

# Hidden Marks

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A study of women students' experiences of harassment, stalking, violence and sexual assault



national union of students



# Foreword



**Welcome to Hidden Marks, the first ever nationwide report into women students' experience of harassment, stalking, violence and sexual assault.**

We decided to undertake this research because we know that women aged 18–25 have

a higher risk of experiencing domestic violence, but there appeared to be little awareness of this amongst students. We wanted to find out from women students themselves about their experiences. We wanted to understand what was happening on campus, in halls of residences, and in students' unions, and we wanted to hear how women students felt about it.

In this report we provide a snapshot of the harassment and violence that women students have faced whilst they have been at their current institution. The picture that we have revealed is disturbing. 14 per cent of students have experienced serious physical or sexual assault. 68 per cent have been subject to verbal or physical sexual harassment. Nearly one in four students has experienced unwanted sexual contact.

Many women students struggle to get through their course without coming into contact with harassment or violence in one form or another. Whether it is being harassed in the students' union bar, or abuse in intimate relationships, this report reveals a serious problem that needs urgent action.

It is a problem that is made worse by the lack of support received by the women students who face violence. There is very little awareness of whether institutions provide any services to support women, and nearly a third of students don't even discuss the issue of violence against women with their friends. Very few students reported their

experiences, either to their institution or to the police. In the category of serious sexual assault only 10 per cent reported it to the police, and more than four in ten told no one about the attack.

At the moment, women students are too often being forced to pick themselves up and carry on, without any help or support from their institution. Many women students are left feeling alone, and feeling like they are to blame for the violence committed against them.

This report is a wake-up call. We must act now to break the silence: violence against women students is widespread, serious, and is hampering women's ability to learn. This report is just the start of the work that the NUS Women's Campaign will be undertaking to tackle violence against women students. But we can't end the violence alone.

Institutions, students' unions and students have a pressing responsibility to take immediate action to tackle the problem. In this report, we call for institutions and students' unions to work together to do two key things. First, we ask that they develop a cross-institutional policy to tackle violence against women. Second, that they adopt a 'zero-tolerance' approach to harassment and violence.

All students have the right to live and study in an environment of dignity and respect, free from the fear of harassment or violence. We look forward to working with government, institutions and students' unions to make this a reality.

Olivia Bailey  
NUS National Women's Officer

# Acknowledgements

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Hidden Marks



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# Executive Summary

## Key Findings

This research was carried out between August 2009 and March 2010. During this time we conducted a literature review and an online survey of 2058 women students' experiences of harassment, financial control, control over their course and institution choices, stalking, violence, and sexual assault. Only current students were asked to fill in the survey, and questions were only asked about students' experiences at their current institution. This report summarises the headline findings from this research.

### Women students' perceptions of safety

- More than one third of respondents reported they sometimes felt unsafe when visiting their university or college buildings in the evening. This is in notable contrast to perceptions of safety during the day when 97 per cent of students always or mostly felt safe.
- Women were most likely to feel unsafe in the evening at their institution because of concerns that they were likely to be harassed or intimidated.
- Students in halls of residences reported feeling unsafe because of concerns with security breaches.

### Prevalence of violence and harassment

- Women students reported experiences of a range of unwanted behaviour during their time as a student, ranging from 'everyday' verbal and non-verbal harassment, to serious episodes of stalking, physical and sexual assault.
- One in seven survey respondents has experienced a serious physical or sexual assault during their time as a student.
- Over two thirds of women students (68 per cent) have experienced some kind of verbal or non-verbal harassment in and around their institution. This kind of behaviour – which includes groping, flashing and unwanted sexual comments – has become almost 'everyday' for some women students.

- 12 per cent of respondents reported being subject to stalking.
- More than one in ten has been a victim of serious physical violence.
- 16 per cent have experienced unwanted kissing, touching or molesting during their time as a student, the majority of which has taken place in public.
- Seven per cent have been subject to a serious sexual assault, the majority of which occurred in somebody's home.
- One in ten victims of serious sexual assault were given alcohol or drugs against their will before the attack.
- A small number of student women (two per cent) reported that their finances have been controlled by family members or a partner, or that their educational choices have been influenced using threats of violence.

### Profile of perpetrators

- The majority of perpetrators of stalking, sexual assault and physical violence were known to the victim.
- Men were the majority of perpetrators of stalking (89 per cent) and physical violence (73 per cent).
- Students were the majority of perpetrators in most categories, the majority of whom were studying at the same institution as the respondent. The exception to this rule is in the category of physical violence where just under half of offenders were students (48 per cent).

- Respondents were most likely to report that the perpetrator was a student at the same institution in the case of stalking; 60 per cent were students and 49 per cent were at the same institution.

### Reporting levels and factors influencing reporting

- Reporting levels were low across all categories surveyed. Respondents were most likely to report stalking to somebody at the institution (21 per cent), and victims of serious physical violence were most likely to report the incident to the police (17 per cent).
- Students who had been subjected to a less serious sexual assault were least likely to report either to the police or to the institution (two per cent).
- The most common reason overall for not reporting was that students did not feel that what had happened was serious enough to report.
- The most common reason for not reporting serious sexual assault was that the victim felt ashamed or embarrassed; 43 per cent also thought they would be blamed for what had happened, and one in three thought they would not be believed.
- Women students in all categories were most likely to report or discuss what had happened to them with friends or family; 80 per cent of stalking victims had done so.
- More than four in ten victims of serious sexual assault have told nobody about what has happened to them.

### The impact of stalking, violence and sexual assault on women students

- Respondents reported a range of different consequences of violence, stalking and sexual assault to their health, experience of learning, confidence, and relationships, with the most common consequence in any category being deterioration of mental health.
- Experiences of stalking, violence and sexual assault can negatively affect a student's education; one in

four victims of serious sexual assault stated that their studies had been affected by the incident, and one in seven victims of serious physical assault reported that their attendance had suffered.

- Approximately one quarter of stalking victims reported that the obsessive behaviour they had been subjected to had affected their mental health, studies and relationships. Furthermore, students in this category were more likely to report concerns if the behaviour had persisted more than three months.
- Women who have been victims of serious sexual assault reported the most significant impact in nearly every area. Just under two thirds (63 per cent) said that their relationships had been affected, approximately half (49 per cent) reported issues with their mental health, and more than one in ten (12 per cent) said there had been consequences to their physical health. 13 per cent had considered leaving their course.
- Women students also commonly reported a loss of confidence, and feeling increased fear as a consequence of being a victim of violence.

## Key Recommendations

Our vision is of an education system in which all further and higher education students can participate confidently, without the restraint of harassment and fear of violence.

We believe that institutions and students' unions have a key role to play in ending violence against women in education and in that regard we make two key recommendations. These recommendations have been developed as a result of our analysis of the survey responses. The detail of these recommendations, and further recommendations, can be found in Chapter 6.

### Adopt a 'zero-tolerance' approach to harassment and violence

Our research shows that high numbers of women students face 'everyday', low-level harassment and intrusive behaviour. We believe that an environment in which sexual harassment is tolerated is one in which more serious forms of violence are less likely to be dealt with effectively. We recommend therefore that institutions and students' unions should adopt a 'zero tolerance' approach to non-verbal and verbal sexual harassment.

Such an approach would:

- send out a strong signal to both staff and students that such behaviour is unacceptable both within and outside of the learning environment; and,
- create an environment in which women students are able to participate with dignity and confidence.

This approach is a standard which should underpin a comprehensive, cross-institutional policy against violence and harassment of women students, as described in the following recommendation.

### Develop a cross-institutional policy to tackle violence against women

There are numerous ways in which institutions and students' unions can work together to prevent further violence and harassment, to ensure that women students access the support services they need should they become victims, and to encourage reporting. We recommend that institutions, in partnership with students' unions, should develop a comprehensive

cross-institutional policy which would set out the measures they will undertake to tackle violence against women students.

This policy should:

- set out how the institution and students' union will develop and implement activities to change attitudes and raise awareness of violence;
- enable students and staff to recognise and effectively deal with violence and harassment against women students;
- discuss how to best utilise peer support in tackling violence and harassment;
- contain plans for improving campus design and security so as to help students feel safe;
- outline how the institution will work with relevant agencies to ensure that students access the support services that they need;
- contain steps explaining how reporting will be encouraged;
- set out how the institution will respond to violence against women perpetrated by its students.

# Introduction

This report outlines findings from a survey carried out by the National Union of Students exploring the prevalence and nature of harassment, stalking, financial control, control over course and institution choice, and physical and sexual violence faced by women students. The UK-wide study provides a snapshot of the experiences of women students today. It includes information about how likely women students are to experience harassment and violence, the extent to which they report these crimes and to whom, the profile of offenders, and the impact of such incidences on women students' health, relationships and education.

The study covers full-time and part-time students in both further and higher education. Both UK-domiciled and international students took part, and surveys were completed by students studying in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

## Background

The British Crime Survey has consistently shown that young women aged 16–24 have a heightened risk of being a victim of violent crime compared with older women. It has also shown that the majority of victims of domestic violence are women, and that sexual partner violence in young people's relationships is all too common.<sup>1</sup>

These figures, in addition to the publication of research suggesting a hardening of attitudes towards victims of sexual assault,<sup>2</sup> were the background to our decision to research the experiences of women in further and higher education today. We wanted to find out from women students themselves what their experiences of harassment, stalking, violence and sexual assault were. We wanted to know what the consequences of such experiences were for students, and whether they were reporting such incidents to the police and to people within their institution. And we wanted to know what they thought could be done to support women students who have been victims of such crimes, and to end violence against women.

In the public policy environment, there is ongoing work to address violence against women and girls in all its forms. At the beginning of 2010 the Government published its strategy to end violence against women and girls, the result of a year-long consultation which engaged thousands of people.<sup>3</sup> Alongside the strategy, a number of

reviews commissioned by the government are underway to consider particular aspects of the problem. At the end of 2009, Sara Payne published her review of the criminal justice system's response to rape victims. In February 2010 Dr Papadopoulos published an independent review on the sexualisation of young people; and Baroness Stern has published findings from a review of the way that rape complaints are handled in March 2010.

We hope that, by illuminating the specific circumstances in which student women experience the range of behaviours included in our survey, this research will be a useful contribution to an ongoing debate about how to end violence against women.

## Research method

Research was carried out between August 2009 and March 2010. This consisted of a review of existing research and statistics about violence against women in the UK, public policy approaches in the field, studies of gendered violence in student communities in other countries such as the United States, and surveys of attitudes towards victims of crime.

Between November 2009 and January 2010, NUS asked women students in both further and higher education to complete an online survey about their perceptions of safety and their experiences of harassment, stalking, financial abuse, violence and sexual assault. The survey was developed after

extensive research into best practice with regard to surveys of violence against women (further information about this is provided in Appendix A), and in consultation with a number of organisations and individuals with expertise in the area, including, but not limited to, Refuge, Women's Aid, Rape Crisis and Amnesty International UK.

2058 valid responses to the survey were received. Partial responses were accepted and, as a result, percentages given throughout the report refer to the base for that question, which differs depending on the question. The demographic profile of survey participants is provided in Appendix B, and base rates for each question are listed in Appendix A.

Data from the survey was analysed using SPSS. A group of critical readers provided advice and feedback on the analysis of data and presentation of findings.

