

ADDRESSING STUDENT SEXUAL  
VIOLENCE IN HIGHER  
EDUCATION

## REVIEWS

This book needs to be in the hands of every advocate, in the library of every university and on the desks of every administrator and policy maker in the higher education sector, regardless of their geographical location. It cuts through all of the noise we've heard in recent years, and offers practical and realistic advice for addressing sexual violence within the higher education sector, without ignoring the nuances that can be present in any individual situation. I can't thank the authors enough for writing it. There were so many moments as I was reading that I was actually shouting out loud in agreement with what they had written. It's made me re-think some of the work that we've been doing, and how we can improve our messaging.

–*Sharna Bremner, Founder and Director, End Rape on Campus Australia*

Towl and Humphreys fill a niche gap in literature by strategising and explaining specific ways institutions of higher education can and must go beyond legal compliance and 'checking the box' in order to best prevent sexual violence and support victim-survivors of violence. Their unique approach is practically focused with plenty of detailed guidance, which although UK specific is widely applicable internationally as a most useful resource. Many of their ideas should be immediately tested and implemented.

–*Annie E. Clark, Co-Founder and Former Executive Director, End Rape on Campus; Author of We Believe You*

This book is a desperately needed contribution to the discourse on sexual violence in Higher Education. The authors' nuanced analysis of international approaches to sexual violence, institutional responsibility and the varied needs of victim-survivors is also applicable to institutions tackling sexual violence outside the HE sphere. This thoroughly researched guide is a vital tool in making the transformative change necessary to eradicate sexual violence in education, and I highly recommend it to student activists, students' unions and staff working in Higher Education.

–*Rachel Watters, Women Students' Officer, National Union of Students*

Institutional responses to student sexual violence continue to be inadequate across the sector as a whole, sometimes through a lack of will, but often through a lack of understanding the complexities and specific issues that arise in this field. Humphreys and Towl bring their many years' specialist academic and practical experience to bear, for the benefit of those in Higher Education who know they must develop a better response to sexual violence in universities but need to understand more detail about what good practice looks like and why. The authors help to flesh out the compelling reasons for taking a focussed long-term, whole-institution approach and then provide the tools for ensuring that the detail of policy, culture change programmes, investigations and disciplinary processes will be crafted from a place of understanding. This is an accessible and very helpful text that provides a wealth of relevant information about all aspects of sexual violence in the student community and sets institutions on their way to achieving appropriately high standards in their response to sexual violence.

*–Dr Helen Mott, Sexual Harassment and Women's  
Rights Consultant*

Universities create societal leaders and thus have a unique ability to engender cultures where gender-based violence is prevented and robustly tackled. Key to this are holistic institutional frameworks which comprise an integrated suite of policies, tools, partnerships and behaviours. In this work, Humphreys and Towl provide valuable perspectives and practical, evidence-informed guidance to develop such frameworks and facilitate a culture of shared ownership across Universities to deliver tangible and impactful societal change.

*–Jill Stevenson, Executive Member, AMOSSHE; Dean for  
Equality, Diversity and Inclusion and Head of Student Support  
Services, University of Stirling*

This is the book that UK universities have been waiting for. Drawing on extensive knowledge of sexual violence prevention and response, the authors lay out clear and practical steps for universities to follow in order to create a safer institution, as well as pushing forward best practice through evidenced arguments. This

book should be required reading for university leaders and everyone working on the front line of student sexual violence services. Now that we know how to make campuses safer, there is no excuse for institutions that fail to act.

*–Dr Anna Bull, Co-founder, The 1752 Group*

As a sector, not nearly enough has been done yet to tackle sexual violence in universities, despite the fact that it impacts so many students' lives in such tragic and personal ways. It is great to see such a well-thought-out and practical resource, which removes one more barrier to implementation. As the authors suggest, ultimately the main factor that stops institutional action on this is leadership prioritisation. For those institutions who know you still need to do more, it's over to you to do so...

