Challenging Behaviour?

Findings from a British Society of Criminology member survey on sexual violence and harassment in higher education

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This report was compiled for the British Society of Criminology by

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About the British Society of Criminology

The British Society of Criminology (BSC) is the learned society for the discipline of Criminology. Founded in 1960, it has a wide membership of university academics, criminal justice practitioners and students in the UK and internationally. The BSC is a registered charity and works for the public benefit with its aim of improving education about crime, criminal justice and criminology.
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We would like to thank all the BSC members who responded to this survey and provided valuable information and suggestions. Your contributions have enhanced our understanding and awareness of these issues, and we hope to continue these discussions with a view to improving institutional cultures for our members, our colleagues, and our students.
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¹ Replaced by UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) and OfS in 2018.
Executive Summary

- Some UK HEIs are yet to implement distinct policies acknowledging and advising staff on how to deal with student sexual misconduct, while others need to promote existing protocols more widely. There is considerable scope for many universities to engage with external specialist providers when developing policies, procedures, and training for staff confronted with cases of student sexual misconduct.

- Participants who taught gender related subject anticipated that students might disclose experiences of sexual misconduct at some point during their studies, and twenty participants had received disclosures from students in the five years prior to this survey.

- Participants reported feeling underqualified to respond effectively due to the patchy availability of specialist training on this issue in their university. In the absence of institutional direction, they resorted to offering guidance and support based on their own professional expertise, previously acquired training, or external resources.

- Some participants recalled disclosures from fellow staff members who had experienced sexual misconduct in the workplace. These involved a range of incidents, some perpetrated by faculty, some by students, and in some cases, by both staff and students.

- Some participants had been made aware of, or dealt with, staff-perpetrated sexual misconduct towards students.

- Some participants had personally experienced sexually inappropriate behaviour and/or sexual misconduct from faculty and/or students while on the university premises. Several demonstrated uncertainty and hesitation around reporting incidents or perpetrators to their institution.

- Dealing with their own or others’ experiences of sexual misconduct impacted on respondents in adverse ways, both personally and professionally. While several recognised that their work performance had been affected, none had sought out university wellbeing services.

- Participants who had been made aware of, or witnessed, inappropriate behaviour from delegates at academic conferences demonstrated a greater willingness to intervene or report this.
Introduction

Over the past decade, there has been a marked growth in inquiry and insight around sexual misconduct in UK educational settings. This has formed part of a wider national commitment to tackling gender-based victimisation, as outlined in the coalition government’s call to end violence against women and girls (VAWG) (Home Office, 2010; 2021). An inquiry by the Women and Equalities Committee into sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools in England highlighted the prevalence of victimisation among school-aged pupils (Women and Equalities Committee, 2016). Importantly, the report also noted significant inconsistency in how schools deal with sexual harassment and violence, fuelled by a lack of guidance and support for teachers to deal with these issues effectively. Similar findings were demonstrated in Ofsted’s subsequent report reviewing sexual abuse in schools and colleges in response to significant numbers of testimonials by pupils on the website ‘Everyone’s Invited’ (Ofsted, 2021).

At the higher education level, a key starting point for inquiry into student sexual harassment and violence was the publication of the *Hidden Marks* report by the National Union of Students (NUS) which detailed concerning levels of sexual misconduct among students across a range of higher education institutions (HEIs) and spearheaded activism around the issue (NUS, 2010). Several high-profile sexual misconduct cases involving university students appeared in the British media and galvanised a greater focus on exploring the link between campus cultures and rates of sexual harassment (McVeigh, 2015). As this media attention grew, it became clear that the government and universities across the UK were failing to address sexual harassment in HEIs in a robust or appropriate manner.

The Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA), an independent body established to review student complaints in higher education in England and Wales, also began acknowledging sexual harassment as an emerging issue of concern (OIA, 2014: 20). They subsequently reported having received a ‘small but steady’ number of complaints about the handling of sexual harassment cases by universities (OIA, 2015: 21). Sexual harassment was not referenced at all in their 2016 report, but they later recognised that some providers were ‘developing information and guidance for staff and students’ addressing the issue (OIA, 2017: 36). These developments were largely a result of a Universities UK taskforce having been established to investigate and report on domestic abuse, sexual violence, and hate crimes in HEIs nationally (Universities UK, 2016). In 2016, the Home Office published its updated VAWG strategy, which referred to the UUK Taskforce and its role in improving the effectiveness of both prevention and response to incidents in higher education (Home Office, 2016). To facilitate and support institutional change across the sector, HEFCE (now the Office for Students) released £2.45m in Catalyst safeguarding funding. In total, 63 institutions received matched funding of up to £50,000 to address gender-based harassment and violence. The resulting consolidation reports detailed case studies of the approaches, initiatives, and interventions taken by award recipients to tackle misconduct, demonstrating the considerable variability in approach across the sector (Universities UK, 2018; 2019). More importantly, concerns were raised about the institutional sustainability of such activities without external regulation or financial support.

In the interim period, journalistic investigations into student sexual safety and the paucity of institutional responses had become commonplace. A BBC investigation demonstrated escalating reports of rape, sexual assault, and harassment at several UK Universities, with 1,436 allegations of sexual harassment or sexual violence against students recorded in 2018 alone (Lee and West, 2019). While on the one hand, this FOI data reflected that students were reporting incidents to their institutions, the responses from 124 (of 157) universities also showed that not all had robust systems to prevent or respond to sexual violence, and that some victims found it hard to report incidents and were retraumatised by poor systems and support. These concerns were mirrored by the OIA report which
acknowledged a gradual rise in student complaints regarding sexual harassment or misconduct since 2016 (OIA, 2019). The Office for National Statistics (ONS) subsequently released data demonstrating that, between 2018 and 2020, students in England and Wales were over three times more likely than average to have experienced sexual assault (ONS, 2021).