## Scope of the research

The survey covers both further and higher education, including women currently studying at higher education institutions, colleges, work-based learning, sixth-form colleges and adult learning providers. Women studying in all four countries of the UK, including international students, and aged between 16 and 60, participated in the survey.

The survey included questions about:

- perceptions of safety;
- unwanted verbal and physical sexual harassment;
- control over finances needed to be a student;
- control over choice of course or institution;
- stalking;
- physical violence;
- sexual assault.

Students were not asked about any experiences prior to their becoming a student, since the intent was to take a snapshot of current students' experiences in their present place of study. Neither were students asked about emotional or psychological abuse. Nonetheless, a number of participants did use open text boxes to tell us about such experiences. Details about question wording and definitions are provided in Appendix A.

The survey did not ask about violence experienced by male students. Whilst we recognise that male students have a heightened risk of being a victim of violent crime, and can be subject to the full range of behaviour surveyed in this research, the primary aim of this research was to explore women students' experiences, focusing particularly, although not exclusively, on men's behaviour towards women and the impact of gendered violence on women.

This report outlines headline findings from the survey. Further analysis will be carried out on the data to explore differences between experiences for women from different backgrounds, including women from different ethnic groups, women of different sexual orientations, trans women and disabled women. This will be published in due course.

## Structure of the report

Following a summary of the key findings and recommendations, the analysis of survey findings is presented in six chapters. In these chapters we consider:

- women students' perceptions of safety;
- the prevalence of harassment, stalking, violence and sexual assault against women students;
- the profile of offenders – who perpetrates violence against women students;
- factors influencing reporting – which crimes women report to their institution and the police; reasons for not reporting; experiences of reporting;
- the consequences of violence for women students;
- recommendations to support women victims and prevent further violence.

The appendices include a list of headline survey questions, details of the survey participant profile, response rates for individual questions, and information about the survey design.

## Terminology

**Violence against women** is a global phenomenon which affects women from all sections of society and of all ages. Violence against women can be defined in a number of different ways, but is generally understood

as gendered violence experienced by women, which can include physical, sexual, emotional, psychological and financial abuse as well as threatening, coercive and controlling behaviour. In this survey, we asked questions about verbal and non-verbal harassment, stalking, physical violence, financial abuse and sexual assault experienced by women students, and whether that behaviour was perpetrated by men or women.

Throughout this report we use the term **victim** to describe respondents who have reported being subject to harassment, stalking, violence and sexual assault. We use this term as it is the most widely-used term in the criminal justice system, whilst recognising that many women who have experienced different forms of harassment and violence against women may not describe themselves in these terms, and that some prefer to describe themselves as **survivors**.

There is no strict definition of the term **sexual harassment**, but it is commonly understood to describe unwelcome behaviour of a sexual nature. In this report, we use the expression to describe the behaviours listed in Appendix A, which are those we asked students to report on.

The terms **perpetrator** and **offender** are used interchangeably throughout the report to denote the person responsible for incidents reported by students.

# 1. Women students' perceptions of safety

We asked women students to respond to a number of statements about how safe they felt in various different environments – in and around their college or university buildings, in their students' union and in halls of residences. We then asked those who did not always feel safe to explain why. Their responses show that, whilst the majority of women students feel safe in these environments most of the time, some have genuine concerns about campus environment, culture and crime that can make them feel unsafe, particularly at night.

## Key findings:

- More than one third of respondents reported they felt unsafe when visiting their university or college buildings in the evening. This is in notable contrast to perceptions of safety during the day when 97 per cent of students always or mostly felt safe.
- Women students most often felt unsafe because they were worried about being approached, intimidated, threatened or attacked, because of inadequate street lighting, and when they were alone.
- Students also reported concerns about campus design and the environment in which their institution is based.
- Seven per cent reported feeling unsafe in their halls of residence at night.
- Students mostly felt unsafe in their halls of residences at night when they did not feel their accommodation was properly secured.
- Only five per cent of respondents had concerns about their safety in the students' union environment at night.
- Students who felt unsafe in their union had concerns about being harassed, being threatened or attacked, and that the security provided was not adequate.

## In and around university and college

Nearly all respondents who visited their university or college buildings during the day always, or mostly, felt safe there (97 per cent).<sup>4</sup> This falls to under two thirds (63 per cent) at night-time, with one quarter of respondents reporting that they only felt safe sometimes, and one in ten saying they rarely or never felt safe walking around their university or college buildings in the evening.

We asked those who reported feeling unsafe on campus either at night or during the day why they felt that was. The most popular answer was that they were worried about being approached or intimidated. Respondents commonly also expressed concerns about inadequate street lighting, being threatened or attacked, being harassed, and being alone.

**“I’ve been harassed outside the campus, and friends have been mugged, so I think the nervousness carries over.”**

**“I have been approached by older males (I don’t think they were students) several times around campus and surrounding areas, walking up to me and asking inappropriate questions just while I’ve been walking about. Mainly asking what’s my name, where do you live, what am I doing etc. Once or twice something worse like ‘oi can I get your number’, or ‘would you fuck me’... I feel intimidated and occasionally I felt threatened by the responses when I’d withheld the information or have asked to be left alone.”**

Respondents also explained that they felt unsafe because of previous experiences of harassment, the

presence of people who have been drinking, and knowledge of other people's experiences of harassment or attacks. A few students also reported feeling unsafe because of a lack of security presence on campus, personal experience of attacks or violence, and warnings given by police, the institution and friends about the area.

**"[I am] worried about groups of drunk people (mainly men) being around/being intimidatory."**

**"I have witnessed and heard of my friends being harassed/threatened."**

Respondents also took this opportunity to note that where their institution was located, or the way in which it was designed, contributed to them feeling unsafe at times. They cited concealed alleyways, hidden footpaths, a lack of security cameras and secluded areas, as examples of design issues. One respondent explained that her institution was located near a red light district.

**"I have been warned that the area around my university... can be dangerous, and heard of incidents in which people were attacked."**

**"(There are) lots of alley ways/places to hide with no lighting."**

### In the students' union at night

80 per cent of those who visited their students' union at night-time agreed that they felt safe there at that time, whilst five per cent reported feeling unsafe.<sup>5</sup> Three quarters of those had concerns about being harassed, over half about being threatened or attacked, whilst approximately the same proportion did not think that the security provided by the union was adequate.

**"I experienced one incident where a man was being very very abusive and violent outside the SU and the bouncers would not help, even though one told me later he had seen what was going on but was told not to get involved. I haven't felt able to go back to my SU since."**

Those who provided additional comments most often discussed how the presence of drunk people, alongside inadequate security and protection, made them feel unsafe in their students' union at night. Several of the respondents had also heard of other students being harassed or attacked in the students' union, which contributed to their feelings of insecurity.

### In halls of residence at night

We asked respondents who are currently living in student accommodation whether they felt safe there at night. 87 per cent said that they did, whilst seven per cent indicated that they did not.<sup>6</sup>

Of those, more than two thirds said that they didn't feel their accommodation was secure and 60 per cent had concerns that somebody would come into their room without permission.

Some respondents also provided comments explaining why they did not feel safe in their halls of residence at night. In these comments, respondents most frequently cited the ease with which security could be breached. The presence of residents who had been drinking excessively also figured highly as a cause for concern.

**"Despite being in one of the most expensive halls, the main gate is often broken or pinned back and the block door is broken. People have got in my flat in the night and smashed up the kitchen. Staff/contractors have come into my room whilst I have been in bed asleep."**

**"In halls of residence during my first year, the front door was repeatedly smashed open and squatters from just across the road broke in and stole food – they were caught in the act once. I heard loud, angry voices outside on a regular basis at strange times of night and the security guards did nothing to help when I phoned them about it, saying 'Go back to sleep, it's just the squatters'. On my last day in halls I was threatened by a youth I'd never seen before who was nonetheless in the building."**

## 2. Prevalence and characteristics of violence against women students

British Crime Survey data tells us that students have a higher than average risk of being a victim of violent crime, and that women are at a higher risk than men of being victims of domestic violence.<sup>7</sup> In this section we set out the findings of our survey in relation to:

- the extent of violence and harassment experienced by women students;
- the severity of incidents reported;
- the frequency of incidents.

And, in the category of sexual assault:

- when and where incidents took place;
- the use of alcohol and/or drugs.

### Key findings:

- One in seven survey respondents has experienced a serious physical or sexual assault during their time as a student.
- 68 per cent of respondents have been a victim of one or more kinds of sexual harassment on campus during their time as a student.
- 12 per cent of respondents reported being subject to stalking.
- More than one in ten has been a victim of serious physical violence.
- 16 per cent of respondents have experienced unwanted kissing, touching or molesting during their time as a student, the majority of which has taken place in public.
- Seven per cent have been subject to a serious sexual assault, the majority of which occurred in somebody's home.
- One in ten victims of serious sexual assault report that they were given alcohol or drugs against their will before the attack.

### The extent of harassment, stalking, violence and sexual assault

We asked women students whether, whilst they have been a student at their current institution, they have experienced sexual harassment, stalking, violence and sexual assault.<sup>8</sup> Incident rates are listed in Table 1, in order of prevalence.

Table 1: Prevalence of harassment, stalking, violence and sexual assault amongst women students

| Type of incident                         | % of responses |
|--|----------------|
| Serious sexual assault                   | 7%             |
| Less serious physical violence           | 8%             |
| Serious physical violence                | 11%            |
| Stalking                                 | 12%            |
| Less serious sexual assault              | 16%            |
| All physical violence                    | 21%            |
| All sexual assault                       | 25%            |
| Verbal and physical harassment on campus | 68%            |

### Harassment

#### Verbal harassment on campus

The survey found that women students were very likely to experience low-level verbal and non-verbal sexual harassment whilst at university or college.

We asked respondents to tell us whether they had ever been subject to any from the following behaviours on campus:<sup>9</sup>

- someone making sexual comments that made them feel uncomfortable;

- someone wolf whistling, catcalling or making sexual noises at them;
- someone asking them questions about their sex or romantic life when it was clearly none of their business;
- someone asking them questions about their sexuality when it was clearly none of their business.

65 per cent of respondents to this question reported that they had experienced one or more of these behaviours during their time as a student, with a total of 3833 incidents being reported by 1210 respondents in this category. This behaviour was most likely to happen in and around college or university buildings (53 per cent of total reported incidents). Just under one third of incidents reported in this category happened in a students' union or at a students' union event, with 16 per cent of the incidents occurring in a learning environment such as a lecture theatre or library.

The most common behaviours reported were making sexual comments and sexual noises that made the respondent feel uncomfortable. More than one in ten students reported feeling uncomfortable as a result of comments with a sexual overtone being made in a learning environment. This figure rose to one in five in the students' union context and nearly one in three when asked about the university and college environment more broadly.

**“One lecturer joked about how to cover up spiking a drink with a rape drug, then later mentioned they had been reported for misogyny and how that couldn't be true... another lecturer showed a former student's picture then made a suggestive comment about fantasising about what could have happened between them...”**

**“I have been present where male students have discussed other female students – and women in general – in sexual and quite aggressively negative ways; when myself or others have expressed discomfort, we have been mocked and ostracised from that social group (not necessarily a bad thing to know who the idiots are, but it is difficult to have a working relationship with someone who you know regards all women as inferior, or as sexual objects).”**

43 per cent of respondents reported being on the receiving end of wolf-whistling, catcalling or someone making noises with a sexual overtone in and around their university or college buildings. A further 18 per cent of respondents reported experiencing this behaviour whilst in a students' union environment.<sup>10</sup>

Facing unwanted questions about their sex/romantic life and/or their sexuality was also relatively common for student respondents, with up to one in five reporting that they have been asked these questions in different educational environments.

