

Sexual Harassment and Violence Support Service

Annual Report 2018-19



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Introduction

The Support Service has been operating since the start of Michaelmas Term 2018, launching on 1 October with a small communications campaign to raise awareness of the new provision. The initial team of 3 specially trained advisors (1 full-time and 2 supporting the project alongside a substantive role in the institution) provided the initial response.

The expectation was that somewhere in the region of 50 students would seek support in the first year of operation with this growing over time. However, by the end of August 2019 a total of 167 students had sought support, with over 65 seeking support in Michaelmas term alone.

The service was joined by a full-time Independent Sexual Violence Advisor (ISVA) seconded from Oxfordshire Sexual Abuse and Rape Crisis Centre (OSARCC) in January 2019 and another specialist advisor in Hilary Term. An additional two specialist advisors will join the team formally in Hilary 2020.

Students receive an individually tailored response to their needs from an allocated specialist advisor or the ISVA that is focussed on what they would like to do and empowering their choice. The service model operated at Oxford is largely unique in the sector and has been described as ‘sector leading’.

In addition to support for students, the service lead is available for non-names consultation and provision of advice to colleges and welfare staff. This provision has seen an increasing demand, largely due to awareness of the issues and increasing student cases being raised in colleges.

Service Developments

The sheer quantity of casework in the year coupled with a very limited resource has meant that ongoing service development work has been limited and below what we would have liked to achieve. However, a focus on delivering an excellent and student-centred response has led to positive feedback from service users and welfare professionals.

The service has also increased multi-agency and partnership working across Oxford and is contributing to a multi-agency response to sexual violence in the city with the police, local authority, NHS, and Brookes. We are looking at options for greater information and intelligence sharing with police to ensure that local resource can be targeted in areas of need. Additionally, we have strengthened our collaboration with OSARCC who we have partnered with to support our training and awareness work, with two large awareness trainings offered for all staff and a more in-depth training for welfare leads.

Finally, we have contributed a chapter to a book on student welfare services looking at sexual violence response and best practice provision, due to be published sometime around Easter 2020, as well as some advice and consultation support with other HEIs looking to set up their own services.

General report information and terminology

This is first annual report on the student case work of the Service, covering Oct 2018 to the end of August 2019. This is 11 months and puts the Service’s reporting in line with other professional services in SWSS running September to August.

We refer to parties as the ‘reporting student’ and the ‘accused student’, and we intentionally avoid the labels of victim and perpetrator. This is to ensure that we work non-judgementally with students and not to put labels on people and behaviour, instead allowing students themselves to define their experiences.

Data picture

The prevalence of sexual violence is higher in the city of Oxford than the national average, and the local police data identifies a notably higher rate in instances in Oxford city compared to wider Thames Valley

Police (TVP) area. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) data shows that it is females, aged 18-25, who have the occupation of student who are most at risk.

Police data locally shows reported sexual offences in Oxford occurring at a rate of 3.83 per 1,000 population, some 65% higher than the wider TVP area which has a rate of 2.32 per 1,000 population. Local sexual offence data from TVP shows an increase of sexual offences in the city of 17.5% in the last year and a 28.8% increase over the last two years. From our engagement in multi-agency work with the police we know that there is little crossover in cases. Of concern is that the true prevalence of sexual violence is higher than reported in national statistics and remains largely concealed.

Referrals

The service received 167 referrals from October 2018 to August 2019 concerning sexual harassment and violence, a significant increase compared to the previous (pre-service) year where only 11 cases were recorded. The vast majority of these were received directly from students or came via referral from the Counselling Service or college welfare staff.

Of these referrals 142 were received by the Service and 25 were direct referrals to the ISVA.

14 students failed to attend their scheduled appointment with an advisor, giving a DNA rate of 8.4% (91.6% attendance). This is felt to be a positive rate given the nature of the work we do and difficulties students have accessing support, and the rate is in line with what colleagues at OSARCC would expect.