In 2021, the Office for Students issued a revised Statement of Expectations which detailed how harassment and sexual misconduct should be prevented and addressed. Harassment (as defined by Section 26 of the Equality Act) includes unwanted behaviour or conduct which has the purpose or effect of violating a person’s dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating, or offensive environment because of, or connected to, one or more of the following protected characteristics: age; disability; gender reassignment; race; religion or belief; sex; sexual orientation. This included domestic violence and abuse and stalking. The Statement (2021: 2) outlines that sexual misconduct relates to all unwanted conduct of a sexual nature. This includes, but is not limited to:

- Sexual harassment (as defined by Section 26 (2) of the Equality Act 2010)
- Unwanted conduct which creates an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment (as defined by the Equality Act 2010)
- Assault (as defined by the Sexual Offences Act 2003)
- Rape (as defined by the Sexual Offences Act 2003)
- Physical unwanted sexual advances
- Intimidation
- Distributing private and personal explicit images or video footage of an individual without their consent (as defined by the Criminal Justice and Courts Act 2015).

In light of this emerging spotlight on sexual misconduct in the academy, in 2021 the British Society of Criminology (BSC) surveyed its members—academic staff teaching criminology in British universities—on issues relating to sexual violence and harassment in higher education. Respondents outlined whether they felt equipped to deal with student disclosures, provided information about their own experiences of sexual violence and harassment, and detailed the extent to which they felt supported by their institutions. This report presents the consolidated findings from the BSC survey.
Methodology

A team of BSC staff members and volunteers from the Executive Committee worked together to draft the survey instrument over several months in 2020. To ensure good methodological practice, the BSC Chair of the Ethics Committee peer reviewed the process and provided input on various aspects of the project. A pilot version of the survey was uploaded to SurveyMonkey and distributed via the BSC Women, Crime and Criminal Justice Network Jiscmail list. Several volunteers anonymously completed the pilot survey and provided feedback to the project lead. These recommendations were actioned, and the amended survey was released to the wider BSC membership base in May 2021. The survey was promoted via the Networks and BSC announcements, remaining live until September 2021. At the time of data collection, the BSC had approximately 900 paying members and a further 440 students on affiliate membership through their universities. The survey was open to all BSC members to take part.

The survey consisted of 42 content questions, grouped into five themed sections: 1. University policies on sexual violence, harassment and misconduct; 2. External relationships; 3. Reporting sexual violence, harassment and misconduct; 4. At conferences; 5. Supporting students (see Appendix). Participation was voluntary, confidential, and anonymous. Participants were free to skip questions so the number of respondents for each individual question varies. Overall, there were fifty respondents to this survey, but one respondent left the survey blank, leaving forty-nine total legitimate respondents.

The survey results were analysed by the authors using SPSS. All forty-nine respondents provided information about their sex/gender, with around 77% of respondents identifying as women. One respondent identified as being non-binary. The majority of respondents were white, at 74%, with either multiple ethnicities or ‘white-other’ being the second highest response categories at 8%, or four respondents, each. Over 80% of respondents identified as being heterosexual or straight, while collectively around 10% identified as being part of the LGBTQ+ community. The remaining 10% declined to answer this question. Twelve percent of respondents answered yes to the question: Do you consider yourself disabled? and one respondent declined to answer.

Most respondents were on a permanent contract and/or full-time employees. Respondents’ roles varied, with academic heads, tutors, Professors, researchers, fellows, and Readers represented. Thirteen respondents (27%) were senior lecturers. Thirty-two percent of respondents had worked at their current institution for 5-9 years, while 20% had been at their current organisation for 1-2 years.

While efforts were taken to make the survey and its findings as useful as possible, some limitations must be noted. A total of 49 valid responses is a relatively small sample. Participants were self-selecting, so the responses may be more reflective of those who have an interest or insight into this topic area. Information on their university affiliation was not sought from respondents, so it is not possible to discern the degree of institutional representation among participants. The feedback provided by some respondents in the free-text comments box indicated that several of the questions were unclear. Given the growing attention placed on this topic, similar surveys were in circulation at the time data was being collected so this may have impacted on the response rate or depth of insight shared by participants due to survey fatigue. Finally, answers to most of the questions were voluntary, so several were skipped over by respondents.
Results

The results are grouped and presented under four thematic subheadings:

1. *Institutional Recognition of Sexual Misconduct*
2. *Dealing with Disclosures of Sexual Misconduct*
3. *Personal Experiences of Sexual Misconduct in HEI Settings*

It is important to recognise that answers to each of the survey questions were voluntary. Therefore, some participants chose not to provide a response to some questions. The percentages and numbers provided below indicate the response rate to each individual question, rather than a percentage or number of overall respondents.

1. **Institutional Recognition of Sexual Misconduct**

This section presents the findings outlining how sexual misconduct is acknowledged and addressed across participants’ institutions in two subsections: *Policies, Procedures and Practices* and *External Engagement with Specialist Agencies.*

**Policies, Procedures and Practices**

Of the forty participants to answer the policies question, twenty-two respondents indicated that their institutions had distinct policies to deal with sexual violence or harassment / misconduct (55%). This was not the case for four respondents (10%), while fourteen answered that they were unaware of whether their institutions held any policies (35%). When asked about where these policies and procedures could be found, most respondents indicated that these were available on the University’s website (55%, n=21), followed by staff handbooks (34%, n=13), and to a lesser degree student handbooks (21%, n=8). From those who selected ‘other,’ five respondents said that they were not sure, one mentioned at-work training, and one mentioned student support services.

