

Sexual Harassment and Violence Support Service Annual Report 2022/23

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1. Introduction

1.1 Service Overview

“SHVSS is a brilliant, brilliant service”

College welfare lead

The Sexual Harassment and Violence Support Service was established in 2018 and exists to support Oxford University students affected by sexual violence, sexual harassment, relationship/domestic abuse, coercive control or stalking, whenever and wherever the incident(s) occurred. Sexual harassment and violence are serious issues in UK higher education settings, and students are more likely to have experienced some form of sexual violence than any other occupational group. Students who have experienced sexual violence in higher education are twice as likely to leave university without a degree, compared with students with no experience(s) of sexual violence¹.

The service offers an empowerment model, advising students of their options, supporting them to make their own choices, and validating that taking no action is a reasonable decision. We work confidentially, and independently from Colleges and departments.

Students receive a tailored response (in person or online) from a Specialist Caseworker, or the Independent Sexual Violence Advisor (ISVA), seconded from Oxford Sexual Abuse and Rape Crisis Centre (OSARCC). All current students can access either service regardless of when or where incident(s) occurred.

We also offer a parallel but separate service supporting students who have been reported for sexual misconduct. This work forms a central part of the University’s responsibility to all our students, and reported students receive the same level of support as reporting students around what to expect from the process and procedures following an accusation.

In addition to support for students, we deliver preventative and educational work across the collegiate University, such as designing and delivering training to build awareness of sexual violence and domestic abuse, in-person and online consent training, no-names consultations, and advice and guidance to colleagues across Colleges and departments. Our educational work aims to create a University-wide consent culture, as well as to increase our visibility, so that students who want support feel able to reach out, and staff they encounter feel empowered and equipped to respond effectively.

1.2 Executive Summary

This report covers the period from 1st September 2022 to 31st August 2023. We refer to parties as the ‘reporting student’ or ‘reporter’, and the ‘reported student’ or ‘reported party’, and to the Sexual Harassment and Violence Support Service (SHVSS) as ‘the service’ or ‘the Support Service’. The report considers data for the

¹ Baker, M. R., Frazier, P. A., Greer, C., Paulsen, J. A., Howard, K., Meredith, L. N., Anders, S. L., & Shallcross, S. L. (2016). Sexual victimization history predicts academic performance in college women. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 63(6), 685

Support Service, ISVA service, Reported Student Support and training streams separately.

Referral rates and patterns across the academic terms remain consistent with previous years for the support service and reported student provision. The ISVA service received less referrals than in previous years. The majority of students self-referred and were offered and attended an appointment.

The average wait time for the support service was 7.4 days from initial enquiry to appointment. In contrast to previous years, the time between an incident occurring and a student referring into the service has increased, and we also saw significant increases in cases related to incidents that were external to the University context, and experiences of domestic abuse and childhood sexual abuse. Cases involving a member of staff decreased.

The ISVA service saw more recent rape and sexual assault cases compared to the support service. Incidents relating to University/College context were akin to those that occurred externally. There were more active Criminal Justice cases and more students had chosen to report what happened to the police.

Most students who accessed our service and the ISVA service identified as female and identified the reported party as male. 100% of students who accessed support for reported students identified as male.

We successfully developed our preventative work around consent and sexual violence: student completion rates for our online training offer *Consent Matters* more than doubled, and attendance to our staff-facing Sexual Violence Awareness Training almost doubled.

2. Core Service – Responsive Casework

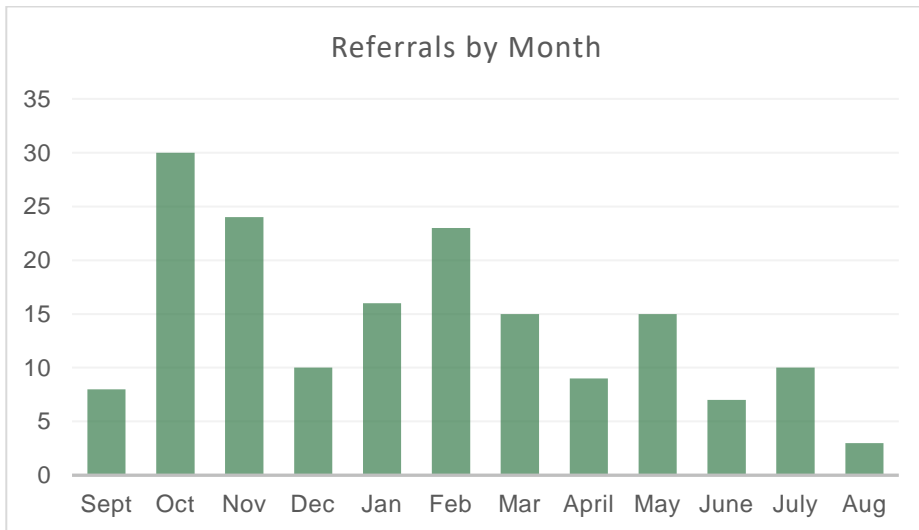
2.1 Support for Reporting Students

“I’ve already told many of my friends how highly I recommend the service, and I really hope my experience encourages more people to reach out. The service is incredible!”

