

Our Streets Now Student Safety Report

An analysis of the 2021 The Tab x Our Streets Now
Student Safety Survey: Public Sexual Harassment
and Sexual Violence within Higher Education



February 2022

Our Streets Now: Higher Education

#StudentsNotObjects

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Terminology

This report will be using the term students who have experienced/experience sexual violence (SESV). Many publications refer to 'victims', however this report will not, as the term can be seen to diminish the power and agency of students facing sexual violence. Similarly, the term 'survivor' is not used as, whilst the term has many positive connotations, it is often used when people experience more severe forms of sexual assault, which may not reflect the position of students facing public sexual harassment (PSH). This is not to minimise the experiences of those facing PSH, as this form of sexual violence has many long-lasting impacts. Similarly, this report will use the terms 'sexual violence' and 'gender-based violence' (GBV) interchangeably as research has shown that perpetration of sexual violence in both higher education and the wider community is overwhelmingly carried out by men (Murphy & Van Brunt, 2017), making this a gendered issue.

PSH comprises unwelcomed and unwanted attention, sexual advances and intimidating behaviour that occurs in public spaces, both in person and online. Higher education (HE) spaces are classed as public spaces by OSN, thus rendering HE buildings and campuses potential sites of PSH (OSN, 2022). PSH is usually directed towards women and frequently oppressed groups within society, however it can be experienced by all (OSN, 2022). It must be highlighted that not all experiences of PSH are the same. Those facing interlocking forces of oppression experience PSH differently as it can simultaneously target other parts of their identity such as race, disability and sexuality.

According to the Crown Prosecution Service's Sexual Offences Act 2003, sexual assault is defined as the non-consensual touching of another person. This can include a range of



behaviours, such as touching over clothes, under/without clothes, or kissing. This does not include rape, which refers specifically to the penile penetration of a vagina, anus or mouth. We specified that this survey did not address instances of rape. Furthermore, causing sexual activity without consent refers to making someone carry out a sexual act. This can include carrying out sexual acts with their own person, a third party who may be willing or not, or with the offender, and can be done through words alone. For the purpose of this survey, we referred to *sexual assault* and *causing sexual activity without consent* under the umbrella term “sexual assault”.

Our Streets Now uses the term higher education institution (HEI) rather than university to encompass different forms of higher education such as conservatoires.

About Our Streets Now and The Tab

Our Streets Now is a grassroots, youth-led campaign fighting to end public sexual harassment. The campaign began in 2019 with a petition (Tutton & Tutton, 2019) to make PSH a specific criminal offence. The petition gained over 100,000 supporters in the first 24 hours, which stands at over 450,000 at the time of writing. As well as fighting for legislative change, the campaign aims to tackle PSH by increasing awareness and education on the issue.

Our Streets Now: Higher Education (OSNHE) is the branch of the campaign focussed on eradicating PSH from HEIs and their cities across the UK. OSNHE began in the summer of 2020 with the OSN 2020 survey: ‘They Saw My Fear and Laughed’ (Warren et al., 2020). This survey asked 100 students and graduates about their experiences of PSH, how it impacted them and what they want to change. It was mostly answered by Our Streets Now supporters, and therefore represents a community who has knowledge or lived experience of PSH. It found



that only 12% of respondents had never experienced PSH as a student (Warren et al., 2020). It was evident that the response of HEIs is lacking, as only 37% of respondents could name a policy to tackle PSH at their institution, and 43% of those who knew of a scheme, criticised it in their answer (Warren et al., 2020). The results of the survey led to the creation of the OSN ambassador scheme, where students at HEIs campaign locally for change at their institution and in their city. The survey and the scheme were released on 22 February 2021.

The Tab is one of the biggest youth media sites in Britain covering student culture. It was founded by students in Cambridge in 2009 and has since expanded with branches at over 35 universities. It has previously written articles and run polls on sexual assault, spiking and harassment (The Tab, 2022; see appendix for a list of relevant The Tab articles).



