

Participant Information Sheet

Sex, power and professionals: the nature, extent and administrative justice responses to sexual misconduct and abuse perpetrated by professionals

A University of Bristol study (ERC awarded/UKRI Frontier Research Guarantee, 2023-2028, EP/Y004698/1)

Introduction

This study explores the nature and prevalence of sexual misconduct and abuse perpetrated by UK professionals and seeks to evaluate critically the regulatory and administrative justice mechanisms used to investigate and sanction such behaviour. It focuses on high status/high public trust professionals who have a guardianship (e.g. police, military, legal, politicians) or confidante role (e.g. doctors, psychiatrists, clergy).

The wider study involves engaging with UK professional regulators to build retrospective datasets of fitness-to-practice cases and other data related to how sexual misconduct cases are identified and managed within professional organisations. Work will also be carried out to pull together data already in the public domain.

This element of the study involves interviewing three groups of people who can provide relevant insight: staff working for regulators, tribunals and professional bodies or within professional standards or internal disciplinary processes; individuals who act as legal counsel in such cases; and journalists who report on sexual misconduct, particularly for 'trade' journals or investigative outlets. This may be a current or previous role.

The study is focused on the UK context, but seeks to draw in best practice with other jurisdictions.

This project is led by Dr Natasha Mulvihill, Associate Professor in Criminology at the University of Bristol. It follows the award of a European Research Council Starting Grant and is funded by UKRI following a Frontier Research Guarantee grant, reference EP/Y004698/1.

What will happen if I take part?

If you agree to take part in the study, you will be invited to participate in an interview. Interviews will take place online using Zoom or Teams. If permitted, these interviews will be recorded (audio only) so that they can be transcribed and later analysed. Once transcribed, the audio would be deleted. If you are concerned about recording, the researcher will take handwritten notes. The interviews may take between 15 minutes and an hour, depending on how much you wish to discuss.

The interviewer will ask about your role in relation to managing, working or reporting on sexual misconduct cases. An indicative question schedule for interviewees can be provided.

You will already be familiar with sexual misconduct and abuse cases. However, occasionally when we are interviewed about an issue - even when it is a topic we are used to discussing - it can resonate in a different and unexpected way. For this reason, the research team will include links to support in the email confirming the interview time and date, should this be required. In addition, you can terminate the interview at any time or ask for a break or to miss a particular question.

Are there any benefits or risks related to taking part?

Aside from potential emotional risks of the content, no other risks are foreseen. Care will be taken to ensure your identity remains anonymous by removing any references to names, places or cases in the final transcript or interview summary note. If you are the exclusive holder of a position (e.g. the head of an organisation), and therefore have exclusive insight into particular issues, extra attention will be paid to ensure that this is not clear from the interview record.

It is hoped that the knowledge emerging from this project will support professional bodies and regulators to learn from each other, and to adopt best practice in relation to professional sexual misconduct. It will provide an evidence base for identifying early, and managing more effectively, abusive professionals. It is also hoped that the project will catalyse more transparency and publication of data. Administrative justice may be a critical route to accountability for victim-survivors, given the limitations of the criminal justice system.

What will happen to the information I provide?

All data related to the interview will be stored securely on the University of Bristol server in a folder only accessible by the research team.

- Interview audio will be transcribed and anonymised and the original audio file deleted.
- Handwritten notes will be placed in a locked drawer until typed up, then the hard copy destroyed.
- Both interview transcripts and typed notes will be anonymised carefully, removing any potentially identifying references to people, places or cases, for example.
- Each interview participant is given a unique identifier (e.g. 001) and the relevant interview transcript or summary will be saved using this.

Anonymised interview excerpts and quotes may be used for future research publication by the project team.

The information that you provide is confidential except where you disclose potential or actual risk of future harm to anyone. In this case, we would need to consult as a research team and decide whether this information should be shared with a relevant authority.

You have the right to withdraw your data at any time. However, once the data is anonymised and written up for publication, it may be difficult practically to withdraw data. The research team will though make best efforts to do so. Requests to withdraw data can be emailed to the principal investigator Dr Natasha Mulvihill (natasha.mulvihill@bristol.ac.uk).

The University of Bristol and Research Council UK (RCUK) encourage researchers to deposit **anonymised** data into the data.bris Research Data Repository and/or the UK Data Archive. This is so that data collected is available to other researchers to use. **We will not do this without your permission** and have therefore added a separate statement regarding this on the consent form (see under Section 3).

If you do decide to provide additional consent in this way, then either the anonymised interview transcript or the interview summary will be placed in the UK Data Archive.

Data collected for this project will be processed within the GDPR lawful basis of being a Public Task. Research participants have the right to lodge a complaint with the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO). The University of Bristol's Data Protection Officer (DPO) is Henry Stuart and he can be contacted at: data-protection@bristol.ac.uk

Who should I contact for more information?

Please contact Dr Natasha Mulvihill if you have any questions or would like further information about the research. Her email is natasha.mulvihill@bristol.ac.uk You can also read more about her work here: <https://research-information.bris.ac.uk/en/persons/natasha-mulvihill>

This study has been approved by the School for Policy Studies Research Ethics Committee at the University of Bristol.