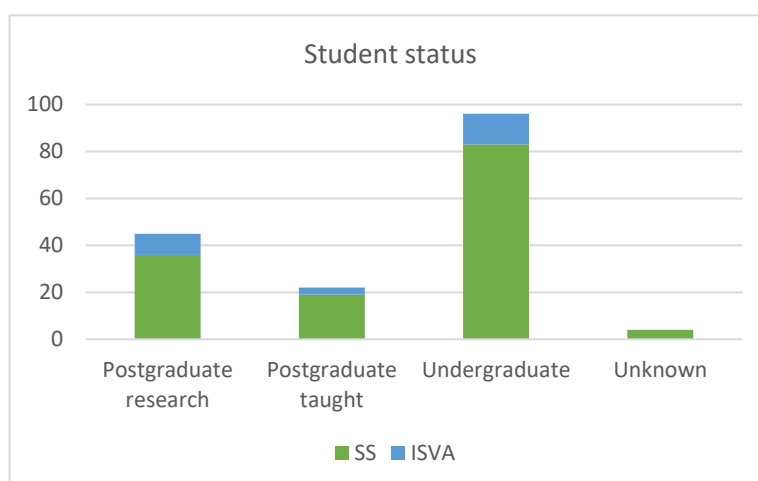
Nine referrals came from students who had been accused, accounting for 5.4% of the work. All of the accused students are handled by the Service team rather than the ISVA due to the specific nature of her role, and students are allocated to different advisors when both parties use the service.

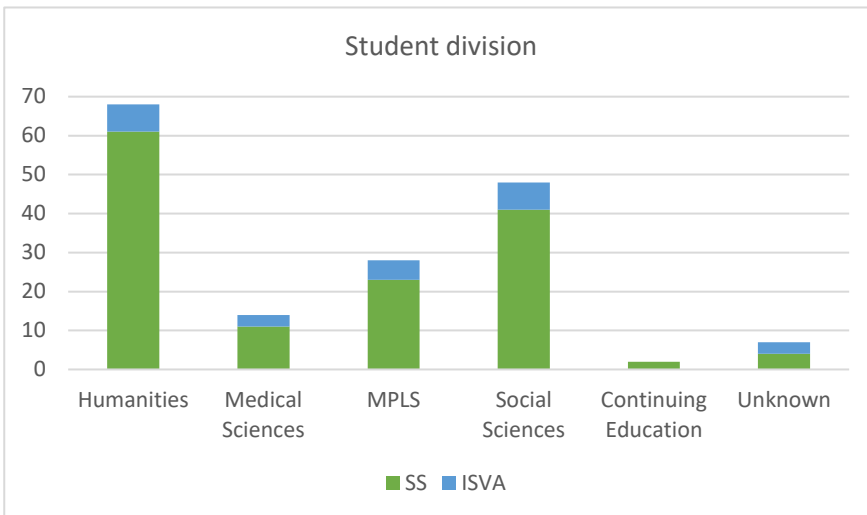
Demographics of referrals

The data shows the core demographics of students who attended an appointment with the service (143 students).

Over half of those seen in the service were undergraduates. Perhaps more surprising was the higher number of PGRs. PGR cases tend to be more complex and involve higher rates of relationship abuse.

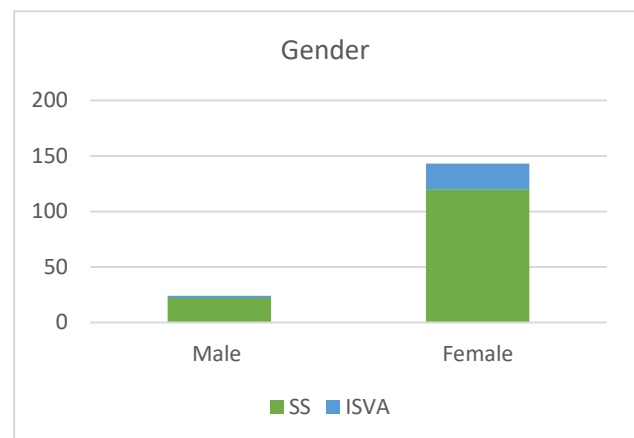
We see fewer PGT students than might be expected based on the student population distribution, however this group have a limited and focussed time in Oxford due to their studies.