Respondents indicated varying levels of institutional awareness-raising and campaigning activities to alert staff to sexual misconduct policies and procedures. Sexual violence awareness initiatives took place in fifteen (38%) institutions, as did activities on harassment in the workplace (38%, n=15). Some respondents indicated that other forms of training took place, i.e., unconscious bias, consent and digital awareness. Only six (12%) respondents were involved in staff training on student sexual misconduct. Eleven (28%) respondents indicated that no such training or activities took place in their institutions. One respondent commented:

none as yet but there is the intention to do this and it is a slow work in progress which was slowed further by covid

Forty-one respondents replied to the question asking what types of centralised reporting and monitoring processes existed within their institution. Most commonly cited were procedures for reporting and initiating formal complaints (51%, n=22). This was followed by procedures offering the ability to report and access support without instigating a formal complaint (27%, n=11) and the availability of anonymous reporting (22%, n=9). Eighteen respondents (44%) were unaware of what—if any—reporting or monitoring processes existed in their institutions.
Thirty respondents provided answers to the question asking whether there was support from senior management, with some adding information to contextualise their answer. Fifteen indicated that there was, although some qualified this by stating that support was received ‘to a point’ or depended on who was providing it while others suggested that this constituted mere ‘lip service’ or was ‘patchy at best’. One respondent indicated that ‘repeated allegations of inappropriate behaviour have been handled appallingly’. The remaining fifteen were either unsure whether such support existed or worked in institutions where there was no senior management support.

The majority of respondents were unsure if there was a chief safeguarding officer at their institution. Thirty-five respondents answered this question, and of those thirty-five, nearly 50% (n=17) indicated they were unsure or did not know if there was an officer. Eight said ‘no’ (23%), and 10 said ‘yes’ (29%). One respondent under the ‘yes’ category said that there was one, but they did not know for certain who that person was.

**External Engagement with Specialist Agencies**

Respondents were asked about the level of engagement with specialist external agencies (i.e., the police, Victim Support, sexual or domestic charities etc.) at their institution. Of the thirty-eight respondents to this question, twenty indicated that such relationships had been established (53%). One respondent commented:

Rape Crisis sit on GBV Strategy Committee and deliver training on sexual violence to first responders, members of student conduct committee and to student peer supporters. Police also sit on GBV Strategy Committee.

Five respondents (13%) said no such relationships had been created, with one respondent indicating that they had specifically inquired about this as they had links with police officers for teaching purposes. Thirteen were unsure or unaware of any external links (34%).

When asked about institutional sharing of best practices (i.e., if their institution used materials developed by other organisations), thirty-one respondents provided answers. Thirteen of the thirty-one (42%) said they didn’t know whether such activities took place at their institution. Two (6%) responded saying they ‘believed so,’ or thought that their university did undertake such activities. Ten (32%) respondents said ‘no’, and six (19%) said ‘yes’, with one of those respondents indicating that the materials in use were sourced from ‘Rape Crisis’ and their ‘local refuge’.

Looking beyond relationships to active engagement with specialists, respondents were questioned about their university’s enlistment of these agencies in helping to develop and improve institutional policies and procedures. Only seven respondents said their institutions enlisted external specialists to advise in this capacity (18%), while ten respondents said this did not take place (26%). Twenty-one respondents (55%) said they were either unaware or unsure about levels of consultation with external agencies.

Responses to the question: What signposting is available to specialist external agencies? varied among the twenty-eight respondents who provided answers. Four respondents mentioned in-person flyers, two respondents mentioned campus police officers, two mentioned weblinks, one mentioned their campus well-being support team, and one mentioned social media posting. Fourteen respondents (50%) said no signposting was offered. One respondent mentioned that their university has not provided anything explicit—all of their information is retrieved elsewhere through their own research or colleagues’ research. Three respondents were unclear about the meaning behind the question.
In summary, this section has demonstrated variability in how sexual misconduct is acknowledged and addressed across the HEIs represented by our survey participants. Several have also indicated that there is scope for greater partnership working between universities and specialist sexual and domestic abuse organisations to produce guidance and support information.

2. Dealing with Disclosures of Sexual Misconduct

This section explores respondents’ experiences of dealing with disclosures of sexual misconduct from students and other members of staff. The findings are presented in three subsections: Training on Student Sexual Misconduct; Disclosures from Students, and Disclosures from Faculty.

Training on Student Sexual Misconduct

Twenty-eight respondents answered the questions relating to perceptions of preparedness and training in anticipation of dealing with cases of student sexual misconduct. When asked whether, when they began in post, they had considered the possibility that they may be confronted with students’ disclosures of sexual misconduct or assault, eighteen respondents answered ‘yes’ (64%) while ten respondents answered ‘no’ (36%).

When asked whether they held a role at their university which was directly linked to dealing with cases of student sexual misconduct or assault, eighteen respondents answered ‘no’ (64%) while ten respondents answered ‘yes’ (36%). A follow-up question was presented to these ten respondents asking whether they felt adequately trained to deal with students’ disclosures of student sexual misconduct or assault. Three respondents said ‘yes’, with one adding: ‘but mainly because I’ve spent many years researching violence (including sexual violence)’. The remainder either answered ‘no’ or outlined the situation:

Generally the training for this at HE level is poor to non-existent
I’ve had no training on this whatsoever, and I’ve had several sexual assaults of varying degrees disclosed to me over the years. I’ve made it my business to know how to respond and where to refer but I’ve not had a single minute of training on this from my institution.

Thinking more broadly, the final question asked whether their university had provided any kind of training (to any member of staff) about issues relating to student sexual misconduct or assault. Three respondents replied ‘yes’ (11%), eighteen respondents said ‘no’ (64%), and seven respondents were unsure whether any training was available (25%).

Twenty-seven respondents replied to the question: Do you feel you have had enough training to support… which listed different groups of students. The findings indicated low numbers of respondents who felt adequately trained to support female students (n=3), students with additional support needs (n=3) and students who disclose sexual assault involving a member of staff (n=3). Two respondents felt suitably equipped to support students who disclose same-sex sexual assault and just one answered that they felt trained enough to support male students. The majority of respondents (85%, n=23) felt they had not received enough training to support disclosures from any of these demarcated groups. Two respondents provided further insight on this issue:

No, not from the uni but I have a counselling qualification so I was able to do the basics of listening and referral to a charitable org who specialises in rape counselling
I'm a [...] year old woman with lots of life experience. Students tend to find me approachable, because of this I've made it my business to know how to respond. But I've not had any training.