*–Chris Newson, Chairman and CEO, The Student Room Group*

# ADDRESSING STUDENT SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

A Good Practice Guide

BY

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

## RAPE AND SEXUAL ABUSE COUNSELLING CENTRE

The Rape and Sexual Abuse Counselling Centre (RSACC) was established in 1990 and is the only free and confidential specialist provider of services for individuals aged 13 years and over in Darlington and County Durham. RSACC's primary objective is to relieve the distress of individuals who have suffered any form of sexual violence, sexual abuse, domestic abuse or harassment and to educate and raise awareness of the consequences of sexual abuse with a view to preventing violence against women and girls.

Support for survivors of sexual violence is desperately needed within Darlington and County Durham. Sexual violence has significant and lasting consequences on survivors, including impacting individuals' mental and physical health, leaving women feeling isolated and disconnected from their community. Other long-term consequences can include post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety and panic attacks, depression, social phobia, substance abuse, obesity, eating disorders, self-harm and suicide. Often survivors are involved in the criminal justice system, which has the impact of increasing stress and anxiety, even re-traumatisation, as clients describe not feeling believed or experiencing victim-blaming.

RSACC values the importance of understanding and responding to survivors within the community need and focuses on working and consulting with survivors to provide services that help them deal with the trauma of sexual abuse, promote their recovery and improve their mental health. Services are developed to provide more choice and a more holistic approach; counselling, helpline, facilitated groups, external training and most recently an Independent Sexual Violence Advisors service and a project working within a prison setting.

RSACC is also an accredited member of Rape Crisis England and Wales National Service Standards and actively supports campaigning both locally and nationally to end violence against women and girls.

**Please note the authors are donating their royalties in full to RSACC.**

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# LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ACHA	American College Health Association
AHE	Advance higher education
AHRC	Australian Human Rights Commission
AMOSSHE	The Student Services Organisation
ATIXA	Association of Title IX Administrators
BLOG	Believe, Listen, Offer options and resources, Get support for yourself
CDC	Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
CEDAW	UN Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women
CJS	Criminal Justice System
CPS	The Crown Prosecution Service
EVAW	End Violence Against Women coalition
EVAWI	End Violence Against Women International
FE	Further education
HE	Higher education
HEI	Higher education institution
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
NASPA	Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education
NUS	National Union of Students
OfS	Office for Students

<b>OIA</b>	Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (England and Wales)
<b>PTSD</b>	Post-traumatic stress disorder
<b>RJ</b>	Restorative Justice
<b>RMA</b>	Rape myth acceptance
<b>SAMHSA</b>	Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
<b>SARC</b>	Sexual Assault Referral Centre
<b>SVLO</b>	Sexual Violence Liaison Officer
<b>UUK</b>	Universities UK
<b>VAW</b>	Violence Against Women

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**Clarissa J. Humphreys** is the Sexual Misconduct Prevention and Response Manager at Durham University. She is a practitioner and leading authority on addressing gender-based violence in higher education and was the first person to hold a dedicated role in this area in the United Kingdom. She is responsible for policy development, case management, student support and prevention and training. She is an experienced trainer and has developed and delivered courses covering topics such as understanding sexual violence in higher education, responding to disclosures and conducting trauma-informed investigations. In 2018, she was recognised for her work with students by Durham Students' Union and was awarded *Best Student Support*. The following year, she was recognised by Durham University through *Durham Women Making a Difference*. Prior to this role, she gained extensive professional experience working as a forensic mental health social worker in England and as a Licensed Master Social Worker and Licensed Chemical Dependency Counsellor in Texas. She has worked with survivors and perpetrators of domestic abuse and sexual violence and with individuals with acute mental illness and co-occurring substance use issues. Additionally, she has both case management and clinical experience, which includes providing group and individual therapy utilising predominantly Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) and Motivational Interviewing (MI).