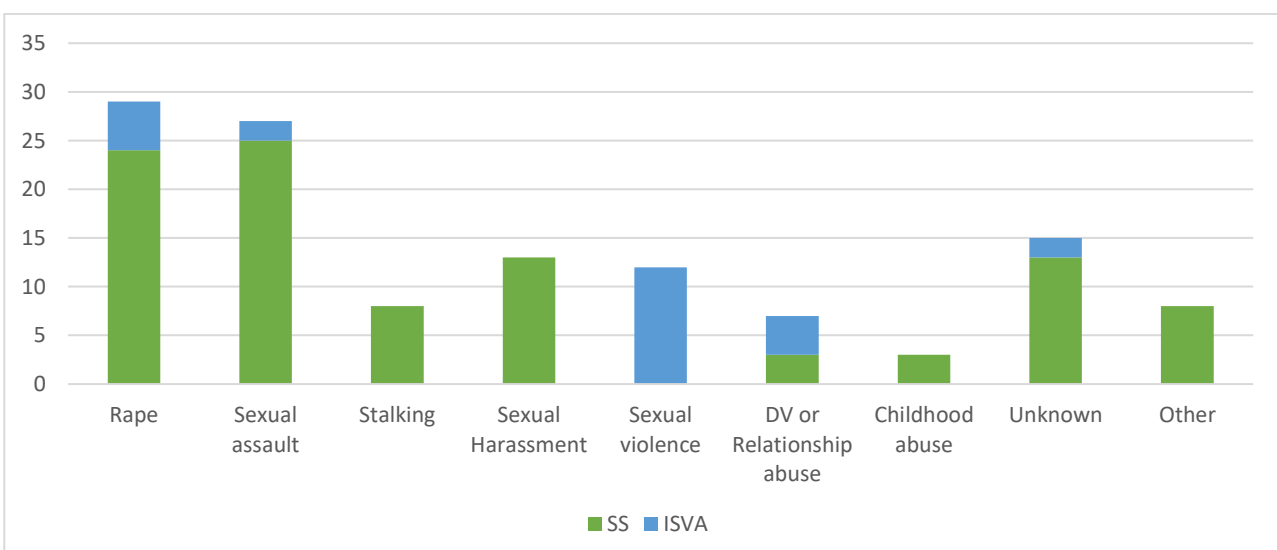
The divisional distribution is broadly in line with that seen in other student welfare services at Oxford, where students engaging in humanities or social science subjects tend to have a higher engagement with welfare provision.

The service by the nature of its provision would be expected to see far more female students than male. The number of male students accessing the service has increase in the latter terms as more accused students (typically male) are supported. Of the 21 male students seen, two thirds presented at the service seeking support as reporting students rather than accused.



Behaviour

This data is based on how reporting students characterise the behaviour they have experienced. The service encourages students to label the incident and behaviour as they choose rather than applying a legal definition. For example, if a student labels an incident as sexual assault but technically this would be rape, we will record sexual assault. Where multiple behaviours are recorded the most significant is captured in the data.



