

Rape investigations and the police interview – perceptions, practice and the law in England and Wales

Research exploring the impact of law, policy and practice on police interviews with adult female victims of rape

Key details

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Police region	South West
Level of research	PhD
Project start date	January 2020
Date due for completion	December 2025

Research context

The aim of this thesis is to critically examine the role, function and impact of the police interview with adult female victims of rape in the context of regulatory and best practice guidance in England and Wales. Against a backdrop of concerns regarding police performance and the delivery of obligations to victims and survivors of sexual violence (e.g. [Operation Soteria Bluestone](#)), the police interview is deserving of particular attention. Further, at the current time, the [draft Victims Bill](#) is receiving parliamentary scrutiny and if passed in its current form will create new legal obligations for criminal justice agencies including the police.

This doctoral thesis will explore current practice, the ways in which interviews are perceived and understood by both police officers and victims of sexual offences and assess the frameworks which inform the conduct and practice of the police interview. The thesis has subsidiary aims and implications, including taking account of how the police interview impacts upon case progression and attrition from the criminal justice system.

This thesis seeks to critically examine the role of complainant/victim interviews in police investigations of rape and to explore their specific impact on:

- complainants
- police investigations of rape
- criminal justice outcomes

It will examine:

- the history of issues in police investigations of rape more broadly
- the role of police discretion
- the relationship between the police and the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS)

to understand police practice.

The proposed work programme will explore both police officer and victim experiences and perceptions of interviews conducted as part of rape investigations.

Crucially, this doctoral project will consider the scope of the guidance that applies to interviews, the impact of the [Victims' Code](#) (and likely the proposed new Victims' Law) and examine these obligations and indeed make recommendations where any reform may be required.

Research methodology

In order to answer these research questions, the researcher aims to conduct empirical research in the following three areas, dependent on access and availability of participants:

Interviews with police officers who have interviewed victims of rape

- Interviewing police officers who have interviewed victims of rape will allow the researcher to collect qualitative data which will seek to understand officers' understanding and application of the legal guidance and other measures.

Interviews with victims of rape who have been interviewed by police officers

- Conducting a questionnaire for victims of rape who have been interviewed with police officers will allow the researcher to collect qualitative data which will seek to understand victim experiences of police interviews. In addition, it will allow the researcher to identify influences of attrition where relevant.

Case analysis of transcripts of police interviews with victims of rape

- Conducting a case analysis of (fully anonymised) transcripts of police interviews with victims of rape will allow the researcher to collect qualitative data from real case examples. This will seek to identify how police officers interpret the guidance that applies to them in interviewing victims of rape.

Research participation

Individuals who wish to take part in the study are invited to email the researcher at sophie.marsh@uwe.ac.uk

Tags

- [Violence against women and girls](#)
- [Rape and sexual offences](#)