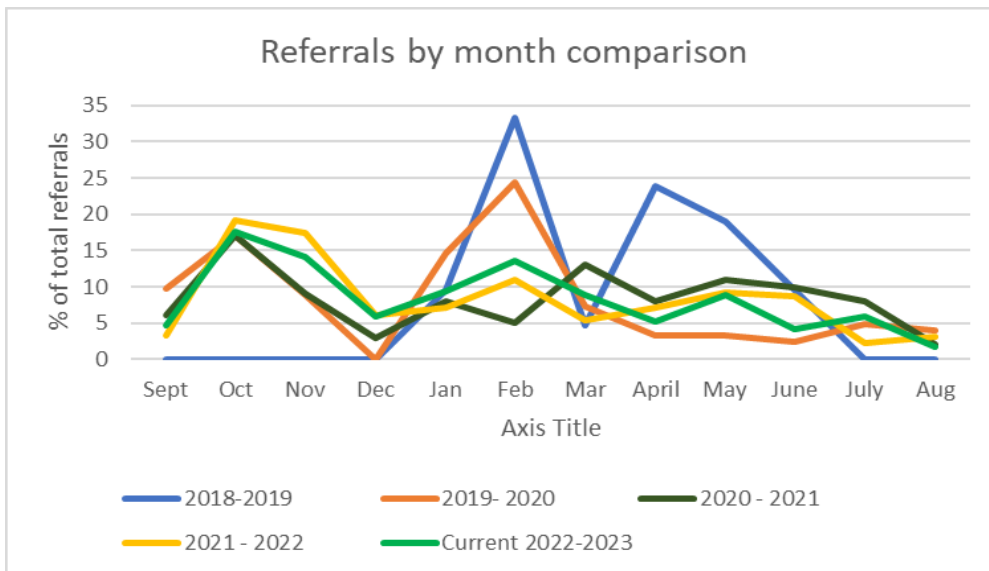
Student feedback

2.1.1 Referrals

Demand for our service has remained consistent with previous years: we received 170 referrals and provided support to 130 students affected by sexual violence, compared with 183 referrals and 135 students supported in 2021-2022. This data is for the Support Service only, and does not include referrals to the University ISVA, which can be found on page 11 of the report.



Similar to previous years, the Support Service saw the largest number of referrals at the start of Michaelmas term (Oct/Nov), which coincides with Fresher’s week, as well as spikes in referrals at the start of Hilary and Trinity term.



100% of students found it easy to access and complete the referral form, and 99% were self-referrals. Of these, 25% were directed to our support by partnering central University services, such as the University Counselling Service, the Disability Advisory Service and Harassment Advisory Service, and 11% by College welfare teams.

Students accessed the service for a variety of reasons:

Reason for referral (Reporting Students)	
Emotional Support	94%
Information on available support options	88%
General Advice	75%
Academic Advice/Support	56%
Safety Planning	31%
Information on Reporting	19%

Most reporting students seeking support received a single appointment (76%) with detailed and tailored follow up information. Our provision is open ended so students can return. This year, we continued to support 16 returning students (who are included in previous years' data) which includes high-risk cases requiring more input and multi-agency approaches to mitigate safety concerns, and students with ongoing reporting/complaints processes.

83% of referrals were offered an appointment. This is consistent with last years' referral outcome data (85%). The main reason for students not being offered an appointment was student choice (11% and 9% for this year and last year respectively). Unsuitable referrals (e.g. from alumni, staff or non-Oxford students) were signposted to an appropriate external agency, or a University service that could meet the individuals' need. Most appointments were in-person (66%), 31% online and 3% audio only. Attendance to appointments was high (96.5%), with only 3.5% unable to attend.

Referral outcomes (Reporting Students)	
Appointment offered	83%
No appt – student choice	11%
No appt – unsuitable referral	6%

2.1.2 Waiting times

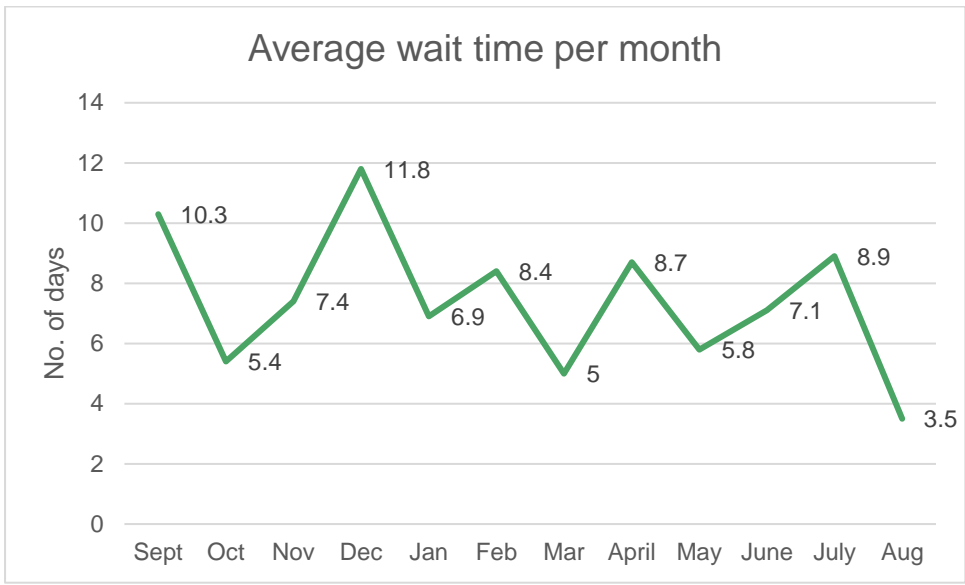
“I was amazed by how quickly the service was able to see me”

Student feedback

This year we have asked for student availability on referral forms, enabling us to not only respond to student enquiries within 2 working days, but respond with an appointment offer. 100% of students who completed our evaluation form felt they were contacted promptly, and 81% found the wait easy to manage.