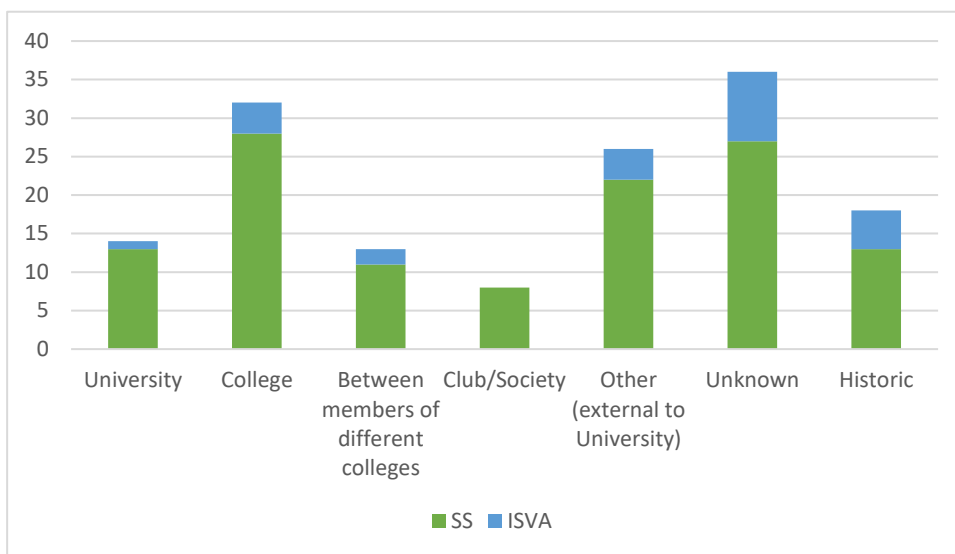
Rape and sexual assault were the most commonly reported, accounting for nearly half of all cases (44%), with sexual harassment accounting for only 10.3% of the caseload. Serious sexual crimes (a measure used by the police encompassing rape, sexual assault, stalking, and for our purposes, sexual violence) account for 60% of the casework. The Service noticed in the year that there was a higher rate of domestic and relationship abuse that perhaps expected, prompting some specialist DV training for the advisors. Coercion-control behaviours are increasingly prevalent in cases and along with stalking present significantly higher risk to individuals and the community.

The ISVA records data slightly differently to the Service and includes a broader category of sexual violence, which can encompass rape, sexual assault, or stalking, but where the student has not identified the actual behaviour.

Context

The context allows us to understand where an incident took place and the relationship with the collegiate university.

The service will respond to historic cases and those that happened outside of Oxford which increases the number of students seeking support. The figures in future years will clarify the Oxford/non-Oxford context.



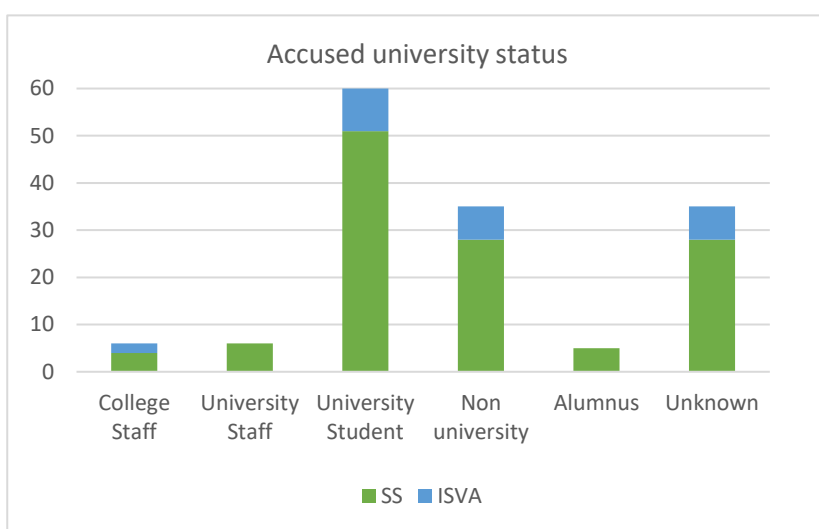
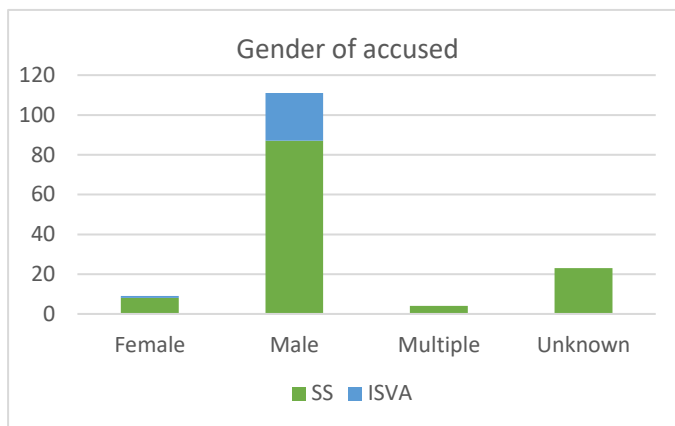
Most cases have a student to student context either in the same college or where the students are in different colleges. University context relates in most cases to departmental academic staff and PGRs. The 'unknown' category is used where reporting student does not know the context or chooses not to disclose this information.