### Physical harassment on and off campus

We asked respondents whether they had ever been subject to any of the following behaviours on campus:

- someone exposing their sexual organs to them when they did not agree;
- someone groping, pinching or smacking their bottom when they did not agree to them doing so;
- someone groping, pinching or touching their breasts when they did not agree to them doing so;
- someone lifting up their skirt in public without them agreeing.

34 per cent of respondents to this question had experienced one or more of these behaviours during their time as a student.

In this section students were most likely to report that they have had their bottom groped, pinched or smacked in a students' union or at a union event (19 per cent), with 14 per cent reporting this happening in and around their institution. Six per cent stated that their breasts have been touched without their consent in a students' union, and a further five per cent reported this happening to them in their institution. Six per cent have been 'flashed' at in and around their institutional buildings.

We also asked students whether they had been subject to unwanted sexual contact (unwanted kissing, molesting or touching including through clothes) whilst they have been a student, but not necessarily on campus. 16 per cent of respondents said that this had happened to them during the course of their student experience so far.

“I was approached by a group of male students as I was walking out of my halls of residence and they were all shouting sexual things at me and then one of them approached me, grabbed me around the waist and then started to touch my breasts and bottom. He was saying things like ‘you know you want this’ and ‘you know you're up for this’.”

When we asked students to tell us about any harassment they had experienced that had not previously been described in the survey, the most common experience described was being harassed outside of the institutional campus, most usually on the way to and from the respondent's house, but also at work, on public transport and in entertainment venues and at parties. Examples of the type of harassment faced by students include being followed home, being shouted at from cars, sexual advances from strangers and being touched or approached by strangers in taxis and on buses.

“I have been harassed/intimidated/spoken to inappropriately by taxi drivers on a regular basis.”

“In first year, (I was) followed home a couple of times by men. And on one occasion had someone ran after me, and I had to run and hide and ask for help from the bouncers.”

“I was followed and harassed by a male international student after a student society (event)... he followed me to the bus stop, and then tried to get me to go home with him, persisting even after I told him I was in a relationship. Without my consent he tried to kiss me. I didn't kick up a fuss because he was a big guy, and I was alone, so I tried to keep things calm despite his persistent and unwanted verbal and physical advances. Basically, I was too frightened that he would become violent to assert myself properly.”

Women students seemed particularly concerned about the persistent harassment they faced in clubs and pubs:

“Almost every time me and my friends go out to a club you can guarantee that one of us will have some kind of violence or unwanted attention forced on us by drunk men. Normally they will just rub themselves up against you or make sexual comments, but there

have been more serious incidents. Once one of my friends was dancing and a man just came up behind her and grabbed her crotch. She was obviously really upset and we left. Another time a man called another of my friends a slag and threatened to spit on her because she accidentally bumped into him and his drink spilt.”

“I have been followed around in one of my campus bars even though I told the guy I was uninterested... he finally stopped when he forced a kiss on me (with tongue) when I was coming out of the bathroom which my friend witnessed and yelled at him for.”

“I have been repeatedly groped/smacked on my bottom on several occasions whilst in student clubs and bars, and when I have confronted the men they have either seemed shocked/embarrassed that I didn't like receiving this kind of attention or have found it funny that I have been unhappy.”

Respondents also reported being subject to homophobic harassment, sexist jokes and comments and unwanted sexual text messages and e-mails.

### Use of visual media

We asked women respondents whether visual media had ever been used inappropriately against them. Five per cent of respondents have been shown pornography when they did not wish to see it whilst a student. A small number of students had been filmed naked or semi-naked without their consent (one per cent), or had naked or semi-naked images of them circulated without their consent (two per cent).

“I feel as though I am in this person's (ex-partner) pocket... He undressed and photographed me against my will during this incident and I am frightened that he will circulate the images if I upset him, because he has done so in the past to a previous partner.”

### Financial Abuse and Control of Educational Choices

We asked women students about whether their educational choices had been influenced by others using threats, violence or financial control.

## Hidden Marks

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Two per cent said that someone had threatened to withhold the financial support that they need to be a student. The same number reported that somebody had tried to influence their choice of course or institution using threats or violence. In virtually all of these cases, the person involved was a parent, step-parent or current or ex-partner of the student. In one case, a student reported that religious elders had attempted to influence her choice of course using threats or violence.

Students explained that money has been withheld from them by their parents for a number of reasons:

“My parents are against me studying at Uni... (so threatened to withhold a) place to live/support with childcare while at Uni.”

“My parents threatened to withhold financial support because of my sexuality.”

“(My parents threatened to remove) all financial support if I moved out, rather than stayed at home.”

A number of students also reported that their partners had used threats or violence to exert control over their finances whilst a student:

“My boyfriend at the time ensured that my EMA I would receive every week went to him.”

“My ex-boyfriend used to steal all my money saying 'you borrowed it anyway' (student loan)... He would spend my money on alcohol for himself, and order takeaways for himself, that I would have to pay for. He would scream and scream until I gave him money, and threatened to get me evicted from my home.”

“My ex-boyfriend threatened to keep the deposit and rent he owed me for a flat we were living in. He would take a large part of my student loan because he claimed he needed money for an emergency, and then would threaten to not pay me back.”

“All the finances are controlled by my partner.”

## Stalking and Obsessive Behaviour

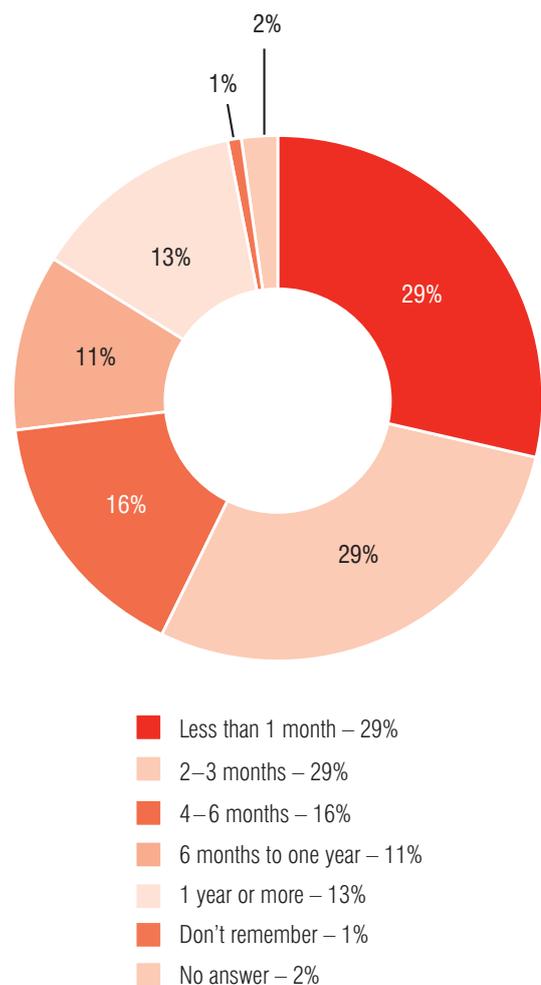
The 2008/9 British Crime Survey reported that in the year preceding the survey four per cent of women had been

subject to stalking, and estimated that 20 per cent of women experience stalking or harassment at some point in their lifetimes. In comparison, student women appear to be at particular risk of this kind of crime. This may be because of the high numbers of people that students meet and associate with in a short space of time and the intensity with which relationships are formed when people move away from home for the first time.

We asked women students the following question:

Whilst you have been a student at your current place of study, has anyone repeatedly followed you, watched you, phoned you, texted, written, e-mailed, communicated with you through social networking sites, or communicated with you in other ways that seemed obsessive or made you afraid or concerned for your safety?

Chart 1: Length of time stalking persisted



12 per cent of respondents said yes, eight per cent said they were unsure and 80 per cent said no. 11 students reported being subject to two unrelated incidences of stalking. Three per cent of cases happened when the respondent was studying on a year abroad.

**“My ex-boyfriend frequently called me to meet up with him alone and would blow up when I refused to do so. He was obsessive and followed my movements, and sent me extravagant presents that would lead to a big argument if I confronted him about this being unacceptable behaviour, or told him to back off.”**

Respondents reported the behaviour lasting from between a few weeks to a year or more, with the majority of incidents lasting for less than six months (see Chart 1). The longer the behaviour continued, the greater the impact on women students in terms of their health, studies and relationships.

### Physical violence

In this section, students were asked two separate questions about their experiences of physical mistreatment and violence. The first question asked whether the respondent had been hit or physically mistreated by anyone during their time as a student, whilst the second question asked whether the respondent had been subject to any from a list of specific behaviours during the same time-frame. The aim of this question design was to maximise response rates by wording questions in such a way that reflected the respondent’s experiences, and to ensure that there was no misunderstanding about the behaviour we were asking about.

The survey responses bore out the idea that women will not always classify violent experiences in those terms. One in ten respondents said that, whilst they had been a student at their current institution, they had been physically mistreated or hit. But 21 per cent said they had been subject to one of the behaviours in the list provided (respondents were asked to select the most serious in the event that they had been subject to more than one). Table 2 lists the breakdown of these experiences.

**Table 2: Prevalence of physical violence experienced by women students**

| Type of incident   | Frequency  | %           |
|--|------------|-------------|
| You were pushed, slapped, shoved or had your hair pulled                                   | 143        | 38%         |
| You had something thrown at you that could hurt you  | 82         | 22%         |
| You were kicked, bitten, hit with a fist or something else that could hurt you             | 69         | 18%         |
| You have experienced another form of physical mistreatment or violence not described above | 38         | 10%         |
| You were choked, dragged, strangled or burnt   | 32         | 9%          |
| A weapon (such as a knife or gun) was used against you                                     | 13         | 3%          |
| <b>Total</b>   | <b>377</b> | <b>100%</b> |

10 per cent of this group said that they had been subject to a form of physical mistreatment or violence not listed in the chart provided. Broken down, these incidents can be described as being subject to threats or threatening behaviour (seven); being held down or physically restrained in another way (five); having things thrown at them which were not in and of themselves harmful (three); being grabbed or roughly handled (two); and being thrown through a window or glass (two). In a further seven cases the incident resisted categorisation because there was only one example reported in this survey.

Two per cent of physical assault cases occurred whilst the respondent was on a year abroad.

### Frequency of violence

59 per cent of the group said that they had been subject to this behaviour only once, with 30 per cent saying it had happened several times, and five per cent reporting being subjected to violent behaviour many times. Over half of those who reported being subject to the most violent behaviour – being choked, strangled or burnt – reported that the incident had happened several or many times.

“All of the first four [pushed, slapped, shoved or had hair pulled; something thrown at you; kicked, bitten, hit with a fist; choked, dragged, strangled or burnt] have happened to me whilst living with my ex-boyfriend during my 1st and 2nd year of uni, but I considered being choked the most dangerous. He also threatened me.”

### Sexual assault

Our survey found that women students are subject to an unacceptably high level of sexual harassment and violence, ranging from molestation to rape.