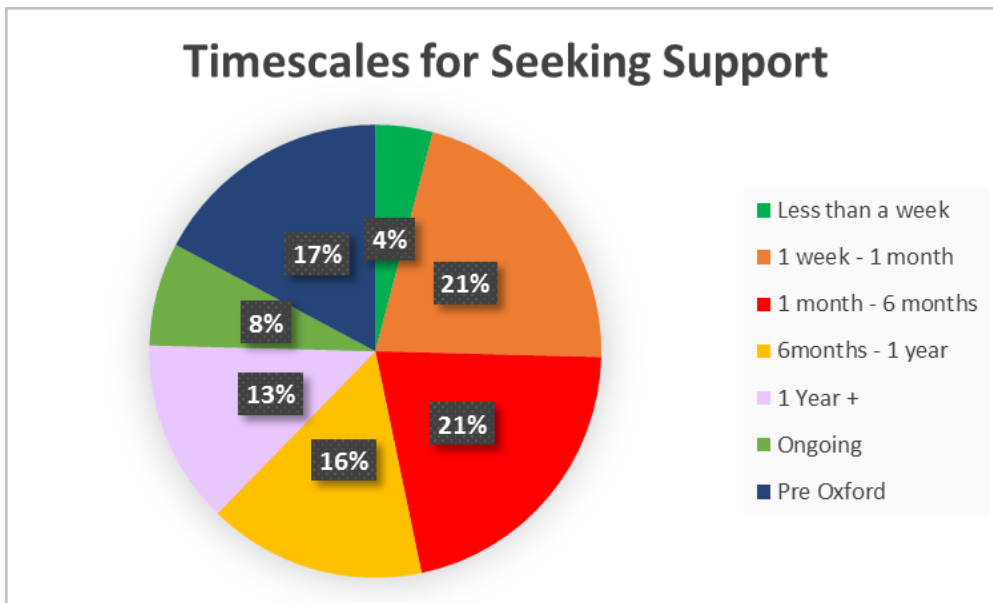
Average wait time (from the date of referral to the date of the appointment) was 7.4 working days. Wait time varies due to staff capacity, student availability and preference. The months with the highest referral rates tended to have lower average wait times, and the end of each term had longer wait times, likely due to a backlog of cases referred in particularly busy periods, and prioritising students based on need and risk.²

² Referrals remain prioritised in order that urgent cases are seen more quickly e.g. when a student identifies feeling or being unsafe, or an incident is ongoing or has occurred recently.



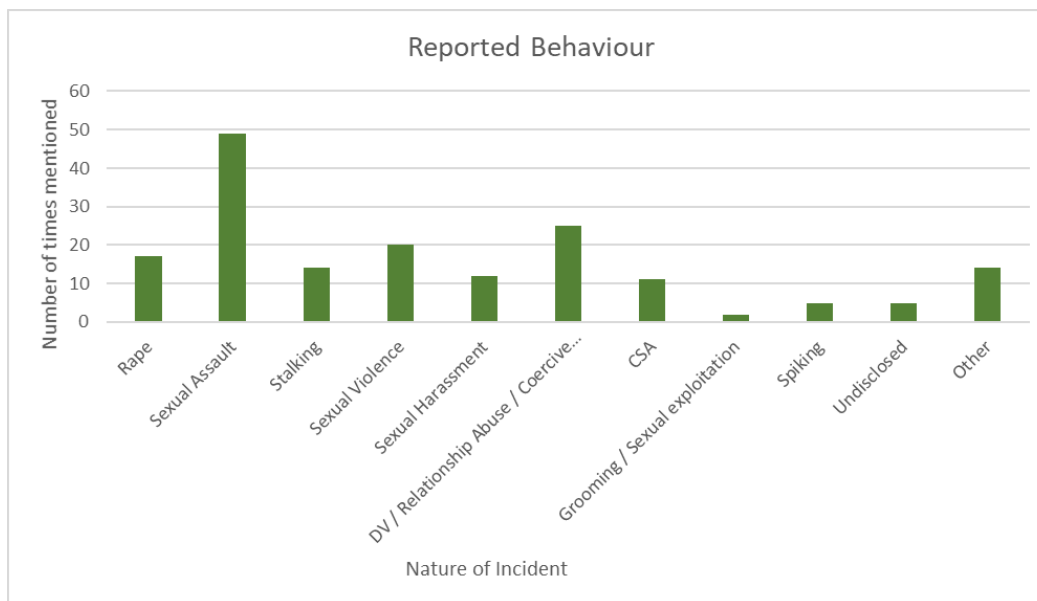
2.1.3 Timescales for seeking support

People who have experienced sexual violence can take a long time to seek support, particularly if they face additional barriers to accessing services. We were seeing a trend towards disclosing incidents earlier, but this year the time between an incident and seeking support has increased, with 46% students contacting our service within 6 months of an incident, compared with 65% last year.



2.1.4 Reported behaviour and context

The service encourages students to define their own experiences, and this is what is recorded. 40% of supported students defined their experience as sexual assault, 17% as sexual violence and 15% as rape. We saw an increase in students requesting support for relationship abuse, including coercive control (40% increase since last year), and childhood sexual abuse (CSA; 85% increase since last year).