Participants were asked about whether they were aware of any specially trained colleagues at their university to whom they could refer students. Eight respondents (29%) stated that there was a designated member of staff available for students, while nine respondents (32%) indicated that no such staff member or role existed. Eleven respondents (39%) were unsure whether or not their institution hosted a designated staff member or role. As a result, this meant many of the participants took on the responsibility of dealing with students themselves:

I have significant tutees but have not received specific training. I have supported students with rape, domestic violence, mental health issues. I don’t think we should have this role really.

When asked whether there was a need for more specialist in-house staff support at their university, Twenty-two of the twenty-five respondents (88%) said ‘yes’ while three answered ‘no’.

Disclosures from Students

Twenty-five participants responded to the question asking whether they taught subjects or modules that covered the topic of sexual assault. Twenty-one (84%) answered ‘yes’ while four answered ‘no’ (16%). When asked whether they thought students feel more comfortable disclosing sexual assault to staff members who teach on this area, eighteen (81%) of the twenty-two respondents to this question said ‘yes’, while four said ‘no’. As one respondent outlined:

Those of us who teach ‘gender’ within our modules - to any extent - have had students reporting.
We had a Zoom meeting about this just recently (informal - not organised by the university).

Of the twenty respondents to indicate that a student had disclosed an incident of sexual assault to them, ten said that had taken place within 12 months of the survey, while ten answered that it had taken place between 1 and 4 years previously.

Respondents were asked to reflect on their most recent experience of a student disclosing sexual assault and answer a series of questions accordingly. For the first question, which asked whether they had been aware that the student was going to disclose prior to them doing so, twenty of the twenty-five respondents answered ‘no’ and five answered ‘n/a’. For the second question, which asked whether they felt fully prepared to handle the situation at the time, eight answered ‘yes’, twelve answered ‘no’ and five answered ‘n/a’. For the third question, whether they felt they had received adequate training to respond appropriately to the nature of the student’s disclosure, four answered ‘yes’, fifteen answered ‘no’ and five answered ‘n/a’. Some participants used the comments box to indicate that they only felt able to respond due to prior experience or knowledge obtained before joining their university:

I was able to respond because of my knowledge outside of the institution. Much of the signposting and support I provided was also outside of the institution
I draw on my previous experience to support individuals who make disclosures to me.

When asked: Did you feel you had been adversely affected (emotionally, mentally, psychologically etc.) as a result of the student’s sexual assault disclosure nine of the twenty respondents answered ‘yes’. However, all twenty respondents answered ‘no’ to the question about whether they had accessed any form of wellbeing support for themselves from their university (following their interaction with the disclosing student).

Relatedly, respondents were asked whether their university did enough to support staff affected by issues that may arise from dealing with students’ disclosures of sexual assault. Of the twenty-four
respondents to answer this question, only two said ‘yes’. Ten (42%) answered ‘no’ while eleven (42%) answered ‘don’t know’. One respondent who answered ‘no’ added that there was ‘little support’ available and that other ‘less important issues’ appeared to be prioritised at their institution.

Staff-on-student sexual misconduct was also addressed in a question which asked: Are you aware of how student allegations of sexual misconduct or assault against staff members are dealt with in your University? Of the twenty-six respondents who answered, eight said ‘yes’ (31%) while eighteen said ‘no’ (69%). In a later question focusing on staff disclosures, two respondents used the free-text comment box to highlight staff sexual misconduct towards students. One respondent clarified that the disclosure they received had been ‘staff on student’. The other indicated that the disclosures of staff-perpetrated sexual misconduct had been from students, not colleagues.

Disclosures from Faculty

Participants were asked: Have colleagues disclosed to you any experiences they have had of unwanted sexual behaviour from other staff? Without disclosing their identity, can you tell us about this? Of the twenty-three who responded using the free-text comments box, twelve (52%) wrote ‘no’ and two wrote ‘n/a’ (9%). Eight respondents replied ‘yes’ (35%) with several taking the opportunity to provide additional information, context, or elaboration in their answers. Some respondents outlined being aware of several colleagues who had experienced inappropriate behaviour:

Yes, every woman I know in academia has shared stories of groping, lewd comments, ‘accidental’ touching (there is a lot of this about) and inappropriate comments made in the workplace. Good grief, why can’t they just let us get on with our jobs!

Unwanted sexual comments made by senior staff

Yes, the same person constantly harassing female staff

One comment made reference to colleagues being aware of one staff member’s harassing behaviour towards others:

Yes, very senior, well established, […] criminologist sexually harassed students, made inappropriate comments to staff (also bullied staff). He eventually quietly moved on. This has happened at, at least, three other British universities. Senior British academics have known about his behaviour for decades but he keeps getting hired

Another respondent highlighted disclosures from male colleagues, and indicated empathising with their decision not to report these experiences:

Some male colleagues have disclosed unwanted sexual attention but did not feel comfortable raising it as they did not feel they would be believed or people would care due to their gender. This is the same reason I have not disclosed instances.

Other comments highlighted colleagues’ disclosures of harassing experiences from students:

Similar experiences of sexist comments from some students and staff

A former student made up an elaborate story about my female colleague. He told his fellow students that he was in a sexual relationship with my colleague, and provided intimate and graphic details of this non-existent relationship.

In summary, this section has demonstrated that two-thirds of respondents anticipated being confronted with student disclosures of sexual misconduct despite only one-third having a role directly linked to such cases. Worryingly, training was considered inadequate or absent by the majority of respondents with a responsibility for addressing student sexual misconduct. Respondents indicated their awareness
of inappropriate behaviour by, and towards, staff and students alongside a culture of silence impeding the reporting or reprimanding of such behaviour. Participants also indicated having been adversely affected by sexual misconduct disclosures, alongside their general reticence or apprehension around accessing wellbeing support from their institutions.