**Graham J. Towl** is Professor of Forensic Psychology at Durham University, UK, where he was Pro Vice Chancellor Chair of the Sexual Violence Task Force (2015–2016). Formerly he was a Senior Civil Servant and Chief Psychologist at the Ministry of Justice, UK, and also previously a practitioner psychologist working with,

amongst others, sex offenders. In his therapeutic work he has also worked with women (in prisons) who have been subjected to sexual violence. He is an expert on sexual violence at universities and has worked with Universities UK, Advance HE and the Office for Students on addressing sexual violence at universities. He chaired the first UK conference on addressing sexual violence in higher and further education (July 2019). He is the co-author (with Professor Tammi Walker, Teesside University, UK) of *Tackling Sexual Violence at Universities; An International Perspective* (2019) published by Routledge. He is a member of the new Office for Students (OfS) Safeguarding and Welfare Expert Advisory Panel.

# FOREWORD

## SEXUAL ABUSE ON CAMPUS: A BETRAYAL OF THE EDUCATIONAL MISSION

Across the world young people who have the ambition and opportunity to progress to higher education embark upon a phase of their lives where new ideas, skills, friends and networks can beckon. For many, this period can be marked by excitement and possibilities but for too many these are stolen through the experience of sexual violence.

From Bangladesh<sup>1</sup> and Uganda<sup>2</sup> to Chile<sup>3</sup> and Japan<sup>4</sup> hitherto largely unacknowledged sexual abuse on campus is finding recognition and starting to gain the attention of managers and administrators. This is in significant part due to the efforts of students to name their experiences and to call their university administrations to account for their (in)action. There is nothing to suggest that more accounts from other parts of the world will not emerge.

Drawing primarily on data and experiences in four industrialised countries – Australia, Canada, United Kingdom and United States – this book provides an impressive body of advice, recommendations and practical measures that, taken together, can drive university

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<sup>1</sup> <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/es/news-and-events/stories/2015/09/addressing-sexual-harassment-in-universities>.

<sup>2</sup> <https://news.mak.ac.ug/sites/default/files/downloads/Makerere-Committee-Investigating-Sexual-Harassment-FINAL-Report-June2018.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.democracynow.org/2018/5/17/headlines/chile\\_thousands\\_march\\_against\\_campus\\_sexual\\_violence](https://www.democracynow.org/2018/5/17/headlines/chile_thousands_march_against_campus_sexual_violence).

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2019/08/07/national/social-issues/students-take-stand-rising-number-sexual-violence-cases-japans-universities/>.

efforts to address and seek to prevent such violence. The urgent and holistic work that needs to be progressed will not be resolved by a few small or easy adjustments – that will not end the problem or fix a reputation. Meaningful efforts to end sexual violence and provide justice to those who have been violated are not about quick fixes but about thoughtful and holistic work that takes on the cultural and often little-expressed notions that excuse perpetrators, deny victims' credibility and refuse to see the harm that rape culture brings to educational settings. Efforts must be integrated, consistent and system-wide.

Sexual violence remains a global epidemic: it is pervasive, it brings harm and it costs far too many lives. It is steeped in cultural norms and beliefs, attitudes and behaviours that target and blame women for the sexual abuse that scars them, minimises the harms done, shatters the potential of their being heard as truth tellers and ultimately excuses perpetrators. Rape culture wields the social, political and economic inequality of power that is global and gendered.

Sexual violence reflects the many assumptions and impacts of gender and sex discrimination that are infused in society and culture. Universities are not islands, separated from the world they inhabit, but are inevitably connected to it; these institutions have to decide whether and to what extent they will uncritically recreate what exists or whether they will rupture the norms of their social context. The construction of gender, the assumptions of women's sexual availability and men's presumed sexual entitlement are among these, as are ideas about **which** women or men are considered 'naturally' sexualised and thus available for consumption or 'naturally' sexually aggressive. Those who are lesbian, gay, bisexual or trans, those who have disabilities, belong to immigrant communities, are young or in other ways sexualised as submissive or hyper-sexual seem to be both especially targeted and especially disbelieved in their reports.