Abstract

Public sexual harassment, one of the most common forms of gendered violence, is faced at an extraordinary level by students, and yet is consistently overlooked by higher education institutions, despite these being specific sites of gender-based violence. This study aimed to build on previous research into public sexual harassment and sexual violence to gain a more detailed picture of the prevalence and impacts of public sexual harassment on and off campus. As part of a joint study with The Tab, this survey also aimed to gather broader data regarding student experiences and perceptions of sexual violence within their institutions. Our Streets Now: Higher Education finally aimed to create a set of general, yet practical recommendations for higher education institutions to address the issue of public sexual harassment. Using volunteer sampling and following the distribution of an online questionnaire, this study gathered quantitative data from over 1,300 students across 71 different higher education institutions. Overwhelmingly, students of marginalised genders reported extremely high rates of sexual violence, stating a lack of trust in their institutions and a strong impact on both their social and academic life. Furthermore, exceptionally few students were aware of access to education and support systems relating to consent and sexual violence. Therefore, recommendations were created to improve education, support and reporting policies which are grounded in research and proactive.



Introduction

Public sexual harassment (PSH) is one of the most common forms of gendered violence. According to the 2021 United Nations (UN) Women UK YouGov survey, 71% of women had experienced sexual harassment in a public space (APPG for UN Women, 2021). This number rose to 86% amongst 18-24 year olds, common ages for HE students, with only 3% stating they had never experienced one of the listed forms of harassment. Although PSH is extremely prevalent, it is often overlooked and trivialised. Unlike other countries such as France, Portugal and Belgium, there is no specific criminal offence for PSH in the UK, with the current Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, blocking the introduction of this law in late 2021 (Plan International UK, 2020; Townsend, 2021). Despite public attention being drawn to this issue, particularly after the murder of Sarah Everard in March 2021 (Atkinson, 2021), the prevalence of PSH, coupled with the lack of action against it, demonstrates that it is a normalised part of society.

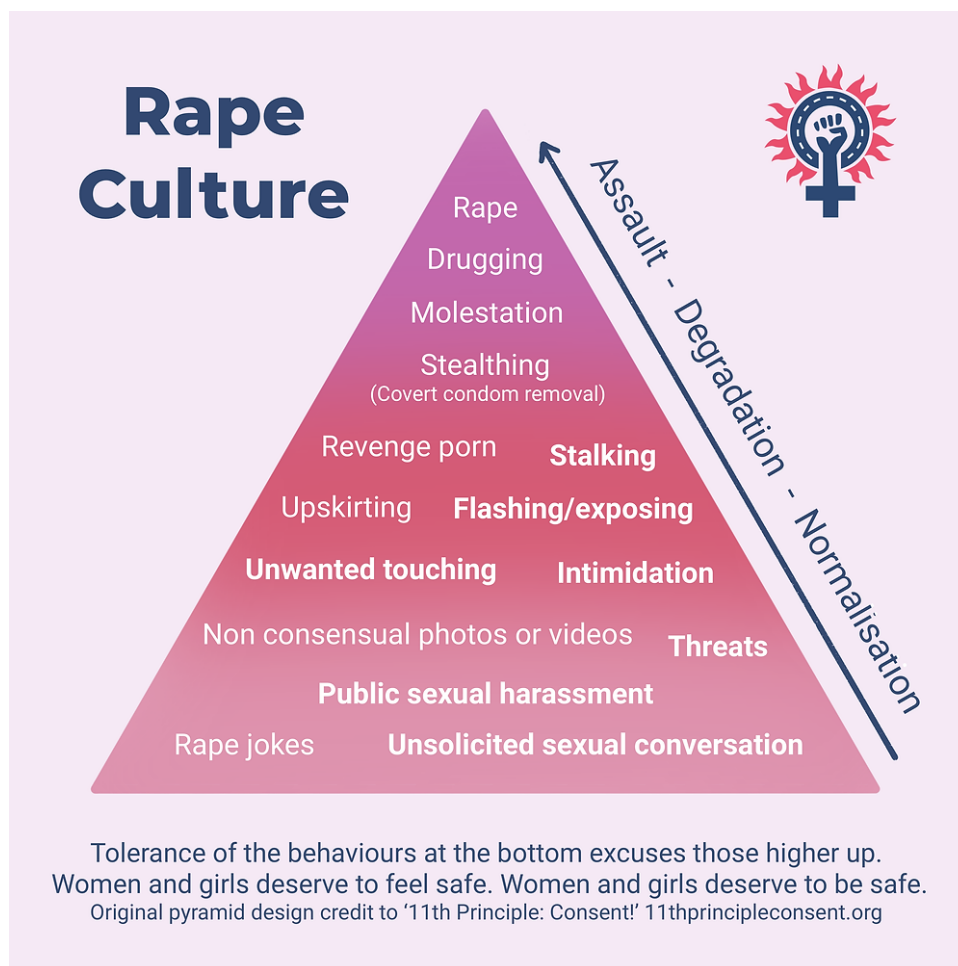
HEIs are not immune from this epidemic of PSH and have been recognised as significant places for gender-based violence (GBV) (Jones et al, 2020). One of the initial and important studies into GBV at HEIs was carried out by NUS in 2010 which found that 68% of female students had experienced verbal or physical sexual harassment (NUS, 2011). The report established that being approached or intimidated was a major worry of students who felt unsafe on campus. It also identified that reporting, to either the police or their institution, was low across all categories, and impacts of stalking, violence and sexual assault on students included changing behaviours and not attending class, with the most common impact being deterioration of mental health (NUS, 2011). A 2019 study in the US gives further evidence to the impact of PSH on mental health of female students at HEIs, where street harassment was related to anxiety and depression and led to the deterioration of sleep quality (DeIGreco & Christensen, 2020). It is clear that although PSH is a less severe form of sexual violence (see Figure 1, found