3. Personal Experiences of Sexual Misconduct in HEI Settings

This section presents information from respondents about any sexual misconduct they may have been subjected to in the workplace. It also explores the impacts of these experiences. The findings are differentiated between Student-Perpetrated Misconduct and Faculty-Perpetrated Misconduct, while the subsection on Impacts and Actions addresses both types of misconduct.

Student-Perpetrated Misconduct

Thirty-three respondents answered the question about whether they had ever experienced sexually victimising behaviour perpetrated by a student. A selection of behaviours was listed with the option to select all that applied. Twenty-two respondents (66%) had not experienced any of the items on the list.

Eleven respondents identified as having experienced one or more of the listed behaviours. These included unwanted physical contact (such as the invasion of personal space and unnecessary touching) (n=7), unwelcome sexual advances, propositions and / or demands for sexual favours (n=6) and receiving unwanted or derogatory comments (n=5). Two respondents had been subjected to sexual harassment in online spaces. Two respondents indicated that they had been sexually assaulted by a student.

Twelve respondents answered the question about the duration of the incident(s). Six said that they had been subjected to a single victimising incident. Three had experienced a series of incidents over a longer period of time. Three respondents indicated that the victimising behaviour they had been subjected to by students was still ongoing.

Faculty-Perpetrated Misconduct

Thirty-three respondents answered the question about whether they had personally experienced one or more forms of sexually victimising behaviour from the same list, albeit this time perpetrated by colleagues while in the workplace. Of these, eighteen (55%) said they had never experienced any of the behaviours listed.

Among the remaining fifteen respondents, the most frequently experienced behaviours were unwanted physical contact (such as the invasion of personal space and unnecessary touching) (n=10) and receiving unwanted or derogatory comments (n=10). This was followed by having experienced unwelcome sexual advances, propositions and / or demands for sexual favours (n=6). Two respondents had been subjected to sexual harassment in online spaces. One respondent indicated that they had been sexually assaulted by a colleague in the workplace.

When asked about the person responsible for the abovementioned behaviours, nine respondents indicated that the perpetrator had been ‘a senior colleague’, with one case involving a colleague more junior to the respondent. Of the respondents who ticked ‘other’, one said the person was a ‘board
member’, two said ‘colleague’, one said ‘male student’, and one respondent indicated two perpetrators: ‘a manager and a senior colleague’.

Using the comments function, one respondent wrote that they had received ‘unwanted/inappropriate texts’, while two respondents used the space to highlight their frustrations:

Again, what a sorry list of experiences. I know it isn’t just me either as I have an extensive network of female colleagues and we ALL have these stories.

Sadly much of the above. 20 years ago I just accepted this as the norm - now less so. I have had ‘words’ with colleagues and senior managers. They mostly laugh it off or squirm their way out of it. It is not a laughing matter to be on the receiving end though, especially when everyone else sees you as a 'strong, capable woman' - it really undermines your sense of confidence and your right to be in the university - honestly, I’ve never even talked about a lot of this before.

When asked about the frequency of incidents and length of time, eight respondents stated that their experience of victimisation had been limited to a single incident, whereas seven respondents said they had been subjected to a series of incidents over a longer period of time.

**Impacts and Actions**

The following set of questions asked respondents about the aftermath of being subjected to one or more of the listed behaviours (from staff and/or students). The first question asked: *Have you missed work due to these experiences?* to which all seventeen respondents who answered said ‘no’.

However, the following question asked: *Do you feel your work has suffered due to any of these experiences?* Eighteen participants replied, most saying ‘no’ (n=11) but some indicating that ‘yes’, their work had been negatively impacted (n=7).

The next question asked: *If action was taken, did the situation improve?* Eleven respondents replied, eight saying ‘no’ and three saying ‘yes’.

Asked whether they would feel 1) able to report incidents within their institution and 2) be supported while doing so, twenty-eight respondents answered. Eighteen respondents said ‘yes’ (64%) and ten respondents said ‘no’ (36%). Several participants elaborated on their answers using the free-text comments box. One stated that ‘There is support in place to report and safeguard’. All the other responses were less positive. One respondent detailed reporting their concerns to senior management only to be instructed to manage their response to the situation instead of any action being taken to address their concerns:

Well it is tricky- I am in a different institution now, but in my previous one I shared an office with a known misogynist and he had bullied other junior female staff. I raised issues to my HoD and he basically told me I needed to have tough boundaries as otherwise this staff member would get worse. That was the extent of it. And when I left he went on to bully other junior women.

Another respondent stated that they had taken action, and would do so again (without the expectation for there to be a positive outcome), but acknowledged that their decision was strongly influenced by their current position and status within the institution:

I would report now that I am established, and have reported, but this is because I have a permanent position with some authority and good standing within the institution. I do not, however, trust the university or HR to do anything
On a similar note, one respondent indicated that their ability to take action was constrained by the circumstances of the event (being a direct report to the perpetrator) and the lack of a specialist reporting process being available to address such situations:

The men I've received bad treatment from include those people who I would be expected to report to! It is a farce. There should be an independent person (in HR maybe?) who could be responsible for this. At least twice I've beenlunged at sexually by my line manager (male) - I tried reporting this the first time and I was just sent some standard wording about making a complaint (which has as its first recourse 'talk to your line manager') - as I say, it is a farce.

Another respondent highlighted that they felt less confident in their institution’s response if their disclosure related to victimisation perpetrated by a student:

It would depend. If I was victimised by a student, I imagine that my institution would prioritise the student's version of events and their wellbeing; my institution will go to incredible lengths to retain students.

Conversely, one participant used the final free-text commentary space provided at the end of the survey to express their frustration with the lack of institutional due process for student victims:

There needs to be systematic overhauling of the whole process. Outcomes to so called investigations included being told that we shouldn't 'ruin' a young man's career with 'unfounded allegations' where behaviour that would equate to criminal offending has been evident. I am furious with how poorly such disclosures are handled. I worry about students making disclosures and knowing that, internally, little will happen in the way of action or support.