College context cases tend to related to undergraduates (69%) and PGT (23%). 63% of college context cases relate to serious sexual crimes. A similar picture exists for students of different colleges, where serious sexual crimes relate to 69% of cases. University context cases typically relate to postgraduates and concern sexual harassment.

Accused party

In line with expectation the vast majority of accused persons are male

We also record whether the accused party has a university status as a student, member of staff or as alumni. The majority of identified accused parties are Oxford students (40.8%), with non-university members and unknown (both 23.8%) the second largest group. Staff across the collegiate university account for 8.2% of accused parties.



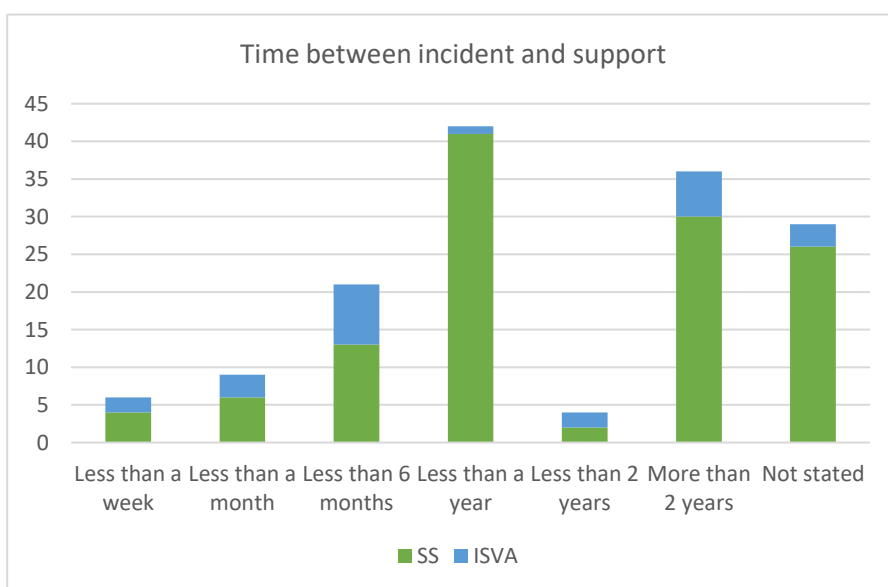
Non-university members in this context can be members of the public or Brookes students. 'Unknown' typically represents historic reports of sexual violence or childhood abuse.

The reports made against staff in year all related to sexual harassment or unwanted sexual advances, and typically involve the postgraduate community.

Timescales for support

People affected by sexual violence can take a very long time to seek support. Research shows that survivors of sexual abuse take an average of 22 years to come forward for support (NAPAC, cited in Telegraph 2016), with a higher average of 26 years for male survivors (Survivors UK, 2017).

We tend to see students either six months or a year after an incident has happened, with the anniversary of the event being a significant trigger. Students tend to come for support having noticed a re-emergence of emotion and feeling



which has a significant impact on their ability to study or function well, and this fits with theories on trauma cycles.

This means that the majority of students we support are not reporting very recent incidents that may require a more focused and medical response, although this does form a significant amount of the advice to colleges and welfare staff.

