

## Care in the Courtroom Case Study of Specialist Sexual Violence Support Courts

### COURT OBSERVATION LEEDS AND SNARESBROOK CROWN COURTS: VICTIM AND SURVIVOR INFORMATION SHEET

Social Sciences and Humanities Interdivisional Research Ethics Committee Ref: 1847247

#### Introduction

Researchers at Oxford are seeking permission from victims and survivors to observe rape and sexual assault cases at Leeds and Snaresbrook Crown Court. This leaflet explains what the study is about.

#### What is the research about?

- In 2022, the government set up 'Specialist Sexual Violence Support' courts in **Leeds, Newcastle and Snaresbrook**.<sup>1</sup> We are interested in victims' and survivors' experiences of testifying at these courts, the support they are receiving, and how they are treated and questioned.
- The study is part of a project investigating the introduction of trauma-informed approaches and specialist courts in sexual offence cases to see if they improve victims' and survivors' sense of justice and wellbeing.<sup>2</sup>
- We hope that the results of the study will help define trauma-informed court processes and help to develop specialist courts for other victims and survivors in the UK and internationally.

#### Who is working on the study?



Dr [Natalie Kyneswood](#) is hoping to observe cases at **Leeds Crown Court**. She is a researcher working at the Centre for Socio-Legal Studies, Faculty of Law, University of Oxford.



Dr [Alma Ionescu](#) is hoping to observe cases at **Snaresbrook Crown Court**. She is a researcher at the Centre for Socio-Legal Studies, Faculty of Law, University of Oxford.

#### What kind of cases are you interested in observing?

- We are hoping to observe up to 20 trials, 20 s. 28 hearings and other pre-trial hearings in sexual offence cases at **Leeds and Snaresbrook** Crown Courts.
- We want to observe cases involving **adult victims and survivors** who are **18 years old** at the time of giving evidence at court.
- This includes cases where victims and survivors give 'live' evidence in the courtroom, testify remotely from another building, and give pre-recorded evidence ('section 28').

<sup>1</sup> See [www.gov.uk/government/news/new-pilots-to-boost-support-for-rape-victims-in-court](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-pilots-to-boost-support-for-rape-victims-in-court).

<sup>2</sup> Please visit the project website for further information: [www.law.ox.ac.uk/care-in-the-courtroom](http://www.law.ox.ac.uk/care-in-the-courtroom).

### Why do we want to observe rape and sexual assault cases?

Very little is known about Specialist Sexual Violence Support (SSVS) courts and what victims and survivors think about them. Observing cases at **Leeds** and **Snaresbrook** will help us to understand how these courts work in practice.

### What other information are you collecting? Are you speaking to victims and survivors?

Yes. We are also inviting victims and survivors to speak to us about their experience of giving evidence at Leeds and Snaresbrook. If you are interested in talking to us and being interviewed as part of the project, please email us or get in touch through the project website: [www.law.ox.ac.uk/care-in-the-courtroom/participation](http://www.law.ox.ac.uk/care-in-the-courtroom/participation). We will also be talking to Independent Sexual Violence Advisors (ISVAs) and barristers about specialist courts.

### Why are we asking victims and survivors for their permission to observe in court?

Sexual offence trials are open to the public but we understand that victims and survivors may feel uncomfortable if there are other people in the courtroom, especially if they don't know who they are or why they are there. That's why we want to tell you about the study and ask for your permission to be in court.

### How are you trying to contact victims and survivors to ask for their permission?

We are asking people who work in the criminal justice system (such as Witness Care Officers, Victim Liaison Officers, ISVAs, the Witness Service and Crown Prosecutors) to share information about the project with victims and survivors. We also have an 'observation' webpage on the project website, [www.law.ox.ac.uk/care-in-the-courtroom/observation](http://www.law.ox.ac.uk/care-in-the-courtroom/observation), where victims and survivors can ask us questions or give us permission to observe their case using the [contact form](#). You may also notice posters about the study.