We asked students to respond to two ‘screen’ questions about their experiences of sexual violence and unwanted sexual contact. We used the first question to identify the extent to which women students are having sex when they do not want to, but which they wouldn’t necessarily describe as rape. The question read, ‘Whilst you have been a student at your current institution have you had sex when you were, or felt, unable to consent?’

Eight per cent of respondents replied that they had; three per cent said that they were unsure and 89 per cent said that they had not. The following quotes illustrate some difficult issues of consent which were reported by women students:

“What if you were absolutely hammered, don’t remember anything but when you ‘come round’ someone is having sex with you? What does that count as?!”

“Personally, it was difficult for me to name what I experienced (drunk partner assuming consent) sexual violence because it is something that we have talked about and worked through.”

“I haven’t been forced into sex before and I wouldn’t say I’ve been ‘unable’ to say ‘no’ as such, because if I had said no then I would have easily been able to get out of sex. But there is still a pressure to say ‘yes’ once you’ve gone a certain way... there needs to be a way for a woman not to feel guilty if she goes a certain way with a man and then decides to continue no farther.”

We then asked respondents to indicate whether they had been subject to any from a list of unwanted sexual behaviours when they did not consent, which were described in graphic language based on legal categories of sexual assault to avoid misunderstanding (see Appendix A). Respondents were asked to select the most serious incident, in the case that they had been subject to more than one of these behaviours and answer follow-up questions about that.

In answer to this question, one in four respondents (25 per cent) reported that they had experienced some kind of sexual assault whilst being a student. This compares with national data which suggests that 23 per cent of women experience sexual assault as an adult, and therefore indicates that there is a heightened risk of being affected by this whilst a student.<sup>11</sup>

Of those who answered this question, five per cent stated that they have been raped during their time as a student; two per cent have faced an attempted rape, one per cent said that they had had an unwanted sexual experience not described in the list, and less than one per cent reported being victim to assault by penetration (see Chart 2).

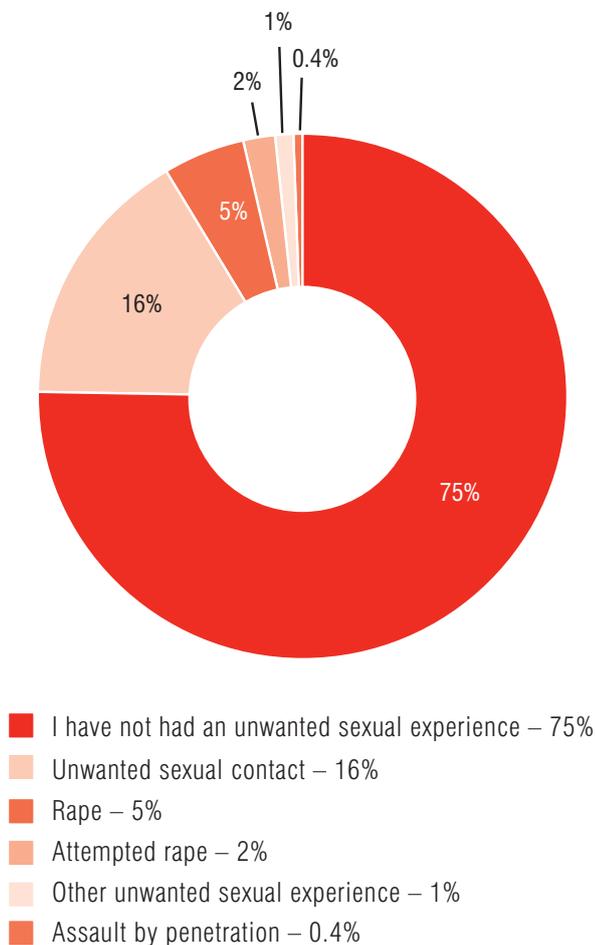
The majority of reported experiences in this section were in the category of less serious sexual assault (described in the survey as unwanted sexual contact such as touching or molesting, including through clothes, or unwanted kissing). These made up 66 per cent of reported incidents.<sup>12</sup>

### Frequency of attacks

Amongst those who reported a serious sexual assault (defined here as rape, attempted rape or assault by penetration), three quarters were assaulted on one occasion only, with a quarter of the group reporting being subject to the assault several or many times. Less serious sexual assault (unwanted kissing, touching and molesting) was less likely to happen on only one occasion, with 50 per cent reporting multiple incidents.

We were particularly interested in students' experiences of sexual violence, since much attention has been given to this in the media in recent years.<sup>13</sup> For this

Chart 2: Have any of the following happened to you whilst you have been a student at your current institution?\*



\*Percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number, hence do not add up to 100.

reason we asked extra follow-up questions in this category. Answers to these questions follow.

### Where and when the attack took place

The majority (76 per cent) of serious sexual assaults took place in somebody's home – whether that was the respondent's, a friend's, or partner or ex-partner's. These findings are consistent with previous research in this area which shows that the majority of victims are attacked in private by someone known to them.<sup>14</sup>

Just under one in five incidents took place in a public place (at work, in college or university buildings, in bars or nightclubs, or outside). Where attacks took place in this context, the attacker was much less likely to have a

pre-existing intimate relationship with the victim, and much more likely to be unknown to them (see Chapter 3 for further information on perpetrators).

Incidents were significantly more likely to have taken place in either a student's first or second year of study (87 per cent). This was true regardless of the current year of study of the respondent.

Differently to serious sexual assault, those who had experienced less serious sexual assault reported that in most cases it had happened outside of the home, with nearly four in five taking place at work in a public building such as a bar or a club, in institutional buildings or outside. Approximately one in five took place in somebody's home.

Two per cent of all sexual incidents happened while the student was on a year abroad as part of their studies.

### Alcohol and drugs

Alcohol was a factor in over half of serious sexual assaults. In 50 per cent of cases, the respondent believed that the perpetrator was under the influence of alcohol (with a further 19 per cent stating that they do not know whether this was the case or not).

Recent research has suggested that 'date-rape drugs' have become readily available, and our survey also indicates a problem in this area.<sup>15</sup> Nearly one in ten victims of serious sexual assault (nine per cent) said they were given alcohol or drugs against their will before the incident. The same number said that they were unsure whether or not this was the case:

*“In the months following this I was not sure if I was raped using Rohypnol or not because I had never been told about how it feels etc. Part of the reason I never had the confidence to go to the police regarding the assault was because I wasn't hundred percent sure I could confirm that I had had my drink spiked and not just been too drunk to be in control of myself. In retrospect I know something was put in my drink but I now feel it to be too late to do anything. I wish I would have known how to react at the time.”*

Concern about the way in which security staff deal with people who have had their drinks spiked with alcohol or drugs was expressed by a number of participants:

“At my student union... security is entirely unconcerned with the welfare of young women. There has been a spate of drink spiking lately and sadly there has been inadequate provision for the victims of these attacks. The union has a policy of rejecting inebriated members, and as you are aware, drink spiking often leaves the victim appearing drunk and unable to communicate the reality of their situation. The victims of these attacks have been forcibly removed from the union because they seem to be inebriated by choice. These women are left alone, unattended and incredibly vulnerable with absolutely no provision for their safety”

“(Drink spiking)... has happened to me and a few of my friends. If someone approaches me in a club and harasses me I can shout for help and make them go away. What exactly am I supposed to do if my drink is spiked and a bouncer throws me out for being ‘drunk’? Luckily, I had friends who got me home. Some other girls were not so lucky and were attacked when left alone outside unable to defend themselves.”

In the category of less serious sexual assault, alcohol was implicated in well over one half of reported incidences. In 60 per cent of cases, the respondents reported that the person involved was under the influence of alcohol (with a further 24 per cent stating that they do not know whether this was the case).<sup>16</sup>

### Case study

“For several years before I became a student, I was a victim of severe domestic abuse for several years (from first ex-boyfriend). The police did nothing. I eventually escaped to a refuge then moved into my own home.

I started university to rebuild my life, but by then I was in a relationship with someone who knew of my previous experiences (second ex-boyfriend). This man physically restrained me to prevent me from attending uni or studying. He would threaten to destroy my property if I left the house. He stole all my money and spent it on alcohol for himself. He would wake me up in the middle of the night and throw me across the room because I wasn't allowed to sleep. He would throw cold water on the bed so I couldn't go back to bed. He put substances that I am allergic to in my food so that only he could eat it.

He wanted sex constantly, and because I didn't, he would rape me constantly and force me to take part in disgusting sexual acts... I kept having to go to the doctor's repeatedly for treatment, which was extremely embarrassing.

I tried to end the relationship, so he began stalking me. I had to take a year out from my studies, because I became too ill to get anything done. Fortunately, the university staff were very understanding. I eventually went to the police, despite my fear of them, and have had no contact with this man for several years.

Because of my experiences... I feel like my life has been ruined. It is difficult for me to plan my future because I often feel suicidal. I am too scared to ever have another relationship again.”

*Current undergraduate student*

## 3. Profile of offenders

Women students who reported being subject to stalking, violence or sexual assault were asked to answer various questions about the perpetrator of the incident. We asked what their relationship to the perpetrator was at the time of the incident, whether or not they were a student, and what gender they were. The responses show that the typical offender in the majority of categories is male, known to the victim, and a student at the same institution.

### Key findings:

- In the majority of cases in all incident categories surveyed, the perpetrator was known to the victim.
- Victims of serious sexual assault were the most likely to know their attacker (81 per cent), and conversely women subject to less serious sexual assault were least likely to know the person involved (53 per cent).
- Perpetrators were most likely to be intimately known to the victim in the category of physical violence, and most likely to be known to the victim in a non-intimate way in the categories of stalking and unwanted sexual contact.
- Men were the majority of perpetrators of stalking (89 per cent) and physical violence (73 per cent).
- Women are most likely to offend in the case of less serious physical violence (28 per cent), and least likely to be the offender in the case of stalking (seven per cent).
- Students were the majority of perpetrators in most categories, the majority of whom were studying at the same institution as the respondent. The exception to this rule is in the category of physical violence where just under half of offenders were students (48 per cent).
- Respondents were most likely to report that the perpetrator was a student at the same institution in the case of stalking; 60 per cent were students and 49 per cent were students at the same institution.

### Relationship to respondent

We asked all respondents who reported an incident of stalking, violence or sexual assault to describe their relationship to the offender. Responses were grouped into three categories:

- those who were known to the victim including acquaintances, friends, neighbours, academic and non-teaching staff, and colleagues;
- those who were known to the victim in an intimate or domestic way such as partners, ex-partners, dates or dating partners, and also family members;<sup>17</sup>
- those who were unknown to the victim before the offence.

In both categories of physical violence, offenders were most likely to be intimately known to the victim (38 per cent for less serious physical violence and 35 per cent for serious incidents). With stalking and unwanted sexual contact, offenders were more often known to the victim but not in an intimate way (47 per cent and 45 per cent respectively).