Accused support

The service also supports students who have been accused of sexual harassment or violence. This forms a central part of the university's duty of care to all of our students, and accused students receive the same level of service as reporting students, with a focus on how to keep them safe and able to continue their studies.

The service supported nine students last year who were accused of sexual harassment or violence.

Trends

There is a perception, particularly in the media, that sexual violence means 'stranger rape in an alley', which is largely incorrect. Instances of sexual violence in Oxford match that of the true picture with instances occurring between people who are known to one another.

Our initial expectation was that a majority of cases would relate to recent (<7 days) incidents, however the casework so far has predominantly related to incidents that occurred 6 months to 1 year previously. Indeed the largest individual group of students seeking support are 2nd year undergraduate coming to speak about an incident of rape or sexual assault that happened in or around fresher's week the previous year.

Amongst students seen in the Service the vast majority do not want to speak to the police or report the incident to them. The preferred option is a university-led investigation using a process that is straightforward and quick, with the preferred outcome as often 'education' for the accused student and a change in their behaviour. It is also common for the reporting student to want the institution to 'ban' or suspend the accused student whilst they (the reporting student) complete their course. Reporting students want the incident to be formally acknowledged somehow, but equally concerned that the narrative of the incident is not widely shared, especially in their College.

We also note an increasing expectation from reporting students that the institution should do something when an incident is informally reported without a requirement to instigate a formal process by the reporting student. Given the requirements of the duty of care this is often not possible unless we consider that there is significant risk to individuals or the community.

The Service saw a number of childhood sexual abuse cases and some instances of institutional abuse particularly amongst international students at the start of the year, although the proportion of these cases has dropped off. More concerning is the coercion-control behaviours which are much more insidious and risky. Students in these relationships are very hard to reach and not likely to seek support. Interventions in these cases have to be carefully considered and risked managed due to the potential for serious harm.

Feedback

A brief survey of service users was undertaken over the Christmas vacation 2018 for initial feedback on the service and as a means to further refine and develop the provision. 10 responses were received of the 52 students contacted (20%). Respondents noted that they were comfortable speaking to their advisor, and that the service felt confidential and independent. The service could be clearer in what it does, as the scope of provision is wider than first considered. All but one would recommend the service.

From the qualitative feedback, we noted strengths of the service: the tone and kindness of advisors; students felt listened to and safe to speak; the service was seen as professional. Areas for improvement were noted as: improving waiting times; understanding how the service integrates with other institutional provision, and follow ups. Wider advertising in colleges and via social media to raise awareness was also suggested.

Other suggestions included: a better institutional reporting processes that colleges could follow; and a similar level of support offered to post-docs and staff.

Forward Plan

Areas of growth

There are a number of areas of potential growth for the service to improve provision, along with work that needs to be done on policy development and sector engagement. Now that the service is in a steady state we would like to look at barriers to access and setting up an online referral form for students.

Work with accused students is a further growth area, however there is limited national guidance and training on this type of work that is not therapeutic or forensic, and the sector in general is not well prepared.

Further engagement with the sector is a target for 2019-20. In addition to the publication of the book chapter we are proposing a session at a student services conference in July 2020 and exploring options with UUK to speak and develop guidance on working with men.

Emerging issues and challenges

The perennial welfare issue of rising demand in casework numbers and case complexity are certainly true for the Service, set aside a lack of resourcing. The budget for the service, which is half funded by colleges, is £88,000 covering the costs of the service lead and ISVA. Any increase in provision will require additional financial resource.

A significant emerging issue of concern is the current (Feb 2020) consultation being undertaken by the Office for Students on regulation of institutions in regard to sexual violence support and complaints.

The complexity of casework has also grown (not that this work can ever be described as straightforward), and we have noticed increasing number of students reporting coercion-control and other relationship abuse behaviours which are much more complex and time consuming to respond well to, often requiring input from Security Services and other agencies to provide a full and safe response.

Pete Mandeville

Service Lead, Sexual Harassment and Violence Support Service