In summary, this section has demonstrated that some participants have experience of being subjected to sexual misconduct by other staff members and/or students while in the workplace, and many demonstrated having little faith in their institutions’ desire or ability to acknowledge or address such misconduct.

4. Sexually Inappropriate Delegate Behaviour at Academic Conferences

The final section presents the findings on respondents’ awareness and perceptions of inappropriate delegate behaviour at academic conferences and who should be responsible for dealing with this. Twenty-eight respondents answered all three questions in this section.

When asked if they had witnessed delegates behaving in a sexually inappropriate way at conferences, ten respondents answered ‘yes’ (36%). Seventeen respondents answered ‘no’ (61%), and one was unsure as they had ‘heard rumours’. In response to the question about whether they thought that sexually inappropriate behaviour is tolerated by other delegates, ten respondents answered ‘yes’ (36%). Seven respondents answered ‘no’ (25%) and eleven answered ‘don’t know’ (39%).

Respondents were asked if they had ever felt uncomfortable by witnessing sexually inappropriate behaviour at conferences. Eight replied ‘yes’ (29%), seventeen replied ‘no’ (61%) and three answered ‘other’. In the free-text comments box, two respondents clarified that they had not witnessed any sexually inappropriate behaviour at conferences (with one adding that they ‘would feel uncomfortable’ if they did). The other respondent alluded to predatory behaviour they had witnessed from male colleagues:
Yes, I’ve seen colleagues getting drunk and behaving stupidly. I’m ok with that but I’ve also seen female colleagues being ‘made drunk’ during the evening conference dinner and I had to intervene to make sure she was not vulnerable from the male colleague she was with.

Participants were asked: *If behaviour is deemed sexually inappropriate whose responsibility is it to respond?* Twenty respondents answered this question by writing a comment in the free-text box, with most indicating that they believed the responsibility should be shared. Most frequently cited answers made reference to everyone who was aware of or witnessed the incident (n=13), followed by those with responsibility for organising the conference (n=5). Several participants suggested the victim or targeted person should be the one to take action (n=5).

Twenty-three respondents provided answers to the question: *How do we as a professional society encourage delegates to address inappropriate language or behaviour?* These were via a free-text comment box, meaning respondents provided a range of different suggestions. Some outlined requests for clearly stated and accessible policies on appropriate conduct:

- Role modelling and stating rules of attendance
- There should be clearer guidance about this in conferences
- Clear guidelines, awareness raising

Others recommended visibly and actively calling out behaviour, while supporting victims of harassment to seek out help and support:

- Show leadership and call such behaviour out
- Maybe a call it out principle - plus complaints procedure?
- Calling it out, reporting it, sharing information on how to prevent / report / address it
- Zero tolerance on sexual harassment.

Some suggested that disclosures should be encouraged and routes for anonymous reporting should be provided ‘to avoid damage to reputation and threat to employment’ (though it was unclear whether this damage or threat related to the victim, perpetrator or both). One respondent advocated for a more direct approach:

- Remind people that we are not in a world where ‘what happens at the conference, stays at the conference’ is acceptable

Another respondent highlighted the androcentric nature of criminology (as a discipline) and they would like to see conferences feel safer for women. Several participants mentioned that they were not sure how to address the issue, or that there were no plausible solutions they could recommend.

In summary, this section has demonstrated that participants are aware that academic conferences can be sites where inappropriate sexual behaviour from delegates is witnessed and / or experienced, and that a degree of responsibility lies with the organisers to anticipate and address such conduct.
Summary

This scoping survey sought to solicit input from BSC members about their perspectives on, and experiences of, issues relating to sexual harassment and abuse within higher education settings. Despite only a small proportion of the total member base taking part, and some respondents choosing not to answer certain questions, the insights obtained contribute to a growing body of information and awareness about sexual misconduct in UK HEIs. In this final section, we summarise the core findings and present recommendations for both HEIs and the BSC as a learned society.

Many respondents indicated anticipating student disclosures, with some having had experience of dealing with cases, regardless of whether or not training had been provided by their university. These respondents indicated that they felt equipped to provide such support as a result of prior experiences, expertise, or knowledge obtained outside of their present institution. However, as no current standardised approach to dealing with student sexual misconduct exists across the HEI sector, staff may inadvertently provide incorrect or incomplete information to students about a particular institution’s response to disclosures. Similarly, much can also be learned from respondents who frequently answered ‘unsure’ to questions asking about the existence, use, and/or promotion of policies, support systems or institutional resources. This indicates that many institutions have much work to do around implementing better infrastructures of support and promoting these more heavily to members of staff. Recommendations to this effect were outlined in the report published by the student-led campaign group Reclaim the Campus, following their examination of 41 universities’ sexual misconduct policies (Reclaim the Campus, 2021).

The findings demonstrated a strong level of investment in students’ welfare among participants, but also highlighted the potential for this type of care and support to adversely impact on members of staff. It is likely that many staff attending to disclosing students will be doing so in a voluntary capacity and may not have had the required training to deal with the issues presented. It is therefore also important to acknowledge that none of the participants in this study accessed university wellbeing support for themselves following their interaction with students affected by sexual misconduct. This is especially notable as respondents indicated variability in institutional approaches to having a designated internal point of contact specialising in student sexual misconduct. While some institutions have acknowledged the necessity of focusing on staff welfare, several areas for development have been identified around providing suitable levels of support for staff responding to student disclosures (Jones, Chappell, and Alldred, 2021).