Whilst our research demonstrates that violence against women is primarily perpetrated by people known to the victim, it is clear from the comments we received that violence perpetrated by friends or partners can be hard to define in those terms. One student explained that she had felt coerced into sex with a male friend:

**“It made me unsure if it had been my fault or not. It was only when talking about it with a friend and she said ‘that’s practically rape’ to me that I realised it actually was. It made me distrustful of male friends for a long time afterwards.”**

Table 3: Prevalence of offending amongst students

|                                | Perpetrator was a student | Perpetrator was a student at the same institution as victim (% of student subset) |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------|---|
| Serious physical violence      | 47%                       | 71%   |
| All physical violence          | 48%                       | 72%   |
| Less serious sexual assault    | 57%                       | 73%   |
| Less serious physical violence | 57%                       | 72%   |
| All sexual assaults            | 58%                       | 72%   |
| Serious sexual assault         | 60%                       | 70%   |
| Stalking                       | 60%                       | 81%   |

### Student offenders

As Table 3 illustrates, the majority of perpetrators in all categories, other than physical violence, were reported to be students. Student perpetrators were most likely to be studying at the same institution as the respondent. The category where this was most likely to be true was stalking, and it was least likely to be true for cases of serious physical violence.

**“I met the guy at a society meeting, talked to him briefly and didn’t decline his request to exchange phone numbers. I did not expect him to keep on calling after I made it clear to him I have no interest whatsoever with him. However, I still get calls from him, even though I haven’t picked up any for the last two months.”**

### Gender of offenders

Our survey found that in cases of stalking and physical violence, the perpetrator was most likely to be male. The category where this is most likely to be true is stalking, where nine in ten victims reported that this was the case. Due to an error with the online survey we did not collect this data in the category of sexual assault. However British Crime Survey data, and qualitative data provided by survey respondents about the incidents, would suggest that this pattern is likely to be consistent in the category of sexual assault.

Table 4: Gender of offenders for stalking and physical violence\*

|                                | Male | Female | Not known |
|--------------------------------|------|--------|-----------|
| Less serious physical violence | 69%  | 28%    | > 1%      |
| All physical violence          | 73%  | 18%    | 5%        |
| Serious physical violence      | 77%  | 12%    | 0%        |
| Stalking                       | 89%  | 7%     | 2%        |

\* Table does not contain figures for those who did not answer the question, hence percentages do not add up to 100%

The category where the perpetrator was most likely to be female is less serious physical violence (one in four). This kind of incident is not so likely to be domestic violence. Only a minority of these incidents (15 per cent) – when perpetrated by women – involved someone intimately known to the victim. Where violence does happen in same-sex relationships, women may experience difficulties defining it as such, as the following quote illustrates:

**“I have had to... re-evaluate my thoughts about domestic violence in homosexual relationships. Although I am quite clear in my mind about what is violence and abuse in any domestic or non-domestic situation, I will admit that I failed to recognise the mistreatment that I was subjected to in an objective manner.”**

## 4. Reporting levels and factors influencing reporting

We asked women students who reported being subject to stalking, violence and sexual assault who they had talked to about their experiences. The results suggest that students are unlikely to report these kinds of incidents either to the institution or to the police. Students were much more likely to talk to their friends or family about what had happened, although this varied depending on the category of incident.

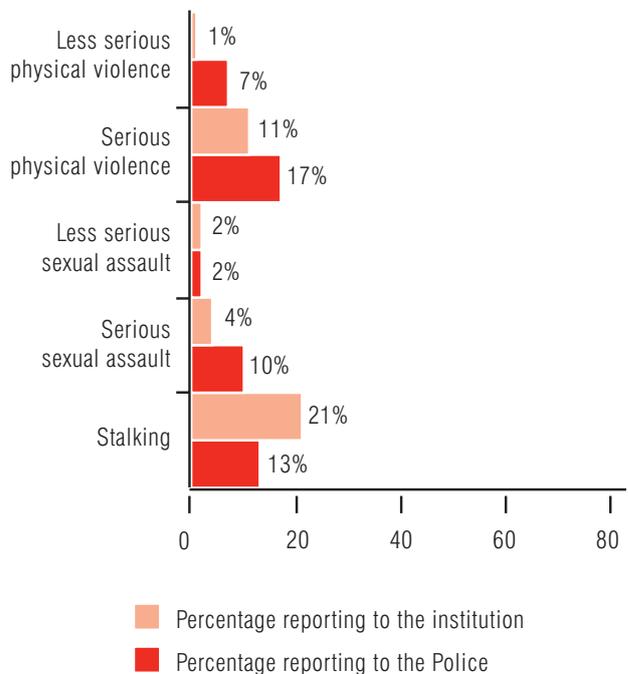
### Key findings:

- Reporting of incidents was low across all categories, whether to the police or to the institution.
- Respondents were most likely to report stalking to somebody at the institution (21 per cent) and serious physical violence to the police (17 per cent).
- They were least likely to report less serious sexual assault to either the police or somebody at their institution (two per cent).
- Respondents gave a range of reasons for not reporting but – in all categories except for serious sexual assault – the most popular reason was that they didn't think it was serious enough to report.
- The most common reason for not reporting serious sexual assault was that the victim felt ashamed or embarrassed (50 per cent of victims).
- Students were most likely to talk to a friend about what had happened to them.
- 80 per cent of stalking victims told somebody else about what had happened to them, most commonly friends or family.
- 43 per cent of victims of serious sexual assault told nobody about their experience.
- Only a minority of victims of serious physical or sexual assault had told their doctor (four and six per cent respectively).

### Reporting Rates

We asked respondents whether they had reported the incident to somebody in an official role at their institution or to the police. Reporting rates to both parties across all incident categories was low, ranging from one per cent (reporting less serious physical violence to the institution) to 21 per cent (reporting of stalking to the police).

Chart 3: Reporting levels across all categories



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The lowest reporting rates overall were for less serious sexual assault (molesting, touching or unwanted kissing), and the highest rates were in the category of stalking and serious physical violence (see Chart 3).

### Reasons for not reporting

We asked those who had not reported the incident to the police their reasons for not doing so. Three reasons scored highly across all incident categories (see Table 5). The single most common reason indicated by respondents was that they did not think it was serious enough to report. This was followed by not believing that what had happened was a crime, and thinking that they could handle it themselves.

#### Reporting serious sexual assault

Victims of serious sexual assault gave notably different reasons for not reporting to the police, compared with other respondents. Table 6 shows six reasons for not reporting which this group scored particularly highly.

It is perhaps unsurprising to find that victims of rape, attempted rape and assault by penetration are reluctant to report for fear of not being believed, concern about being blamed and feeling ashamed about what has happened to them. Research from recent years has consistently shown that public attitudes towards rape victims can be unsympathetic at best and at worst explicitly hostile, apportioning blame for rape to the victims themselves in particular circumstances.<sup>18</sup> Equally, the attention that has been given to low rape conviction rates and the police's handling of such cases in recent

years may have discouraged rape victims from initiating criminal proceedings. This attitude is typified in the following quotes:

**“I’ve seen the statistics for prosecution of this sort of thing so what would be the point? It would only cause myself more trouble.” (Victim of sexual assault)**

**“I think the problem lies mainly with the police. If women felt that they would be believed and get the perpetrator prosecuted as a result they would be much more likely to report it. This would stop men thinking they can get away with it – which they clearly can at the moment.”**

#### Reporting and Relationships

In some cases, the victims' relationships were also significant in terms of their decision to report to the police. More than one in ten of all victims of physical violence, and eight per cent of victims of serious sexual assault, said that they did not report the incident because they did not want their relationship with the offender to end. In the case of serious sexual assault, 12 per cent did not report the incident because they were concerned that their partner would find out what had happened to them. And between one in ten and just over one in five victims in all categories did not report the incident because they didn't want the person involved to get into trouble. One in five victims of physical assault feared reprisals or retaliation from the person involved should they report the incident, as did 17 per cent of victims of serious sexual assault.

**Table 5: Most common reasons for not reporting to the police**

|  | Stalking | Less serious physical violence | Serious physical violence | Less serious sexual assault | Serious sexual assault | All physical violence | All sexual assault |
|--|----------|--------------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------|
| 'I didn't think it was serious enough to report' | 64%      | 73%                            | 56%                       | 70%                         | 45%                    | 64%                   | 65%                |
| 'I didn't think that what happened was a crime'  | 49%      | 45%                            | 42%                       | 55%                         | 42%                    | 42%                   | 53%                |
| 'I thought I could handle myself'                | 54%      | 34%                            | 32%                       | 36%                         | 46%                    | 35%                   | 40%                |

Table 6: Reasons for not reporting serious sexual assault

|  | Stalking | Less serious physical violence | Serious physical violence | Less serious sexual assault | Serious sexual assault | All physical violence | All sexual assault |
|--|----------|--------------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------|
| 'I felt ashamed or embarrassed'  | 16%      | 17%                            | 19%                       | 15%                         | 50%                    | 20%                   | 26%                |
| 'I thought I would be blamed for what had happened'                      | 15%      | 22%                            | 14%                       | 14%                         | 43%                    | 18%                   | 22%                |
| 'I didn't think I would feel comfortable talking to the police about it' | 21%      | 13%                            | 12%                       | 13%                         | 33%                    | 13%                   | 18%                |
| 'I didn't want my parents/family to find out'                            | 12%      | 14%                            | 15%                       | 7%                          | 33%                    | 16%                   | 15%                |
| 'I didn't think I would be believed'                                     | 16%      | 12%                            | 12%                       | 7%                          | 33%                    | 13%                   | 15%                |
| 'I didn't want my friends to find out'                                   | 4%       | 10%                            | 9%                        | 7%                          | 25%                    | 9%                    | 13%                |

### Experiences of reporting

We asked women students who had reported their experience to the police or to their institution to provide comments about how their report had been responded to. The majority of comments received to these questions can be classified into two categories of either very positive or very negative experiences. This is perhaps unsurprising given that people are more likely to report experiences which would be typified as extreme, when given the opportunity, as opposed to more neutral ones. Nonetheless the responses provide valuable information about good and bad practice in this area.

#### Reporting to the Police

Respondents who had received good treatment from the police were keen to explain the elements that constituted a good response. Based on the responses to our survey, a good response can be characterised as the police officer:

- believing the respondent;
- taking the incident seriously;
- being sympathetic and reassuring to the victim;

- acting professionally;
- acting quickly.

“They were very nice, supportive and professional and came to the house to take a statement from me. I felt they believed everything I was saying.”

“I was relieved that they were taking my concerns seriously. In the past, they were not sympathetic when I was a victim of domestic violence, so I was surprised that they now take harassment and stalking seriously.”

“I once called the police when the person in question came to my flat and tried to break in while I was inside. The police responded promptly and were reassuring, though he had gone by the time they arrived. I was pleased with the way they responded.”

“(They) dealt with the situation exceptionally well. I felt comforted and protected. They resolved the issue immediately by removing the threatening person. Though highly traumatic, I felt like I was able to talk to them and felt no hesitation in calling them again if a similar situation arose.”

## Hidden Marks

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More generally, the police response was praised when the police force:

- provided a female officer when appropriate;
- took time to talk to the victim about their situation;
- communicated well with the victim over the course of dealing with the complaint.

“Very well, they listened and checked up on me the next day.”

Respondents gave negative reports about police behaviour when the officer was perceived to have:

- been dismissive of the victim's complaint;
- not followed up on the complaint;
- suggested the victim was at fault;
- acted insensitively or asked inappropriate questions.

“The police were okay, but didn't seem to think it was as bad as I made the harassment out to be. They got really uncomfortable when I started crying and I got the feeling that he thought I was overreacting to everything. I was trying to emphasise how stressful it was to be constantly threatened... but I wasn't sure how seriously any of this was taken and I was flat-out told that probably not much could be done if I did file an official report.”