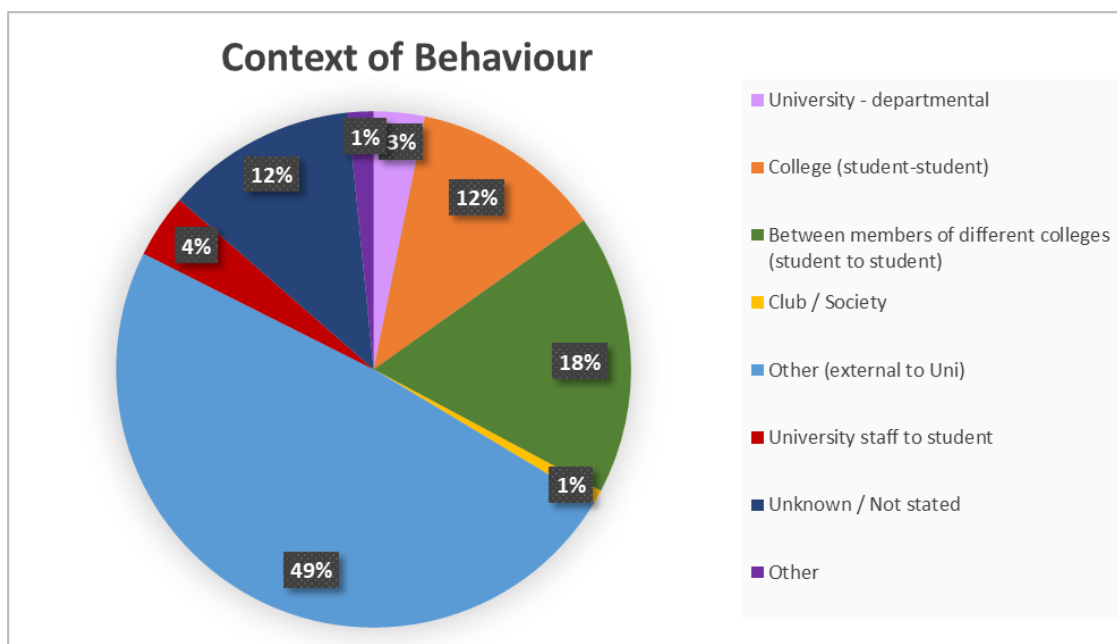


Serious sexual crimes (a measure used by the police encompassing rape, sexual violence, sexual assault and stalking), accounted for at least 70% of our casework. The recent [OURSPACE study](#) looking into the prevalence of sexual violence specifically at the University of Oxford, revealed that 52.7% of respondents had experienced at least one act of sexual harassment, and that the majority of these incidents had taken place at the University. This suggests the Support Service sees proportionately high numbers of serious sexual violence cases, which may also indicate that the majority of students affected by sexual harassment are not accessing our support.

The context of the behaviour allows us to understand where an incident took place, and the relationship with the collegiate University. In 2022-23 we saw a significant increase in cases related to incidents that were external to the University context. This includes cases where the reported party is a non-University member, as well as cases that happened prior to students coming to Oxford, for example at school, another university or during childhood.

Non-University context includes members of the public, friends/partners outside of the University, Brookes students, or family members, and accounted for half (49%) of all cases, compared with 17% last year. This may be reflective of the current financial landscape and cost of living, resulting in unmanageable waiting lists, reduced accessibility to private services, and closure of local agencies, requiring students to rely more heavily on University support, even when an incident occurred elsewhere or historically. It may also indicate students are aware of, and feel able to access, the Support Service, even when the incident(s) did not occur within the University context.

Cases related to the University and/or College context accounted for 38% of cases, with 4% of those relating to incidents involving a member of University staff. The latter has decreased since last year, and may be a direct result of the student-staff relationships policy introduced in Hilary Term 2023, as students may be less willing to disclose, report or seek support around relationships with members of staff, and/or there may be fewer inappropriate relationships between staff and students as a result of the policy. Only 12% related to the College context, which may indicate that College welfare teams supported these students internally.



In line with national statistics, most people reported were identified as male by the reporter (86%). Reported people identified as female doubled to 7.5%, and 6.5% chose not to disclose, didn't know, or had multiple parties to report.

2.1.5 Case outcomes – University and College cases

Similar to previous years, 57% of students who accessed our service did not wish to make a formal report at the time of the appointment, with 23% considering making a police or College complaint, and 6% involved in an active police report. The service provides detailed advice on relevant complaint and reporting routes, and will validate the choice that a student makes. We only hold data based on what reporting students tell us at the time of the appointment, and therefore don't always know the outcome of a students' decision (as our support is short-term and students often graduate before their case is resolved).

2.1.6 Student demographics

Gender

Consistent with previous years, the majority (85%) of service users self-identify as female, which is disproportionately high compared to the female student population, and mirrors national prevalence data indicating that 90% of people who experience sexual violence identify as female.

Male service users accounted for 7% of our cases, which is consistent with previous years, and with national prevalence data indicating that 5% of men have been raped or sexually assaulted as an adult. Students identifying as non-binary accounted for 5% of our cases, and 2% identified as transgender. We know that LGBTQI+ are particularly vulnerable to being targets of sexual harassment and violence (50% of the transgender community are sexually abused or assaulted in their lifetime, and

18.1% during their time in higher education³) and hope to continue increasing accessibility of our service for this community.

Gender	Service Users
Male	7%
Female	85%
Non-binary	5%
Transgender	2%
Other	1%

Ethnicity

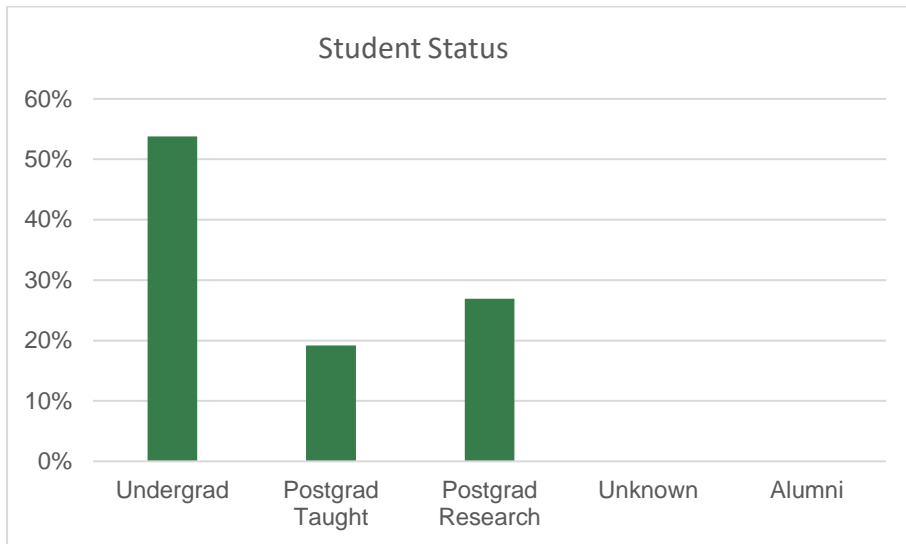
Comparable to previous years, 65% of students accessing our service were white, which is higher than the general student population; 8% were Asian and 4% Chinese, which is lower than the general student population; 4% were black and 8% mixed, which is in line with the general student population.