The Equality Act 2010 outlines provisions governing the legal duty on universities to prevent sexual harassment and violence, while several organisations (e.g., The 1752 Group and Equally Safe in Higher Education) have resources available to HEIs seeking to develop policies and practices targeting sexual misconduct. Relatedly, some respondents made reference to incidents involving students being sexually victimised by members of staff. This issue has received less national attention in comparison to efforts to address incidents perpetrated by and on students. However, a report exploring students’ experiences of staff-perpetrated sexual misconduct demonstrated that four in ten of all respondents reported at least one experience of sexualised behaviour from staff, while one in eight respondents reported being touched by a staff member in a way that made them uncomfortable (NUS and the 1752 Group, 2018).

While survey participants demonstrated their awareness of other staff members who had experienced sexual misconduct in the workplace, some indicated having been personally subjected to victimising behaviours themselves. This included being targeted for sexual assaults by staff and/or students. None said that they missed work as a result, but several agreed that their experiences had
negatively impacted on their performance at work. Some were hesitant about reporting such behaviour, indicating the perceived futility of such efforts or the responsibility for dealing with incidents being deflected back on to them. Sexual misconduct in the workplace was the focus of a recent UCU investigation (UCU, 2021). Their report detailed how one in ten university and college staff had experience of workplace sexual violence in the past five years and over half (52%) did not disclose or report this to their employer (UCU, 2021). The UCU study also discovered that 70% of those who directly experienced sexual violence described it as an ongoing pattern of behaviour rather than a one-off incident.

While universities evidently have a responsibility to recognise, respond to, and reduce sexual misconduct, learned societies such as the British Society of Criminology also have a role to play in supporting these important conversations, activities, and initiatives. With that in mind, we outline a series of recommendations based on the findings from this research aimed at both groups:

**Recommendations for HEIs:**

- HEIs should create, implement, and publicise dedicated policies and practices on student-student, student-staff, and staff-student sexual misconduct. This is an important starting point to demonstrate that institutions are taking the issue seriously. Step-by-step guidance on how to do this can be found in the UN Women’s guidance note on campus violence prevention and response.
- HEI sexual misconduct information and guidance documents should be clearly signposted to staff and students and be easily locatable and accessible through online repositories. This includes publicising the contact details for specialist wellbeing or safeguarding officers.
- HEIs should capitalise on the expertise held by external (local and national) specialists when developing their materials or procedures. This is important to ensure accuracy in approach, terminology, tone, information, delivery style etc. Furthermore, students who have experienced sexual harassment and abuse may already be accessing specialist support services, so these organisations may have unique insights into how to address sexual misconduct in educational settings.
- HEIs should clearly outline how and where staff can access wellbeing support following a disclosure of sexual misconduct. Senior management teams should also be alert to the possibility that students may disclose to members of staff who teach on topics related to gender-based violence, and check-in with staff accordingly to ensure they have capacity to manage such disclosures.
- HEIs should encourage and support the sharing of best practice in dealing with sexual misconduct and publish relevant (anonymised) data to improve transparency.

**Recommendations for the BSC:**

- Provide members with the space to share their experiences, frustrations, ideas, recommendations and insights around best practice at events, such as the BSC Annual Conference
- Promote initiatives such as the *Innovation Fund* to support members’ actions in tackling sexual misconduct and knowledge-sharing activities.
- Provide a clear statement around acceptable conduct for delegates attending BSC local, regional, annual and Network events. This should be coupled with guidance about who to contact if concerns are raised about inappropriate delegate behaviour at such events.
- Promote transparency and track developments in this area through periodic data collection from members on the issue.
References


ONS. 2021. Sexual offences prevalence and victim characteristics, England and Wales. 18 March 2022. Table 5.


Universities UK. 2019. Changing the culture – tackling gender-based violence, harassment and hate crime: Two years on. [https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Pages/changing-the-culture-two-years-on.aspx](https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Pages/changing-the-culture-two-years-on.aspx)


Appendix

Preface for the survey

The British Society of Criminology is conducting research into the experiences of staff within criminology of sexual violence and harassment in higher education. In this survey we ask about your own experiences of sexual violence and harassment, the extent to which you feel supported by your institution, and whether you feel equipped to dealing with student disclosures.

We have carefully considered the ethics of conducting an online survey. We follow the ethical guidelines of the BSC Ethics Statement, as well as those of the Association of Internet Researchers. Throughout the project, we will be critically reflexive about unanticipated ethical issues arising from its sensitive, qualitative and digital nature.

Background

1. What is your current job title?

2. Is your employment: Hourly paid / Fixed-term / Permanent / Other (please specify) [Free-text box]

3. Do you work full-time or part-time? Full-time / Part-time / Retired

4. How long have you worked at your current institution? Less than 1 year / 1-2 years / 3-4 years / 5-9 years / 10-14 years / 15-19 years / 20 years+

5. Are you involved in the training of other staff around student sexual misconduct or assault? Yes / No

6. How would you describe your gender? Female (including male-to-female trans woman) / Male (including female-to male trans man) / Non-binary /Other (please specify) [free-text box]

7. Do you consider yourself disabled? Yes / No / Prefer not to say

8. How would you describe your sexuality? Asexual / Bisexual / Gay / Heterosexual or straight / Lesbian / Pansexual / None of the above (please specify) [free-text box]

9. How would you describe your ethnicity (please choose only one)? Asian / Asian-Bangladeshi / Asian-Indian / Asian-Pakistani / Asian-Other / Black / Black-African / Black-Caribbean / Black-Other / Chinese / White / White-Other / Multiple ethnicity / Other [Free-text box]

University policies on sexual violence, harassment & misconduct

1. Does your institution have any distinct policies to deal with sexual violence or harassment/misconduct? Yes / No / Don’t know
2. What awareness-raising and campaigning activities are undertaken by your institution to make staff and students aware of policies and procedures? None / Sexual violence awareness / Harassment in the workplace / other (please specify) [Free-text box]

3. Are policies and procedures included in:
   a. Staff handbooks Yes / No
   b. University website Yes / No
   c. Student handbook Yes / No
   d. None of the above
   e. Other (please specify) [Free-text box]