“They were very slow to respond and acted as though I was lying.” (Victim of sexual assault)

“They made me feel humiliated and at fault. I was assaulted on a bus in central London and one of the police officers I reported the incident to asked me what I was wearing at the time which I thought was wholly inappropriate.”

“The officer who interviewed me made me feel as though it was my fault for my choice in partner.” (Victim of stalking)

“They seemed concerned to help at first but after a first visit they did not follow up with me, and also ignored my requests regarding the handling of the case.”

“I have no confidence in the police force in dealing with these kinds of incidences after being told 'boys will be boys – I should know, I'm one of them'...”

I felt completely shattered after talking to the police, who didn't even take a statement. I can't express in the survey how depressed I felt by the treatment I received...”

### Reporting to the Institution

When we asked respondents who had reported their experience to somebody in an official role at their college or university to tell us about how it had been received, their comments demonstrated that what characterises a positive or negative police response also applies in the educational setting. In other words, respondents reported positively when they were believed, taken seriously, reassured and communicated with until the issue has been resolved. In addition to that, students said that they had felt well-supported when:

- they had been helped and encouraged to report to the police;
- they were provided with advice and support;
- the incident was taken into account in terms of their course;
- the perpetrator (particularly if that person was a student at the institution) was dealt with effectively and promptly.

“They were very supportive and encouraged me to go to the police.” (Victim of stalking)

“They responded with sound advice and offered to continue advising me if the problem persisted.” (Victim of stalking)

“They were very sympathetic. The event had affected my studies in a big way and my tutor really helped me get back on track.” (Victim of sexual assault)

“The Head of Student Support was completely brilliant. She was understanding and took it seriously, giving me brilliant advice and boosting my morale and self-confidence. She made me feel supported and represented.” (Victim of physical assault)

“(They dealt with it) absolutely brilliantly – hugely supportive of my academic and personal needs. Arranged weekly meetings and suggested counselling.” (Victim of physical assault)

“They dealt with it quickly and the person was banned from entering campus. They also put a member of staff on the gates when buses from my town were arriving and leaving.” (Victim of stalking)

“The teachers and Head of Sixth Form whom I reported this incident to were very supportive. I felt reassured that they were there for me and that they didn’t blame me as a person.” (Victim of sexual assault)

“They were very reassuring that the individual (s) did not have the right to behave in such a manner and advised me on support available and how to go about making a complaint.”

Negative descriptions of institutional responses were given when the respondent felt that the person involved had:

- been unsupportive;
- given bad advice;
- not taken the complaint seriously;
- failed to take action against the perpetrator (specifically when that person was a student at the institution).

“They were not very helpful in emotional terms, and I did not really receive any proper form of support via the College. In fact they seemed rather reluctant to acknowledge the issue.”

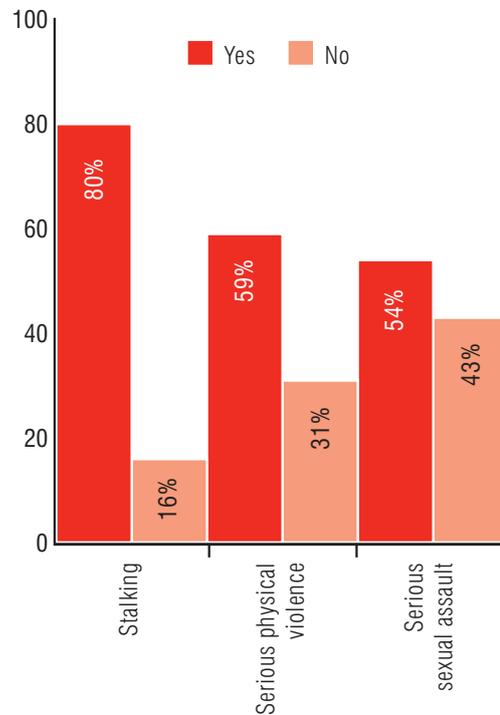
“Inadequate – they just took a note and said they would ‘keep an eye.’ I didn’t feel any safer.”

### Telling others

We asked respondents whether they had talked to anybody else, other than the police or institutional authorities, about what had happened to them (see Chart 4).

Across all categories, respondents were most likely to tell their friends what had happened, followed by family members and partners. Only a minority of victims of serious physical or sexual assault talked to a doctor about what had happened to them (four per cent and six per cent respectively).

Chart 4: Did you report or discuss the incident with anyone else?<sup>19</sup>



Respondents in our sample who had been subject to stalking were most likely to tell other people about what had happened to them. Victims of serious sexual assault were least likely to tell anyone else; 43 per cent told nobody. These figures correspond with national data on victims of sexual violence and abuse which suggests that 40 per cent of adults who are raped tell no one about it.<sup>20</sup> And whilst it is clearly preferable that victims tell somebody about what has happened to them, talking to friends can bring its own set of problems – as the following cases illustrate:

“I was in violent relationship for 3 years and felt totally alone; there is a stigma that violence happens only to people of a certain demographic... When I spoke to my friends I always felt slightly judged, the classic ‘you are clever, why didn’t you leave’. Only now have I come to see that this was not my fault for being weak. I will never fully recover from this.”

“I had a hard time going out again after that and I felt very betrayed by the friends whom I confided in that did not believe me. Even my partner at the time didn't think I was drugged, just that I drank too much! That took a huge toll on my self esteem and I even began doubting myself, despite having a doctor confirm that I was drugged! Everyone, except my aunt who I told, just seemed to blame me for the incident and while I've suffered abuse before I've never once been told it's my fault.”

One respondent explained why she had not told family members that she had been hit by her boyfriend:

“You never think it will happen to you and I always thought if it did I would be defiant and hit him back. When it did happen to me, I didn't know how to react. I still haven't told my family because I don't want them to be disappointed in me.”

## 5. The impact of stalking, violence and sexual assault on women students

Violence against women can have a devastating impact on victims. Our survey results show that women students who have been victims of stalking, violence and sexual assault are remarkably resilient, and find ways to ensure that the experience does not come to define them. Others have found it harder to recover from what could be horrific ordeals. Others still, particularly in relation to less serious incidents, felt they had not been affected at all.

### Key findings:

- Respondents reported a range of different consequences of violence, stalking and sexual assault to their health, learning, confidence, and relationships, with the most common consequence being deterioration of mental health.
- Experiences of stalking, violence and sexual assault can negatively affect a student's education; one in four victims of serious sexual assault stated that their studies had been affected by the incident, and one in seven victims of serious physical assault reported that their attendance had suffered.
- Approximately one quarter of stalking victims (27 per cent) reported that their mental health, studies and relationships had been affected. Furthermore, respondents were more likely to report concerns if the behaviour had persisted more than three months.
- Victims of serious sexual assault reported the most significant impact in nearly every area. Under two thirds (63 per cent) said that their relationships had been affected, half (49 per cent) reported issues with their mental health, and more than one in ten (12 per cent) said there had been consequences to their physical health. 13 per cent had considered leaving their course.
- Women students also commonly reported a loss of confidence, and feeling increased fear as a consequence of being a victim of violence.

### The impact on mental and physical health

Victims most commonly reported that the incident had had an impact on their mental health, with approximately half of victims of serious sexual assault, and just over one quarter of victims of serious physical violence (28 per cent) and stalking (27 per cent) reporting concerns in this area. Students elaborated on these concerns in open text responses where they reported experiencing suicidal feelings, a loss of confidence, panic attacks, depression, and a loss of concentration. Others reported feelings of stress, anxiety, nervousness, panic attacks and frequent crying.

The majority of victims reported that their physical health had not been affected, although a minority in all categories did report consequences. In the qualitative comments provided, students reported incidences of increased drinking, eating and self-harming, unwanted pregnancy and STI infection.

### The impact on education

Approximately one in four victims of stalking and serious sexual assault reported problems with their studies as a result of the incident. The equivalent figure was one in five for victims of serious physical violence.

When we asked women students to tell us about how their experiences had affected their education, the most common response was that their attendance had suffered. Nearly one in five victims of serious sexual assault was affected by this. Sometimes this was because students felt unable to attend classes because of mental health or confidence issues, and

sometimes it was because they were trying to avoid the perpetrator:

**“I avoided the classes I shared with the male ‘friend’ who tried to kiss me/touch me.”**

Similar numbers reported that there had been a knock-on effect on their grades as a result of the incident. Some elaborated on the effect on their academic participation, describing a loss of interest in the course, and a loss of motivation and commitment.

Between nine and thirteen per cent of victims of stalking, or serious physical or sexual violence, had considered leaving their course as a result of what had happened to them. There is evidence that some respondents were forced to leave their studies temporarily as a result of the incident:

**“I had to take a year off from my studies to recover. The member of academic staff was very sympathetic, and was aware of the fact that one cannot get any studies done when being stalked.”**

### The impact on confidence

In the qualitative comments provided by participants, victims most commonly reported feeling scared as a consequence of being a victim of violence. Respondents reported feeling worried and anxious about the incident being repeated, about being alone at home and in public, and about the possibility of encountering the perpetrator. As a result of feeling scared some respondents changed their behaviour including where and where they went and with whom.

**“I decided to move house. This person was a friend of one of my housemates at the time... since I've moved house, I've never felt uncomfortable or threatened. I've been a lot more careful about the people with whom I come into contact.” (Victim of stalking)**

**“It is playing a massive part in my life. I won't go out alone after dark anymore, which, as a part-time student, is seriously affecting my studies and personal and social choices. It is also affecting me financially as I will take any possible precautions so as not to be alone in my local area in the dark. I'm**

**taking anti-anxiety medication for the first time because of it and I feel like it's slowly destroying me.” (Victim of assault by penetration)**

**“Now when I go out I don't like to expose too much skin so as not to attract unwanted attention from men.”**

### The impact on relationships

29 per cent of victims of serious physical assault, approximately one quarter (24 per cent) of stalking victims, and under two thirds of respondents who have experienced a serious sexual assault said their relationships had suffered as a result of the attack. Respondents identified a difficulty with trusting new people, particularly men, and in forming new relationships:

**“It just makes me more wary of people, and less likely to be friendly towards strangers/new acquaintances. I am slightly more nervous of men... on public transport.”**

**“I find it difficult to go on dates with men without being wary of their intentions.”**

In the case of sexual assault current intimate relationships could be affected (where the partner was not the perpetrator).

**“It caused trouble between my current boyfriend and I. Since he is living a distance away from me it can be difficult at times. This incident... worried him e.g. trust issues.” (Victim of sexual assault)**

Where violence happened within a relationship, the confidence of the victim was often badly shattered:

**“Our relationship is probably on it's way out, as ever since this happened his treatment of me has become more and more disrespectful... as a result of this even being with him makes me feel weak and has been detrimental to my personal confidence.”**

### Case study

“For the 2/3 months immediately following the incident I would not leave the house – partly because of my physical appearance (I was bruised all over, my hair had been pulled out at the roots and I had particularly prominent marks around my neck and eyes), partly because I just wanted to curl up and die.

I was terrified I would see him again – any time I saw a guy that looked remotely like him my heart would start racing and I would feel extremely frightened – my first instinct was to run away but I always forced myself to check, and I have never yet seen him since the incident.

It has affected my relationships with friends and boyfriends since – I have huge difficulty in trusting people, and when I do it seems to be misplaced every time.

Ironically, it was a phone call from the same guy, telling me that I was now as fucked up as he was and my life would be a mess that helped me the most to overcome the ordeal – there was no way I was letting him ruin my life. Without that phone call I think I would still be victimising myself now...”