Ethnicity	Service Users	Student Population
Asian	8%	12%
Black	4%	4%
Chinese	4%	12%
Mixed	8%	7%
Other	4%	3%
White	65%	58%
Unknown	7%	4%
Total	100%	100%

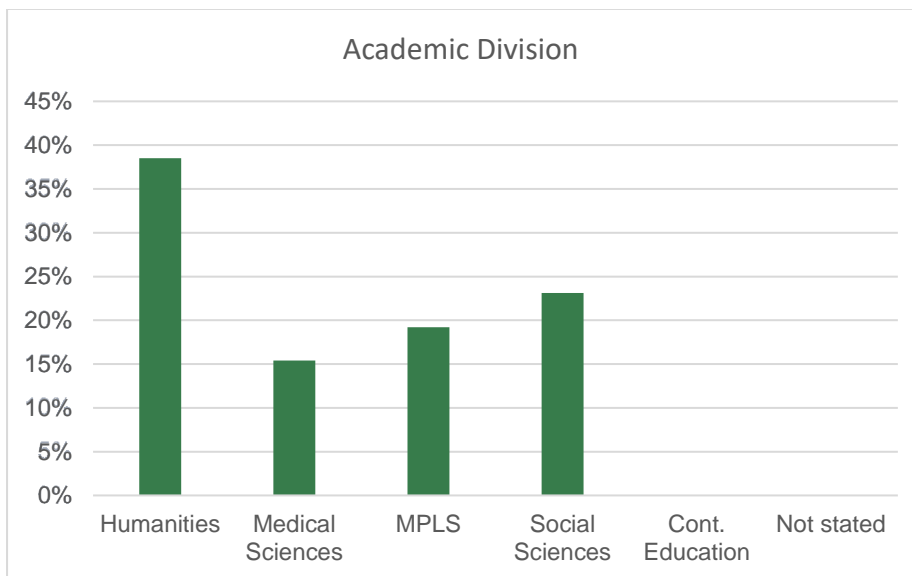
Student Status and Division

Most students accessing our service were undergraduates (54%), which is similar to previous years, and disproportionately high compared with the general student population. The proportion of postgraduate students (both taught – 19% and research – 27%) remains consistent with last years' data.

³ Steele, B., Martin, M., Sciarra, A., Melendez-Torres, G. J., Degli Esposti, M., & Humphreys, D. K. (2023). The Prevalence of Sexual Assault Among Higher Education Students: A Systematic Review With Meta-Analyses. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse, 0*(0). <https://doi.org/10.1177/15248380231196119>



The divisional distribution demonstrates that students engaging in humanities subjects represent a high proportion of service users, similar to previous years, and also corresponds with what we see in other student welfare services at the University.



2.1.7 Student feedback

All students who accessed the Support Service were invited to provide feedback through an evaluation form. The feedback for the support was hugely positive: 87.5% rated the service excellent, 12.5% rated it good, and no-one rated it average, poor or terrible.

100% of students who accessed our service:

- Felt confident accessing further support and empowered to make decisions about their future
- Felt less isolated and alone, and experienced their caseworker as sensitive and understanding to their needs and situation
- Agreed that they got the information they needed and the support they wanted

- Felt listened to and believed

Qualitative feedback around what was most valued about the support provided included:

- “Reassuring environment”
- “Feeling listened to, being provided with helpful and targeted (but not overwhelming) information and guidance”
- “Learning more about trauma responses”
- “Feeling believed”
- “Having somebody listen, understand and tell me it wasn't my fault”
- “Telling my story, it felt like a huge weight had lifted off my shoulders and I could breathe more easily”
- “Compassion, kindness, empathy”
- “I can't put it into words”

2.2 University Independent Sexual Violence Advisor (ISVA) Support

“ISVA support made me feel more confident and empowered when liaising with the police, and changed my outlook on dealing with what happened and how I go forward.”

Student feedback

The Oxford University Independent Sexual Violence Advisor (ISVA) has been part of the SHVSS service since 2018. The ISVA is trained by, and seconded from our local partner, Oxford Sexual Abuse and Rape Crisis Centre ([OSARCC](#)).

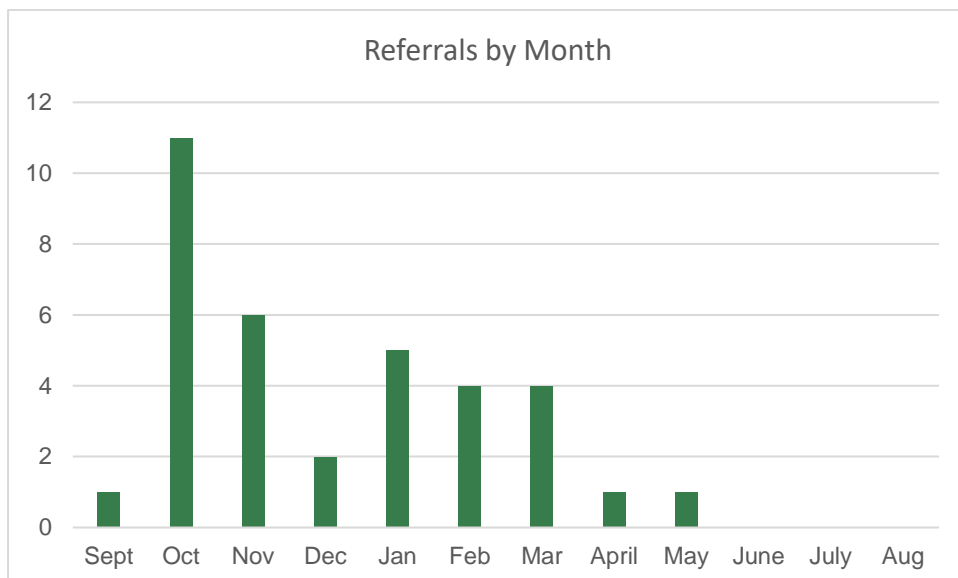
The ISVA is best placed to support students who are considering, or in the process of reporting what happened to the police. Their expertise is in the criminal justice system (CJS), which complements the caseworker specialism in College and University reporting options, policies and procedures. The ISVA supports students throughout the criminal justice process, and continues to do so after they have left University, regardless of student status. They also provide support to students who wish to report to the University or their College.

