Survey 2021

Costs of Inaction

What are the costs to the organisation of not implementing meaningful cultural change? For an emergency agency whose workforce is 85-90% volunteer, there are significant implications for sector capability, recruitment, retention, member welfare, workplace practices and reputation.

There are human, economic, social and cultural costs, including:

- Volunteer and staff churn
- Lower skills and experience level
- Less diversity
- More complaints and workers compensation claims
- More bullying and behaviour issues
- Less satisfaction of volunteers with their agency
- Lost motivation
- Unwillingness to be deployed in large scale events
- Reluctance to take on volunteer leadership roles
- Decline in volunteer numbers and capacity
- Absenteeism

The benefits of cultural change in dealing with VICSES grievance and misconduct issues are many: early engagement using effective strategies can prevent matters escalating, can build trust in the organisation, can establish pathways for constructive (if challenging) conversations and can

VicSESVA Conduct and Culture Survey 2021

reduce stress and mental injury on individuals. This is apart from any dollar values which can be attributed to time off work, loss of skilled members or WorkCover claims²².

Why am I a VICSES Volunteer

Volunteers join VICSES or other emergency agencies for clear altruistic reasons related to community service which also give them a sense of fulfilment. In the annual Volunteer Welfare and Efficiency Survey²³, the 2 most selected answers to the question **Why am I a VICSES volunteer?** have consistently been 'to help and protect the community I live in' and 'a sense of fulfilment in supporting my community in a meaningful way'.

If conduct and culture issues create a work environment which does not support those motivations, then volunteers will leave and organisational capability will be diminished. Volunteers don't ask much in return for their service, but they do want respect and equity to be concepts that are lived and upheld, not just words in a mandatory online learning module. As stated by a participant in this survey: "All I wanted was to be fairly treated".

²² Claims involving mental health conditions are usually associated with an above average time off work and higher than average claim costs. For example, in VICPOL over the five years between 2010-11 and 2014-15: typical compensation payment per claim was \$24,500 compared to \$9,000 for all claims, and typical time off work was 15.3 weeks compared to 5.5 weeks for all claims.

²³ Volunteer survey developed by VFBV, with themes written by volunteers for volunteers. VFBV offered the survey to VicSESVA in 2015 and it has run annually since then. The survey was also adopted by 9 other agencies in the EM sector in 2016 and 2017, supported by EMV.

VicSESVA Conduct and Culture Survey 2021

Support: Help Lines and Resources

If any content of this survey has raised issues for you, please seek help.

Lifeline

131114 (24/7)

lifeline.org.au

Beyond Blue

1300 224 636 (24/7)

beyondblue.org.au

Headspace Australia

1800 650 890

headspace.org.au/headspace/

Suicide Call Back Service

1300 659 467 (24/7)

suicidecallbackservice.org.au

Qlife

1800 184 527

qlife.org.au

SANE Australia

1800 187 263

www.sane.org

ReachOut NextStep

<https://au.reachout.com/urgent-help#nextstep>

MensLine Australia

1300 789 978 (24/7)

mensline.org.au

VicSESVA Conduct and Culture Survey 2021

1800 RESPECT

1800 737 732 (24/7)

1800respect.org.au

Mindspot

1800 614 434

mindspot.org.au

RU Triple OK?

www.ruok.org.au/triple-ok

Smiling Mind app

www.smilingmind.com.au/

Self Compassion resources

self-compassion.org

myCompass web tool

www.mycompass.org.au/

MoodMission app

moodmission.com

VicSESVA Conduct and Culture Survey 2021

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<https://www.worksafe.vic.gov.au/occupational-health-and-safety-act-and-regulations>

<https://www.humanrights.vic.gov.au/for-individuals/bullying/>

<https://www.worksafe.vic.gov.au/bullying-workplace>

<https://www.justice.vic.gov.au/safer-communities/crime-prevention/bullying-brodies-law>

APPENDIX A: DEFINITIONS

Bullying is offensive, intimidating, malicious or insulting behaviour, an abuse or misuse of power through actions intended to undermine, humiliate, denigrate or injure the target.

Workplace bullying is verbal, physical, social or psychological abuse by your employer or manager, another person or group of people at work. Workplace bullying is repeated, unreasonable behaviour directed at an employee or group of employees that creates a risk to health and safety. Unreasonable behaviour does not include reasonable management action, such as discussions about work performance, as long as they are taken in a reasonable way.

Harassment is unwanted behaviour that intimidates, offends or humiliates a person. It may target personal characteristics such as race, age, gender, disability, religion or sexuality. Harassment may be persistent or an isolated incident. It can include being sworn or yelled at in the workplace, being threatened or even physically assaulted.

NOTE: bullying is repeated, whereas harassment can be experienced in a single incident.

Sexual harassment is unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature which makes a person feel offended, humiliated or intimidated, where that reaction is reasonable in the circumstances. It can include unwelcome hugging, kissing or other types of inappropriate physical contact, staring or leering, intrusive questions about your private life or physical appearance, unwanted invitations to go out on dates, requests for sex, or sexually explicit emails, calls, text messages or online

VicSESVA Conduct and Culture Survey 2021

interactions. Sexual harassment includes behaviour that makes the environment you are working in uncomfortable or threatening in a sexually hostile way, such as sexually offensive pictures or a culture of suggestive comments or jokes.

Coercive control is an act or a pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish, or frighten their victim.

Misconduct is any other form of inappropriate behaviour between or towards individuals which contravenes the values and codes of conduct of the organisation.

Discrimination is treating a person or group of people less favourably because of their characteristics, such as age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation.

Line manager or supervisor: if you are a staff member, you will be aware who your line manager is. For volunteers, your 'line manager' or direct supervisor may be your Controller or Deputy Controller. For Controllers, your Line Manager is the Regional Manager.

Worker: for the purposes of this survey, both volunteers and paid staff are all considered 'workers' in VICSES, if no other differentiation is given. Similarly, the SES 'workplace' is wherever work is conducted for paid employees (e.g. offices), or volunteers (e.g. the Unit LHQ or any other location such as at an RFA where work is carried out).