*Undergraduate student*

## 6. Recommendations

### Summary of Recommendations

Institutions and students' unions can play a key role in ending violence against women students by working together to:

- Develop a cross-institutional policy to tackle violence against women students.
- Adopt a 'zero-tolerance' approach to harassment and violence.
- Raise awareness of violence against women among staff and students.
- Use educational initiatives to challenge negative attitudes and stereotypes.
- Equip staff and students to identify and challenge unacceptable behaviour.
- Create a campus environment in which students feel safe.
- Ensure there are strong links between the institution, students' union, Police, NHS, and specialist voluntary services.
- Design and signpost women students to support services that respond to their needs.
- Promote support services widely and consistently to all students.
- Tell students what they can report.
- Provide accessible ways for women students to report their experiences.
- Believe women who say they have been victims of harassment or violence.
- Take decisive and appropriate action against perpetrators.

In this section we outline our key recommendations to:

- prevent violence against women in education;
- improve the support that victims receive; and,
- enhance the protection that students receive under the criminal justice system.

Our ideas in this section are drawn from responses provided by survey respondents, who provided us with a clear direction and imaginative ideas about how to address the issues outlined in this report.

These recommendations are only the start of our work in this area. Over the coming months and years we intend to work with partner organisations – including voluntary sector services, perpetrator organisations, government, institutions and students' unions – to develop detailed policy solutions to address violence against women in education. The aim of these will be to ensure that all women students are able to confidently enjoy, and get the most out of, their experience of learning – unencumbered by harassment or violence.

We believe that above all, two key recommendations are necessary to achieve this vision. These are:

- that institutions and students' unions should adopt a 'zero-tolerance' approach to non-verbal and verbal sexual harassment; this would send out a strong signal that such behaviour is unacceptable both within and outside of the learning environment; and,
- that institutions, in partnership with students' unions, should develop a comprehensive cross-institutional policy to tackle violence against women students; this policy should enable students and staff to recognise and effectively deal with violence and harassment against women students, outline how support will be provided to victims, contain steps explaining how reporting will be encouraged, and set out how the institution will respond to violence perpetrated by its students.

## Preventing further harassment and violence

“Tell us about it. Make us aware of what counts as violence and harassment, when it becomes serious enough to report to the police and how we should react, who we should contact and how to make it stop.”

Women students who responded to our survey outlined a number of ways in which violence against women students could be prevented. These can be summarised as raising awareness of violence, changing attitudes, challenging inappropriate behaviour and helping students feel safe.

- **Raise awareness of violence against women among staff and students**

Approximately two in three respondents said that they were unaware if their institution ran educational campaigns aimed at raising awareness about violence against women. In order to create a culture in which violence and harassment against women is unacceptable, **awareness campaigns need to be commonplace and widely promoted**. All students and staff need to be clear about what violence against women means: what it constitutes, the prevalence of violence, how it affects women, the accountability of the perpetrator, and the relationship between violence and gender inequality. **Institutional-wide campaigns to raise awareness will help students to respond effectively if a friend tells them about an experience of violence**, as our research proves the majority of victims do. They will also help women students to disclose experiences by helping them to realise that what they have experienced is relatively common and not something to be ashamed of.

- **Use educational initiatives to challenge negative attitudes and stereotypes**

Research has shown that perpetrators don't always understand what constitutes violence or assault. Education programmes can help students to understand the implications of their actions, the negative impact of particular kinds of behaviour on women, and can warn them of the disciplinary and legal implications of such actions. Such **programmes should also encourage students to consider how alcohol can affect their judgement and behaviour**.

Institutions should work with students' unions to **encourage students to talk about violence**, using language which reflects students' experiences and avoids stereotypes which can disempower women and alienate men. Students' unions should consider how they can promote a positive culture in which the objectification of women students – through advertising, promotion of club nights and in product sales – becomes unacceptable.

- **Equip staff and students to identify and challenge unacceptable behaviour**

Our research showed that women students are very likely to encounter low-level, 'everyday' forms of harassment in the learning environment, students' unions and in the broader institutional context. This behaviour includes unwanted or intrusive non-verbal or verbal behaviour, as well as physical sexual harassment – which is a common experience for many women simply trying to enjoy a night out. **Students and staff should feel able to challenge unacceptable behaviour** to ensure that women are able to participate confidently in all elements of the student experience. In this context, NUS recommends that institutions and students' unions **adopt a 'zero-tolerance' approach to harassment**, backed up by a strong institutional policy for tackling violence against women which is widely promoted and easily understood.

- **Create a campus environment in which students feel safe**

Our results have shown, in common with previous research, that the majority of violence against women happens in private and is perpetrated by someone known to the victim. Nonetheless, our research indicates that some women do not feel safe in and around their institution, halls of residences and students' unions, particularly in the evening. Whilst it is important that **women students should not feel the need to modify their behaviour in order to avoid violence or harassment**, and it is essential that **the accountability for such behaviour should always remain with the perpetrator**, in order to help women feel safer and more confident, we recommend that:

- institutions should provide information to new students about the local area which would allow them to make informed judgements about where they go and when;
- transport services should be provided for students who need to leave the institution or students' union late at night;
- security staff in students' unions should receive training to identify and deal with harassment and violence against women, and to identify and help people who have been victims of drink-spiking;
- estates departments should consult with students in order to carry out a 'safety audit' of their campus, including halls of residences.

### Providing Services for Women Students

**"I think the main thing is knowing where to go and who to talk to."**

Respondents had lots of ideas about how support services could be designed to enhance reporting, and increase the likelihood of women accessing them. The survey responses made it clear that the institutional role is considered to be key in linking up provision from different services. Running through the responses was an expression of the need for such services to be widely and consistently promoted.

- **Ensure there are strong links between the institution, students' union, Police, NHS, and specialist voluntary services**

Institutions and students' unions are best placed to provide the links between services, including but not limited to: specialist domestic and sexual violence voluntary sector services, local police forces, health provision including sexual health clinics, and counselling services. These links will be best forged by the development of an overarching institutional policy to tackle violence and harassment against women students.

- **Design and signpost women students to support services that respond to their needs**

Women students were clear about the kind of services they needed should they become victims of violence. Key characteristics of the services include being 24-

hour, confidential, anonymous, easily accessible and high-quality. Students wanted to access **peer-led self-help groups** as well as **private, free counselling** at the institution. Support services should be staffed by well-trained (predominantly female) staff who are able to signpost women to counselling services, reporting mechanisms and health services. On campus, there should be a **contact for victims of violence** who can liaise with academic staff and the police.

- **Promote support services widely and consistently to all students**

Only four in ten respondents said that their institution or students' union provided information about help and support for victims of violence. It is vital that **services should be widely and consistently promoted**, and that **women should be able to access this information without having to ask**; in other words it should be visible, obvious and possible to access confidentially. Suggested ways of providing information include ensuring there is clear and up-to-date content on the institution's website, information given to freshers, and relevant phone numbers and website addresses displayed in student accommodation, entertainment venues, toilets, student handbooks, notice boards, chaplaincies, advice centres, lecture theatres, global e-mails, and on library cards. Women students are most likely to talk to their friends about violence, so **communications of this kind should be targeted at peer groups**, as well as women themselves.

### Reporting and Justice

**"Tell us what we can report without being laughed at, and we'll do it."**

Our survey has categorically shown that reporting of stalking, violence and sexual assault is worryingly low amongst women students. Respondents told us what they thought could be done to increase the numbers of women students reporting, and to enhance the experience of those who do so.

- **Tell students what they can report**

The survey results show that many women students do not know what constitutes behaviour serious enough to

report either to the institution or the police. In order to address this, institutions and students' unions need to **ensure that students are informed about the law** in this area. Academic and relevant support staff should also be provided with this information, particularly if they have a personal tutor role.

- **Provide accessible ways for women students to report their experiences**

Women wanted to be able to report their experiences more easily, and suggested that in some cases doing so anonymously, and without having to go to a police station, would encourage them to report. Institutions and students' unions should work with the police to **develop ways for women to report crimes to somebody at the institution** in lieu of going to a police station. They could also consider developing online, **anonymous reporting systems** which would allow victims to report without having to proceed with criminal charges, as some women will choose not to put themselves through formal proceedings, but may want what has happened to them to be 'counted'. This would also help institutions and the police to **record levels and patterns of harassment and violence amongst women students** in the area.

- **Believe women who say they have been victims of harassment or violence**

Our results show that too many victims of serious sexual assault do not report what has happened to them because of concerns they will not be believed, shame and embarrassment, and because they are worried that they will be blamed for what has happened. In order to encourage women to come forward, the police, institutions and students' unions should work together to **ensure that women receive a positive response to a report**, and to **let women know that if they have been assaulted, it is not their fault and they will be believed**. Advertising which focuses on women's behaviour, or which could be perceived to place blame on women, should be avoided.

- **Take decisive and appropriate action against perpetrators**

At the institutional level, it is clear that **fast, decisive action against a student perpetrator** encourages

women to report. An institutional policy to tackle violence and harassment against women students would outline procedures for dealing with suspected or confirmed perpetrators in the student body to ensure the safety and confidence of the victim. The policy would also **outline how perpetrators will be supported** to address their behaviour.

# Appendix A: The Survey

## Survey design

This survey sought to explore women students' experiences of harassment, stalking, educational/financial support, and sexual assault and rape.

Careful wording of the survey questions was crucial due to the sensitive nature of the subject as well as potential confusion over definitions of certain terms (such as 'rape'). To mitigate this problem, we used three different strategies. The first was to use language to describe various types of victimisation which was drawn from their legal definitions. The second was to use graphic language which described behaviour so as to avoid misunderstanding. The third was to ask more than one question about the same kinds of incidents, but using different language.

In addition, many questions were modelled on existing questions which have worked well in other surveys of violence against women. In particular, we looked at the British Crime Survey, studies from the United States where this subject has been researched in more depth in relation to students, as well as guidance provided by the World Health Organisation about researching violence against women.<sup>21</sup>

The questions were piloted with a group of current and recent women students who completed the survey and gave detailed feedback. Changes were made to the design and content of questions based on this feedback.

We worked with colleagues in specialist domestic violence and sexual assault support organisations to try to mitigate against any negative consequences for participants responding to the survey. Telephone helpline numbers and website addresses were placed at different points throughout the survey, where particular questions or sections might be upsetting or triggering to survivors of violence. We also provided open text boxes at regular intervals throughout the

questionnaire so that respondents could tell us about their experiences in their own words if they wanted to.

At the end of the questionnaire we provided participants with an open text box and asked them to use it to provide us with any comments or concerns that they were not able to express in answering the survey. A small number of participants used this opportunity to make comments about the survey design, which provides valuable learning for future work in this area.

Some participants also used this opportunity to convey positive comments about participating in the survey:

**"I would just like to thank you for creating the survey. In a strange way I have actually liked filling it out because I have managed to talk about my experiences fairly openly and not felt judged. I needed to get some of it off my chest again and it helped."**

## Questions

The following is a list of headline questions we asked in each section.

### Harassment on campus

Whilst you have been a student at your current institution, have you experienced any of the following in a learning environment such as a classroom, lecture theatre or library, in your students' union or at a students' union event, or in and around other areas of your university or college?