2.2.1 Referrals

In 2022-2023 the University ISVA supported 54 students, 35 of which were new referrals. This is about 35% less than last year, a decrease which can be explained by high staff turnover and consequential gaps in service availability.

80% of referrals to the ISVA service were from students themselves, with referrals from professionals (including the police) accounting for the remaining 20%. Although the self-referral rate is desirable (as students who self-refer are more likely to engage with support and benefit most from it), the ISVA service had half as many referrals from professionals compared with last year, indicating a need for more outreach, partnership working and awareness-building around this service across the collegiate University and beyond.

Similar to the Support Service and previous years, the ISVA saw increases in referrals at the start of Michaelmas term and Hilary term. The quieter period from April coincides with the service not having an available ISVA.



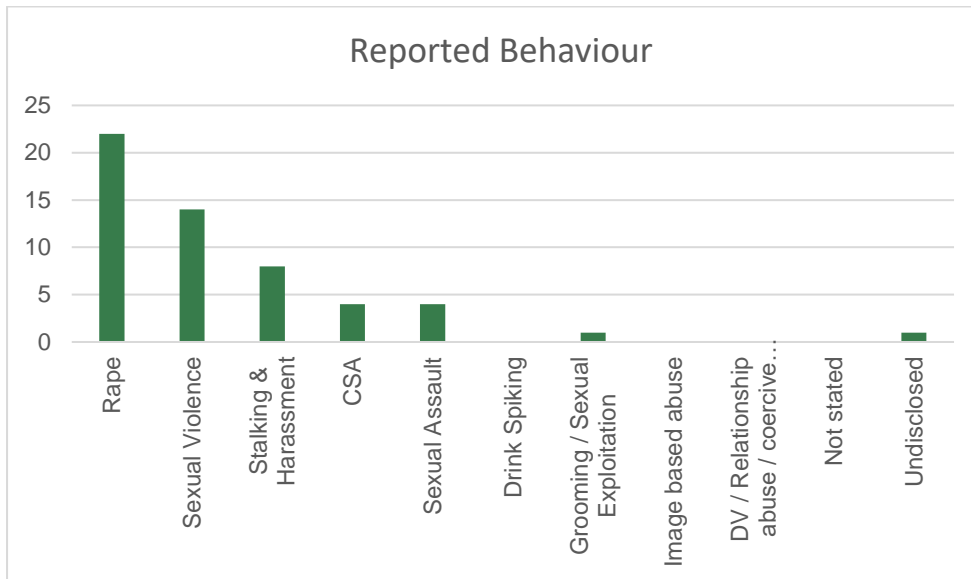
2.2.2 Timescales for seeking support

Of the 35 new referrals, the majority were recent rape and sexual assaults (which differs from the Support Service trend this year, as well as OSARCCs other ISVA services, where historic sexual violence is the main reason for seeking support).



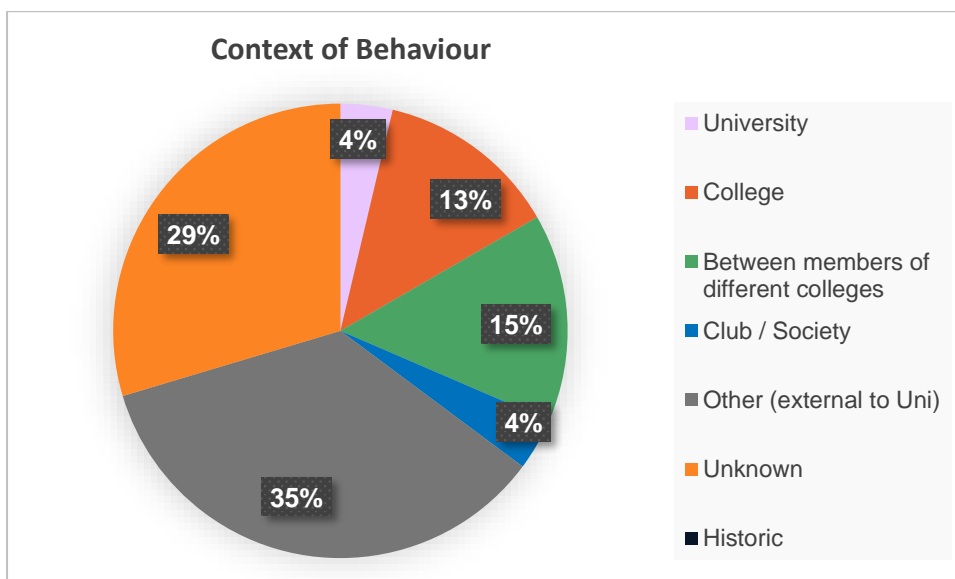
2.2.3 Reported behaviour, context, and relationship with reported party

Oxford Sexual Abuse and Rape Crisis Centre ([OSARCC](#)) also encourages students to label their own experiences, and this is what is recorded. Comparable to previous years, rape, sexual violence, stalking and harassment are the main reasons ISVA support is sought.