### What happens if I give permission for you to observe the trial or hearing in my case?

- We shall sit in the courtroom and silently take notes during the case.
- We won't talk to anyone in the public gallery.
- Only one researcher, either Natalie or Alma, will be in the courtroom.
- We would like to observe the part where you give evidence and also the rest of the trial, so that we can understand the way that your testimony fits together with the rest of the evidence in the case.

### Do I have to give permission?

- No. It is completely up to you to decide if you want us to observe and take notes.
- **We will not observe without your permission.**
- Please keep hold of this leaflet. If you change your mind, you can ask us to remove your case from the study and delete any notes we made at any point before **the 30th April 2026** by emailing [natalie.kyneswood@csls.ox.ac.uk](mailto:natalie.kyneswood@csls.ox.ac.uk). There are no consequences in withdrawing from the study.

### What are the positives and negatives of allowing you to observe?

If you are happy for us to observe, there are no risks or disadvantages. It won't make a difference to your case. If you give permission, you may feel some comfort in knowing that there is an external, professional researcher in the courtroom and that your case may provide examples which help shape the development of specialist courts and best practice in this area.

### What information will you collect and why is it relevant to the study?

We will collect information about any help, support or special measures you are given in court, how these work, and the way you are treated and questioned. We are also interested in how the prosecution and defence describe the case and talk about the evidence you give. Observing your case will help us answer our research questions, including:

- How is trauma-informed care understood in sexual offence cases?
- Are 'specialist' courts or courtrooms needed to achieve trauma-informed practice?
- Do trauma-informed approaches or specialist courts improve the way that victims and survivors are treated and questioned, and participate in court proceedings?

#### How will we respect your anonymity and privacy?

- We understand that victims and survivors of sexual offences are given lifetime anonymity. **We will never identify you.** The notes we make of court proceedings will not name you or anyone else involved. Cases will be given numbers, e.g., Case 1 at Court A, and we will never refer to dates or places in our notes.
- Notes of your trial or hearing will be stored electronically on University password protected computer servers and kept securely for at least 3 years until after publication of the work.
- With your permission, we would like to deposit a copy of our anonymised notes of the trial or hearing in the [Oxford University Research Archive](#) and [UK Data Archive](#) so other researchers can refer to it.

#### Could I be identified in any studies or reports?

- We will use notes from cases we have observed and interviews with victims and survivors, ISVAs and barristers to write a publicly available report, an academic article, and a book about specialist courts in sexual offence cases.
- A briefing for victims and survivors will be published on the [project website](#).
- It will not be possible for someone to identify you in any document we publish.

#### Who has funded and reviewed this research?

The project is funded by Wellcome Trust and has received ethics approval from the University of Oxford's Social Sciences and Humanities Interdivisional Research Ethics Committee (project reference 1847247). The Ministry of Justice and Rape Crisis England and Wales are collaborating with us on the project.

#### Who do I contact if I have a concern about the research or I wish to complain?

- If you have a concern about any aspect of the research, please email [Dr Natalie Kyneswood](#) and I will get back to you within 10 working days to explain how it will be dealt with.
- If you remain unhappy or wish to make a formal complaint, you can contact the University of Oxford Research Governance Ethics & Assurance (RGEA) team on 01865 616480 or by emailing [rgea.complaints@admin.ox.ac.uk](mailto:rgea.complaints@admin.ox.ac.uk).

#### Contact information

If you would like to discuss the research with Natalie (**Leeds**) or Alma (**Snaresbrook**, London), or if you have questions, please get in touch through the project website: [www.law.ox.ac.uk/care-in-the-courtroom/observation](http://www.law.ox.ac.uk/care-in-the-courtroom/observation), or by emailing [natalie.kyneswood@csls.ox.ac.uk](mailto:natalie.kyneswood@csls.ox.ac.uk) or [alma.ionescu@csls.ox.ac.uk](mailto:alma.ionescu@csls.ox.ac.uk).