4. Is there support from Senior management? [Free-text box]

5. What formal or centralised reporting and monitoring processes exist within your institution? (tick all that apply)
   a. Reporting with the option of not taking further action (such as formal complaints) but accessing support
   b. Reporting and initiating formal complaints procedures
   c. Anonymous reporting
   d. Don’t know
   e. Other (please specify) [Free-text box]

6. Does your institution have a chief safeguarding officer? [Free-text box]

7. Do you know of any institutional sharing of best practice around reporting structures? For example, does your institution use materials developed by other organisations? [Free-text box]

**External relationships**

1. Does your institution have external relationships with, for example, with the police or specialist support services? Yes / No / Don’t know [Free-text box]

2. Do specialist agencies help to develop and improve policies and procedures? Yes / No / Don’t know

3. What signposting is available to specialist external agencies? [Free-text box]
Reporting sexual violence, harassment & misconduct

1. Thinking about the actions of staff members, have you personally experienced any of the following in the workplace?
   a. Unwelcome sexual advances, propositions and / or demands for sexual favours
   b. Unwanted or derogatory comments
   c. Sexual harassment in online spaces (eg., sexual comment by another academic in response to your tweet)
   d. Unwanted physical contact such as the invasion of personal space and unnecessary touching
   e. Sexual assault
   f. None of the above
   g. Other (please specify) [Free-text box]

2. Thinking of the previous question, was the person(s) responsible?
   a. Your line manager
   b. Another manager
   c. A senior colleague
   d. A junior colleague
   e. Other (please specify) [Free-text box]

3. How long did it go on for? It was a single incident / A series of incidents over a longer period / Ongoing

4. Thinking of actions from students, have you personally experienced any of the following in the workplace? (tick all that apply)
   a. Unwelcome sexual advances, propositions and / or demands for sexual favours
   b. Unwanted or derogatory comments
   c. Sexual harassment in online spaces (eg., sexual comment by another academic in response to your tweet)
   d. Unwanted physical contact such as the invasion of personal space and unnecessary touching
   e. Sexual assault
f. None of the above

g. Other (please specify) [Free-text box]

5. How long did it go on for? It was a single incident / A series of incidents over a longer period / Ongoing

6. Have you missed work due to any of these experiences? Yes / No

7. Do you feel your work has suffered due to any of these experiences? Yes / No

8. If action was taken, did the situation improve? Yes / No

9. Have colleagues disclosed to you any experiences they have had of unwanted sexual behaviour from other staff? Without disclosing their identity, can you tell us about this? [Free-text box]

10. Thinking of the future, do you think you would feel able to report incidents within your institution, and be supported in doing so? Yes / No [Please elaborate Free-text box]

At conferences

1. Have you witnessed any delegates behaving in a sexually inappropriate way? Yes / No / Not Sure [Free-text box]

2. Do you think sexually inappropriate behaviour is tolerated by other delegates? Yes / No / Don’t know

3. Have you ever felt uncomfortable by witnessing sexually inappropriate behaviour at conferences? Yes / No / Other (please specify) [Free-text box]

4. If behaviour is deemed sexually inappropriate whose responsibility is it to respond? [Free-text box]

5. How do we as a professional society encourage delegates to address inappropriate language or behaviour? [Free-text box]

Supporting students

1. When you began in post, did you consider the possibility that you may be confronted with students’ disclosures of sexual misconduct or assault? Yes / No

2. Do you have a role at the University that is directly linked to student sexual misconduct or assault? [i.e. investigative role, pastoral role and emergency response role]. Yes / No

3. If yes: Do you feel adequately trained to deal with students’ disclosures of sexual misconduct or assault? [Free-text box]
4. Has your University provided any training about issues relating to student sexual misconduct or assault? **Yes / No / Not sure**

5. If yes: Was this delivered in-house or by external specialists? [i.e. Rape Crisis] *[Free-text box]*

6. Do you feel you have had enough training to support:
   a. **Female students who disclose sexual assault**
   b. **Male students who disclose sexual assault**
   c. **Students who disclose same-sex sexual assault**
   d. **Students with additional support needs who disclose sexual assault**
   e. **Students who disclose sexual assault involving a member of staff**
   f. **None of the above**

7. Is there a designated member of staff for such complaints or are all staff trained to provide this support? **Yes / No / Don’t know**

8. How recently has a student disclosed sexual assault to you? **Less than a year ago / 1-4 years ago / 5+ years ago**

9. Thinking about the most recent experience you have of a student disclosing sexual assault:
   a. Were you aware that the student was going to disclose prior to them doing so? **Yes / No / NA**
   b. Did you feel fully prepared to handle the situation at the time? **Yes / No / NA**
   c. On the basis of what the student disclosed, do you feel you had adequate training to respond appropriately? **Yes / No / NA**
   d. **Other (please specify) [Free-text box]**

10. Following your engagement with the disclosing student, did you access support for yourself from the University? **Yes / No**

11. If yes: who provided this support? *[Free-text box]*

12. Did you feel that you had been adversely affected (emotionally, mentally, psychologically etc.) as a result of the student’s sexual assault disclosure? **Yes / No**

13. In your opinion, does the University do enough to support staff affected by issues that may arise from dealing with students’ disclosures of sexual assault? **Yes / No / Don’t know / Other [Free-text box]**
14. Do you consider there to be a need for more specialist in-house staff support at your University? Yes / No

15. Do you teach subjects / modules that cover the topic of sexual assault? Yes / No

16. If yes: Do you think students feel more comfortable disclosing to staff members who teach subjects / modules that cover the topic of sexual assault? Yes / No

17. Are you aware of how student allegations of sexual misconduct or assault against staff members are dealt with in your University? Yes / No

Thank you for taking the time to answer these questions. If you require support, please contact Rape Crisis in your own area (this is a good starting point - Rape Crisis Eng&Wales).

If there is anything else you would like to add, please use this text box. [Free-text box]