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Plain Language Statement: In-depth Interview

Ending Gender Based and Sexual Violence and Harassment (GBSVH) in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) - An analysis of the views and experience of those to whom disclosures were made

What is the project about?

In this study we aim to learn from people who have received informal disclosures and/or formal reports of GBSVH in higher education. We will provide them with a safe platform to share their experiences and views, including exploring the challenges, supports, and opportunities that they meet in the process of receiving disclosures, complaints or reports.

The study is part of the national framework for ending SVH in higher education institutions. The term SVH includes many forms of gender-based and sexual violence harassment: It includes direct physical and sexual acts, and also non-contact actions and behaviours including bullying, harassment, and online violence and abuse.

How is the project funded?

The project is funded by the Higher Education Authority, an agency of the Irish government. It was commissioned as part of the national strategy for Ending Sexual Violence and Harassment in Higher Education.

What will I have to do?

You will be invited to partake in a one-to-one interview lasting between 60 and 90 minutes. The location in which the interview will take place will be according to your choice. Prior to taking part in the interview, you will be asked to sign a consent form. The interview will be audio recorded.

What are the benefits?

The potential benefits of the study are to give voice to people who have received disclosures or reports of gender-based and sexual violence and harassment within a Higher Educational Institution in Ireland. There is a potential opportunity to inform policy that will enable more victim-centred and trauma-informed HEIs in future.

What are the risks?

The potential risks associated with this study relate to the potential for distress from (re) encountering trauma. Given this, additional measures will be taken to support participants including interviews being carried out in a location of preference for the participant, providing participants with interview questions in advance of the interview, and an opportunity to review the interview transcript and make any changes or withdraw if you so wish to do so. The research interview is trained in trauma-informed approaches, and will listen to your account without judgement. Should

you experience emotional distress, you will be supported to pause, use grounding techniques, and decide in your own time if you wish to continue.

For some people, if their experience of receiving a disclosure was negative, being associated with this study could lead to a risk to your professional or personal wellbeing – for instance, if you have been labelled as a “complainer” or “trouble-maker”. For this reason, the study has a very high standard of confidentiality, making the likelihood of this risk very low. We will remove identifying information from your interview transcript as thoroughly as possible, and we will return the transcript to you to check that you are satisfied with it. When we analyse and write about the interviews, we will focus on information that is useable by all or most HEIs, and we will use descriptions that are broad rather than specific (eg: a senior undergraduate student, not a 3rd year medical student). Our team has conducted similar research previously, and we are experienced in attending to participant confidentiality. The research interviewer will discuss individual concerns and risks with participants and offer opportunities to withdraw if that is appropriate.

What if I do not want to take part?

Participation is completely voluntary. You can stop taking part in the research study at any time, up until data is de-identified and pseudonymised (after transcript review). At that stage, it will not be possible to distinguish your data from that of other participants. Should you feel at any stage that you want to stop taking part in the study, then this is dealt with in a sensitive and confidential manner.

What happens to the information?

We will collect your name and contact details in order to organise the interview. If you want us to, we will keep this information so that we can return your transcript to you to review (see below), and so that we can inform you about the outcomes of the research. Otherwise, we will delete your name and contact details following the interview. If you choose to share sensitive data with us (eg your race, ethnicity or sexuality), we will make a record of this separate to your interview transcript: this will not be connected to anything else about you such as your name, contact details or place of work or study. All personal data will be deleted at the end of the study period, in August 2027.

Following the interview, a transcript will be prepared and securely stored on the research interviewer's GDPR-compliant, password protected One Drive account. Once the transcript has been finalised, we will permanently remove identifying information as much as possible, including all names, names of institutions, and places. If you agree for us to keep your contact details, we will return your transcript to you and you will have the opportunity to make amendments or remove details that you do not wish to be included, within 7 days of receipt. The transcripts will be considered deidentified from this point onwards.

We cannot guarantee that your data will be fully anonymous, as with all qualitative research, there is a very small chance that people might recognise you from the way you speak, phrases you use or stories that you tell. The information gathered from the study will be handled in complete confidence.

Confidentiality of the interviews is the first priority of the researchers carrying out the study. The study will be audio recorded, with all recordings stored safely, securely and confidentially and deleted after transcripts have been confirmed. If your interview takes place over Microsoft Teams with the camera on, then it will also be video recorded as there is no way of only recording audio, and the video will be deleted. You can also choose to conduct the interview with your camera off, or by phone.

Only the PI and interviewing researcher in the study will have access to your data, including: your name and email address; the audio/video recordings; and the transcript before it is deidentified. When the study is finished, deidentified study information will be kept on Prof Margaret Hodgins' GDPR compliant UoG One-Drive cloud server.

As a data subject, you have rights over your personal data, including but not limited to the right to withdraw from this project. You can learn more about this here: <https://www.universityofgalway.ie/data-protection/>

The data protection officer of UoG can be contacted by email dataprotection@universityofgalway.ie and by phone: (091) 49 4494

You have the right to lodge a complaint with the data protection commissioner, more information here: <https://www.dataprotection.ie/en/contact/how-contact-us>

Who else is taking part?

We are seeking to document the experiences of 15-20 individuals. Participants will include:

- Staff and students of higher education institutions that have received disclosures or reports of SVH in the past 4 years.
- Former staff and alumni of an institution may also be considered who received disclosures or reports of SVH in the past 4 years.

We are also conducting focus group discussions with staff who have a professional role that involves receiving disclosures and reports, such as staff in SVH, HR, dignity and respect and EDI units. These staff members can also take part in individual interviews, if they choose.

What happens at the end of the study?

At the end of the study the information will be used to present results including:

- a policy report with recommendations,
- peer-reviewed journal articles,
- conference presentations
- potentially coverage in the media.
- The main research outputs will also be on our website www.borg.ie. All findings shared will be fully deidentified (see above).

What if I have more questions or do not understand something?

If you do not understand any aspect of the research, please contact any of the researchers and discuss any questions that you might have. It is important that you feel completely at ease during the research.

What if I change my mind during the study?

Should you feel at any stage that you want to stop being a participant in the research, you are free to stop and take no further part. After data de-identification, it will be impossible to withdraw your data as it will not be possible to distinguish it from the data of other participants. For this reason, it will not be possible to remove your interview data once we have finalised the de-identified transcript.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet.

Project Investigator Contact Details:

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This research study has received ethics approval from the University of Galway Research Ethics Committee. If you wish to contact a neutral third party, email ethics@universityofgalway.ie to communicate with the coordinator or Chair of the University of Galway Research Ethics Committee.