Work against sexual violence has a long and honourable history through which clear principles have been established, including that the majority of reports arise from real experience (not malicious intent), that the voices of victims and survivors provide clear

direction as to what is needed, that impunity breeds perpetration, that investigations need to be timely and bring meaningful consequences. Such principles inform and drive the work in this volume. It provides universities in and beyond the United Kingdom a solid framing and understanding of how sexual violence on campus is to be addressed.

University is when young people should be focusing on learning and benefitting from environments where they can establish relationships that will nourish and help them to grow intellectually, in competence and socially. Their ability to participate in a learning environment and be nourished by it is profoundly compromised or wholly denied through the incursion of sexual violence into their lives as well as by its corrosive remains.

Understating what constitutes sexual violence, including rape, remains a work in progress. A common, minimalist approach has seen rape as penile–vaginal penetration, evidenced by the victim fighting off the assailant and consequently bearing marks or injury that evidence a lack of consent, that is subsequently relied upon in court. More recently, dynamics of power and inequality, coercion and control have entered definitional discussions. The international definitions of rape and sexual violence reflect the experiences of those raped and sexually violated: rape is

a physical invasion of a sexual nature, committed on a person under circumstances which are coercive. Sexual violence, including rape, is not limited to physical invasion of the human body and may include acts which do not involve penetration or even physical contact....coercive circumstances need not be evidenced by a show of physical force. Threats, intimidation, extortion and other forms of duress which prey on fear or desperation may constitute coercion<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> *The Prosecutor v Jean-Paul Akayesu* Case No. ICTR-96-4-T, Judgement, 2 September 1998, <https://unictr.irmct.org/sites/unictr.org/files/case-documents/ictr-96-4/trial-judgements/en/980902.pdf>.

Power shapes the fear, desperation, coercion and the other conditions identified in these definitions and is present on campus. Any serious intent to rid places of scholarship of sexual violence has to tackle seriously the naming and minimising of such inequalities and to ensure that the ability to learn is a primary ambition. Sexual violence damages the ability to learn, feel safe, be able to debate, plan and build a life after study. If processes of reporting, investigation and the delivery of justice start from the premise of disbelief, prioritising the wellbeing of the alleged abuser over the person violated, then the institution's primary mission of education is severely compromised. Instead of focusing on the risk of being violated, a rightful focus on the risk of perpetration shifts the debate and identifies the source of the problem.

The extremely helpful guidance in this volume instead offers routes away from denial or minimisation of sexual violence, providing practical routes to ensure that reporting is made worthwhile, investigations are likely to be meaningful and educational objectives are deliverable. Students and the #MeToo movement have made clear that sexual violence on campus is not to be tolerated or considered inevitable. Measures are needed to support and win confidence of survivors, advise professionals, monitor experiences and responses if lasting change is to be made. Clarissa Humphreys and Graham Towl point the way to delivering on these changes – and to the rightful prioritising of the true mission of institutions of scholarship: environments conducive to learning and growth for **all** students.

**Purna Sen**  
UN Women

**Purna Sen** is Executive Coordinator against sexual harassment at UN Women, where she was formerly Policy Director. Purna's experience is in policy, advocacy, teaching, research and publishing in education, inter-governmental work, local government and NGOs.

Her work has covered violence against women, human rights, trafficking, sexuality and sexual control, development and race equality in the United Kingdom. She has been on management/

advisory groups of NGOs including the Refugee Women's Resource Project, Southall Black Sisters, the Kaleidoscope Trust (LGBT rights), RISE (domestic abuse) and the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative. Purna was previously Deputy Director of the LSE Institute of Public Affairs, Head of Human Rights for the Commonwealth and Programme Director at Amnesty International. Her PhD (Bristol) researched domestic violence.

Purna received the Sir Brian Urquhart Award for Distinguished Service to the UN in 2018 and was included in the 100 Most Influential People in Global Gender Policy in 2018 and 2019.

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