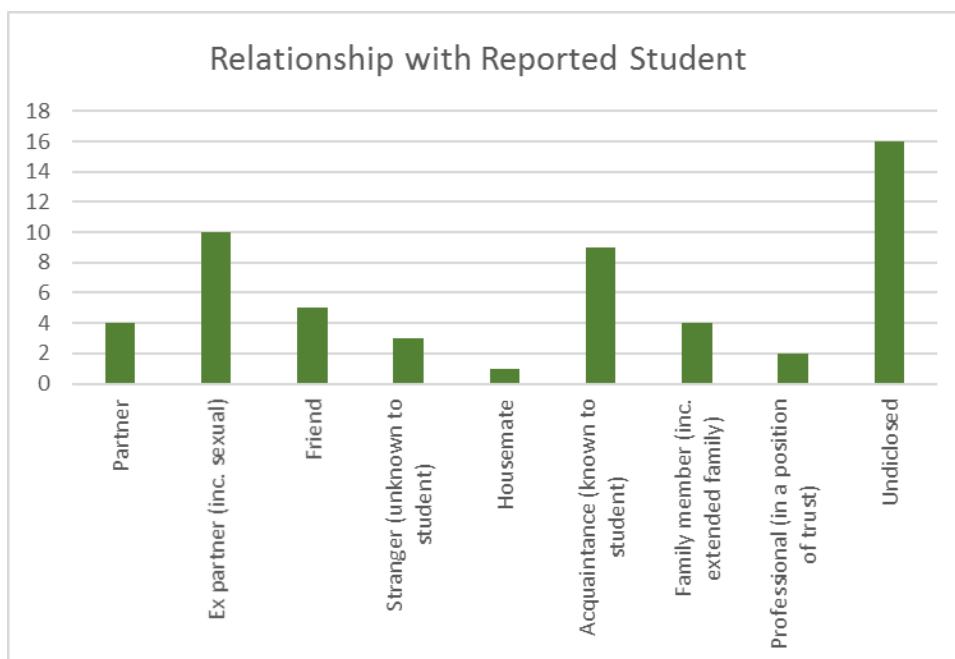


In line with national statistics, the majority of people reported were male (76%), none were female (in previous years we have consistently seen 3% females) and 24% didn't state the other parties' gender.

13% of incidents were related to College contexts, 15% departments, 4% club/society, and 4% University context. 35% were 'other' demonstrating that the proportions of incidents occurring outside the University and/or College context is akin to those that happened within. This is consistent with last years' data and the Support Service.



In terms of relationships with the reported party, the data emphasises what we already know about sexual violence: the majority of people who have experienced sexual violence reported people who are known to them. Data also shows that most of the people reported within the University context are peers / other students.



2.2.4 Case outcomes - criminal justice cases

The proportion of active Criminal Justice System (CJS) cases is higher than last year (28% compared with 17%), and the proportion of students who have chosen not to report to the police is lower (57% compared with 67%). This could indicate more appropriate referrals to the service, and that people feel more empowered and able to go through the CJS following an informed choice session. The proportion of students who chose not to report remains high, which is to be expected considering general distrust in the CJS, reporters being aware of low conviction rates and increasingly lengthy investigations and police decisions, wanting to avoid potential re-traumatisation and/or not wanting to report another student while they both continue to attend the Yniversity.

2.2.5 Student demographics

Gender

Similar to the Support Service, and consistent with previous years, most service users identify as female (87%). Male service users have decreased to 2%, and non-binary or transgender service users have increased to 11%.

Ethnicity

Most students accessing the service were white (67%), with 7% Asian/Asian-British, 6% Chinese, 6% Mixed/dual heritage, 4% Black/Black-British and 2% 'any other' ethnic group.

Student Status and Division

Consistent with previous years, Undergraduates made up the majority of students seeking ISVA support (35%), although this year we saw a smaller majority (2021-2022 was 60%), and proportionately more postgraduate taught students (30% compared with 24%).

The majority of students (65%) did not state what division they belonged to – 15% were from Social Sciences, 11% Humanities, 5% MPLS and 4% Medical Sciences.

2.3 Support for Reported Students

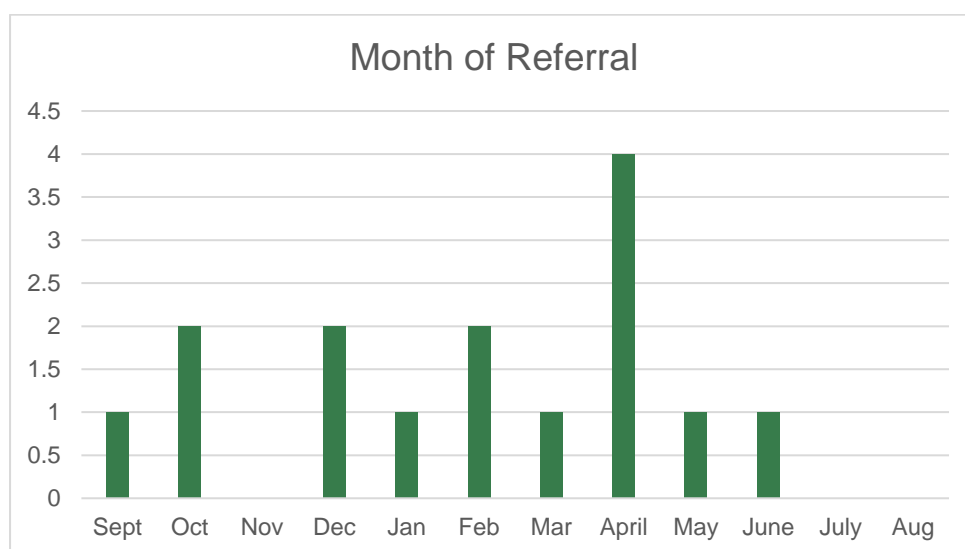
“They listened to me without judging”

Student feedback

Support for reported students is invaluable in providing clarity around what to expect from complex disciplinary processes, and the impact it can have on an individuals’ experience and capacity to study at Oxford, whether the complaint is upheld or not. Support is tailored to individual need and can include information on timeframes, appeal options, University processes, emotional support and safety planning.

2.3.1 Referrals

Reported student support provision received 15 referrals this year, which is consistent with last year (14), following a spike in 2020-2021 (23). Reported students tend to seek support later in the academic year, which may be reflective of lengthy disciplinary processes that take time to instigate. All students self-referred, and all were offered an appointment.



2.3.2 Demographics

In line with previous years, all students seeking support following a report against them were male. 33% were undergraduates, 40% postgraduate research, 20% postgraduate taught and 7% unknown.