1. Someone making sexual comments that made you feel uncomfortable
2. Someone wolf whistling, catcalling or making sexual noises at you
3. Someone asking you questions about your sex or romantic life when it was clearly none of their business

4. Someone asking you questions about your sexuality when it was clearly none of their business
5. Someone exposing their sexual organs to you when you did not agree
6. Someone groping, pinching or smacking your bottom when you did not agree to them doing so
7. Someone groping, pinching or touching your breasts when you did not agree to them doing so
8. Someone lifting up your skirt in public without them agreeing

In the analysis we have grouped the first four categories under the heading 'verbal harassment', and the second four under 'physical/non-verbal harassment'.

### Stalking

Whilst you have been a student at your current place of study, has anyone repeatedly followed you, watched you, phoned you, texted, written, e-mailed, communicated with you through social networking sites, or communicated with you in other ways that seemed obsessive or made you afraid or concerned for your safety?

### Financial control

Has anyone ever threatened to withhold financial support that you need to be a student using threats or violence (this could include your course fees, transport costs, money for books or living costs)?

### Control over course or institution choice

Has anyone ever attempted to influence your choice of institution or course using threats or violence?

### Physical violence

Whilst you have been a student at your current institution, has anyone ever hit you or physically mistreated you in any way?

Have any of the following ever happened to you whilst you have been a student at your current institution:

If more than one of these things has happened to you, please select the incident you consider to be most serious and answer the following questions about that incident. You will have the opportunity to report further incidents.

1. You were pushed, slapped, shoved or had your hair pulled
2. You had something thrown at you that could hurt you
3. You were kicked, bitten, hit with a fist or something else that could hurt you
4. You were choked, dragged, strangled or burnt
5. A weapon (such as a knife or gun) was used against you
6. I have experienced another form of physical mistreatment or violence not described above (please describe)
7. I have not experienced any kind of physical mistreatment or violence whilst I have been a student

In the analysis we have mostly separated less serious physical violence (the first option in the list above) from serious physical violence (answers 2, 3, 4 and 5). This is clearly indicated in the text.

### Sexual assault

Whilst you have been a student at your current institution have you had sex when you were, or felt, unable to consent?

Whilst you have been a student at your current institution, have you experienced any of the following when you did not consent?

Please note: consent is legally defined as agreeing by choice and having the freedom and capacity to make that choice. If you have experienced more than one of the following, please select the incident you consider to be most serious and answer the following questions about that. You will have an opportunity to report a further incident in this section.

1. Sexual contact (this could include kissing, touching or molesting you including through clothes)

## Hidden Marks

2. Attempted sexual intercourse (when someone has tried to have oral, anal or vaginal sex with you but has not been successful)
3. Assault by penetration (this means someone putting an object, such as a bottle, in your anus or vagina)
4. Sexual intercourse (this means someone putting a penis in your mouth, vagina or anus)
5. Other unwanted sexual experience not described above (please describe)
6. I have not had any kind of unwanted sexual experience whilst I have been a student

In parts of the analysis we have separated less serious sexual assault (option one) from serious sexual assault (options 2, 3, 4).

## Response rates

The apparent anomalies between prevalence rates of harassment, stalking, violence and sexual assault are due to the exclusion of missing responses from the analysis (only valid responses are included) which affects base sizes and thus prevalence rates.

The following numbers give the total number of answers analysed for questions about perceptions of

|   |      |
|---|------|
| Perceptions of safety (university or college – day)   | 2035 |
| Perceptions of safety (university or college – night) | 843  |
| Perceptions of safety (halls of residence)            | 572* |
| Perceptions of safety (students' union)               | 1369 |

\* Only the answers of students who stated that they were currently living in halls of residences or student accommodation were analysed, hence the low number.

safety. The numbers exclude those who indicated that they did not use the facilities listed at any time and so were unable to give an opinion.

|                                |      |
|--------------------------------|------|
| Physical and verbal harassment | 1877 |
| Stalking                       | 1890 |
| Physical violence              | 1803 |
| Sexual assault                 | 1792 |

The following table provides information about the total number of respondents who answered headline questions about experiences of violence.

|                                |     |
|--------------------------------|-----|
| All physical violence          | 377 |
| All sexual violence            | 440 |
| Stalking                       | 224 |
| Less serious physical violence | 143 |
| Serious physical violence      | 196 |
| Less serious sexual assault    | 289 |
| Serious sexual assault         | 129 |

The following table provides the number of respondents who had been victims of particular crimes in the main subsets used for analysis throughout the report.

# Appendix B: Survey Participant Profile

## Survey participant profile

Respondents were 'screened' into the survey by an initial question which asked whether the student was a woman currently studying in further or higher education; only those who answered positively were asked to continue with the survey. It was made clear at this point that the survey was open to trans women.

The majority of respondents – 88 per cent (1812) – were UK students, whilst 12 per cent (246) were international. 85 per cent (1751) are currently studying in England, 10 per cent in Wales, five per cent in Scotland, and 0.2 per cent in Northern Ireland. 71 per cent (1462) of respondents described themselves as 'White British'. 11 per cent of the sample selected 'Any Other White Background' and 41 students selected 'White Irish'. Five per cent described their ethnic origin as Asian,<sup>22</sup> two per cent said they were from a Black background, two per cent Chinese, and two per cent were from mixed backgrounds.<sup>23</sup>

Just over one third of survey participants described themselves as having no religion (36 per cent; 742), with around one quarter identifying as Christian, and nearly one in five describing themselves as Atheist. Four per cent are Muslim, and 66 respondents identified themselves as either Hindu, Sikh, Jewish, Jain, Bahai or Buddhist. Four per cent opted not to select a religion, and six per cent entered a religion not listed in the survey responses.

40 per cent of respondents stated that they lived in a shared house or flat with friends (not including halls of residences), while just over one quarter (28 per cent) were in student accommodation provided either by their institution or by a private organisation. 14 per cent lived at home with their parents or another family member; 10 per cent lived in a house or flat with their partner and/or children; five per cent lived on their own and two per cent live only with their children as a single

parent. Six per cent of the sample have caring responsibilities for children under the age of 18.

11 per cent stated that they have a long-term health condition or impairment that affects their day-to-day life, whilst seven per cent described themselves as disabled.

The majority of the survey sample described themselves as heterosexual (80 per cent), with five per cent of respondents describing themselves as lesbian, and 11 per cent bisexual. Two per cent of the sample selected 'prefer not to say', and two per cent described their sexual orientation as something not listed in the survey. Two per cent of respondents stated that they have a trans background, and of those 13 described themselves as trans women and five as women with a transsexual history. A further 18 specified a trans identity not listed in the survey.

93 per cent of respondents (1905) were studying in Higher Education Institutions. Four per cent (79) were studying in Sixth Form Colleges; three per cent in Further Education Colleges; and 15 respondents were based at Adult and Community Learning Providers, Specialist Colleges or Work-Based Learning Providers.

94 per cent of respondents were studying full-time, and six per cent part-time. The majority (69 per cent; 1423) were working towards Level 4 qualifications, with 22 per cent studying at postgraduate level, and 7 per cent at Level 3. Two per cent were studying for Level 1 or 2 qualifications.

The vast majority of our respondents were under the age of 25 (86 per cent), with the majority of the remainder being aged between 26 and 50 (14 per cent), and only eight respondents over the age of 50. Respondents were mainly in their first, second or third year of study (respectively 42 per cent; 29 per cent; 22 per cent) with seven per cent reporting that they are currently in year four or above.

# References and Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> British Crime Surveys and supplementary reports can be accessed from: [www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/bcs1.html](http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/bcs1.html)
- <sup>2</sup> Amnesty International and NUS Wales (2008); *Violence against Women: the Perspective of Students in Wales* [online]; London Student Survey (2010) [online]. Available from: [www.london-student.net/2009/02/16/asking-for-it/](http://www.london-student.net/2009/02/16/asking-for-it/)
- <sup>3</sup> (2010) *Together We Can End Violence against Women and Girls: A Strategy* [online]. Available at: <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/documents/vawg-strategy-2009/index.html>
- <sup>4</sup> Percentages exclude those who indicated that they do not ever use the facilities (i.e. distance learners).
- <sup>5</sup> 15% of the sample selected 'neither agree nor disagree' when asked to respond to the statement 'I feel safe in my students' union at night'.
- <sup>6</sup> The remainder selected 'neither agree nor disagree' when asked to respond to the statement 'I feel safe in my halls of residence at night'.
- <sup>7</sup> British Crime Survey 2008/09.
- <sup>8</sup> Exact definitions of all of these categories can be found in Appendix A.
- <sup>9</sup> For this question we define campus as a learning environment, students' union or students' union event, and in an around institutional buildings.
- <sup>10</sup> It should be noted that two respondents used the comments section to clarify that the wolf whistling they had experienced did not make them feel uncomfortable and was not aggressive.
- <sup>11</sup> Interdepartmental Ministerial Group on Sexual Offending (2007) *Sexual Violence and Abuse Action Plan: 3* [online]. Available at: [www.crimereduction.homeoffice.gov.uk/violentcrime/finalsvaap.pdf](http://www.crimereduction.homeoffice.gov.uk/violentcrime/finalsvaap.pdf)
- <sup>12</sup> According to the most recent British Crime Survey figures, approximately three per cent of women aged 16 to 59 had experienced a sexual assault (including attempts) in the previous 12 months. The majority of these are accounted for by less serious sexual assaults. Less than one per cent of women reported having experienced a serious sexual assault.
- <sup>13</sup> For a recent example see the London Student Survey (2010) [online]. Available from: [www.london-student.net/2009/02/16/asking-for-it/](http://www.london-student.net/2009/02/16/asking-for-it/)
- <sup>14</sup> Payne, S. (2009) *Rape: the Victim Experience Review: 10* [online]. Available at: <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/documents/vawg-rape-review/rape-victim-experience2835.pdf>
- <sup>15</sup> Tighe, A. (24 February 2010) 'Date-rape drugs' are on the rise, UN warns [online]. Available from: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/8533736.stm>
- <sup>16</sup> These figures correspond with those in the British Crime Survey 2008/09, where nearly half of all victims of violent crime believed the perpetrator to be under the influence of alcohol, with this figure rising to 62 per cent in the case of stranger violence.
- <sup>17</sup> This categorisation is consistent with the government's definition of domestic violence. This can be found in full at: <http://www.thewnc.org.uk/work-of-the-wnc/violence-against-women/domestic-violence.html>
- <sup>18</sup> The Havens (2010); Amnesty and NUS Wales (2008); London Student Survey (2010).
- <sup>19</sup> Percentages do not add up to 100 because the pie charts exclude missing answers and those who selected 'don't remember'.
- <sup>20</sup> Interdepartmental Ministerial Group on Sexual Offending (2007): 3
- <sup>21</sup> See for example Fisher et al. for the US Department of Justice (2000), *The Sexual Victimization of College Women*; Koss et al (1982), *Sexual Experiences Survey: a research instrument investigating sexual aggression and victimization*, *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*. Vol 50 (3), Jun 1982, 455–457; Wild et al. (1991) *Acquaintance Rape and the College Social Scene*; World Health Organisation and PATH (2005): *Researching violence against women: a practical guide for researchers and activists*.
- <sup>22</sup> Includes: Asian or Asian British: Bangladeshi, Indian, Pakistani or any other Asian background.
- <sup>23</sup> Mixed: White and Asian; White and Black African; White and Black Caribbean.



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