The academic division of reported students seeking support is equally distributed between MPLS, Social Sciences and unknown.

3. Other areas of service delivery

3.1 Consent Training

“My favourite part was how they covered several different areas of sexual consent and healthy relationships to reflect a wide range of situations.”

This meant that we could have interesting conversations and equip participants with the tools to navigate different types of relationships at university”

Student facilitator

We know that preventative and educational work is essential in creating a consent culture at the University of Oxford. All students had access to free online consent training – Consent Matters. When this was launched in 2020 – 2021, 2930 students completed this training, in 2021-2022 only 949 students completed this training, and this academic year this almost doubled to 1778.

SHVSS also successfully piloted a new in person training model. Colleges signed up to recruit student facilitators, to be trained and supervised by the Support Service to deliver their own peer-led, in-person workshops within their College. Two Colleges signed up and we trained 10 student facilitators. 188 student participants’ provided feedback on these workshops:

- 84% felt they had a better understanding of healthy relationships, 81% felt they had a better understanding of sexual consent;
- 81% said the workshop felt like a safe space to express their thoughts and suggestions and 90% felt the workshop was inclusive and accessible;
- 100% felt more likely to seek support, or report, if they experienced sexual violence or relationship abuse.

3.2 Sexual Violence Awareness Training

In line with our mission to increase preventative and educational work we have developed our training offer. In 2021-2022 we delivered Sexual Violence Awareness training to 127 staff across the collegiate University, and this year we have almost doubled this and reached 251. However, the proportion of attendees in student-facing welfare roles across the collegiate University has decreased, despite the value of this input:

"I felt out of my depth, and had conflicting advice from different members of my College. SHVSS gave me the advice that I felt was best for the student, and for myself. I really saw the value in having a specialist service for issues as complicated as sexual violence. Now I refer all students struggling with these issues to SHVSS rather than dealing with them within College welfare"

College Welfare Lead

3.3 Other Service Developments

- Completed our first full year of using a new case management system, improving quality and quantity of data and reporting, and simplifying regular audits
- Designed and rolled out specialist Sexual Violence Awareness training for College welfare teams

- Designed and piloted Domestic Abuse Awareness training in response to an increase in demand for support, continuing to build on caseworker strengths and expertise
- Began 'Tea & Talk' - a safe space for reporting service users to share the impact of their experience(s) and build a community of support – jointly facilitated with the counselling service
- We are beginning to monitor: no-names consultations and a reporting student's relationship with the reported party (in line with OSARCC), and plan to include this data in next years' report
- New service lead in post in Trinity 2023

4. Conclusions and looking ahead

This year, we have successfully delivered our three-core student-facing services, meeting student demand and need with excellent response times, and evaluative feedback attesting to the high quality of the support provided. We know that students who have experienced any form of sexual harassment, violence, domestic abuse or stalking need timely support, and we have managed to keep average wait times low, with no waitlist.

Additionally, we have continued developing and delivering both student and staff facing preventative and educational work. We have not only doubled our reach in terms of staff attending our Sexual Violence Awareness training and students completing the online consent training, but also piloted new innovative ways to respond to demand and improve consent culture, such as Domestic Abuse Awareness training, and the student-led in person consent workshop model.

In the next year we have three broad aims for the service – to maximise impact, improve culture, and increase visibility and inclusivity of our service.

Maximising impact: We have secured trust funding to employ another full-time Specialist Caseworker, as well as a part time Caseworker to support reported students in 2023-2024. We hope that increasing capacity of the casework teams means that we can continue to prioritise timely, high quality, effective support to students who need us.

We will continue developing our expertise and remaining professionally curious, anticipating trends in the sector, collaborating with ongoing [OURSPACE research](#) into the nature and prevalence of sexual harassment and violence at Oxford, proactively preparing and planning our response to the upcoming Office for Students (OFS) regulations, and to the evolving issues and changing needs of Oxford University students.

In anticipation of emerging trends, we are engaging in more staff training around stalking to create a best practice model for responding effectively to these high-risk cases, and in response to increasing demand we plan to replicate the Tea & Talk group space for students who have past experiences of domestic abuse, co-facilitated with the counselling service, and with a focus on psychoeducation.

We will continue investing in external partnerships with local services e.g. police, domestic abuse services and OSARCC, as well as working more strategically and collaboratively with internal partners - the Counselling Service and Disability

Advisory Service (DAS), and contributing to the first Student Welfare and Support Service-wide strategy.

In addition to growing and developing the team, there will be a focus on protecting the psychological capacity of caseworkers to mitigate against burnout, compassion fatigue and vicarious trauma experienced by staff in this sector. This includes a focus on well-being, trauma-informed approaches, reflective practice and group and 1:1 clinical supervision.

Improving Culture: Increasing capacity also means we can continue to further develop and deliver our educational, preventative and awareness building work. This is essential to creating a whole university approach to consent culture, which includes equipping staff across the collegiate university, and particularly in welfare roles, to effectively support and signpost students affected by sexual harassment and violence.

Having successfully piloted the in-person consent workshop peer training model, we plan to develop and expand the reach of this approach by increasing engagement with Colleges next year. We are also planning to increase our training offer to reach 100+ staff per term for 2023-2024, and are changing our online consent training provider to Brook – Consent for Students, ensuring Colleges have more autonomy and better oversight of completion data.

Increasing visibility and inclusivity: We will continue promoting our service and reducing barriers to seeking support by increasing the visibility and awareness of our service through training, outreach, no-names consultations and increased partnership working. We plan to review and assess our outreach approach to ensure that we engage with students from more diverse, inclusive and representative demographics. For example, students of colour, students identifying as male, transgender and non-binary.

We are contributing to the working group updating policy and practice around sexual misconduct and disciplinary processes at Oxford to make them more accessible, inclusive and trauma-informed, and are developing our processes for consulting with students, and incorporating student voice and experience into our service development.