on Our Streets Now website [<https://www.ourstreetsnow.org/>], its impacts can be serious, with academic as well as social aspects.

Figure 1.

Sexual Violence Pyramid.



In more recent years, data on sexual harassment in HEIs can be found in the 2018 report conducted by Revolt Sexual Assault and The Student Room, which further highlighted the prevalence and impact of this issue. 57% of female students surveyed had experienced sexual harassment, lowering slightly to 55% for non-binary students. This compares to 19% of male



students surveyed, clearly situating sexual harassment as a gendered issue. This gender disparity was also noted in the sexual health and wellbeing charity Brook's 2019 investigation that found that 49% of women students had been 'wolf-whistled at' compared to 3% of men (Brook, 2019). The Revolt report confirmed students' lack of trust or confidence in their institution, as only 6% of those experiencing sexual assault or harassment reported their experience. This may also be compounded by the fact that 33% of students surveyed had little or no knowledge about where to seek support for such issues. It is clear that there is a lack of awareness of institutional support and reporting systems, which undermines their efficacy in tackling PSH, despite its evident prevalence.

In 2020, Jones et al. published an overview of 15 studies conducted on GBV among UK HE students. It found that up to 69% of female students and up to 39% of male students had experienced sexual harassment (Jones et al., 2020). Critically, it discovered that studies that included other identifying information, such as race and sexuality, suggested that there is higher prevalence among marginalised groups.

This data goes alongside the initial OSN research mentioned above. The issue of GBV in HEI has been substantiated by SESV themselves who have courageously exposed their institutions for the sexual violence and harassment that occurs whilst attending them. For instance, social media pages have been set up at the University of St Andrews and Durham University for students to share their experiences (Binji, 2020; Brooks, 2020). Offering a firsthand, wider view, these pages demonstrate that the statistics recorded by institutions may not capture the full extent of the sexual harassment and violence that students face. The fact that students felt the need to create spaces to share experiences themselves is an indictment on institutions whose reporting systems are often not sought, and exemplifies that some students feel that their official reports will not be taken seriously, as revealed in the Revolt report (Revolt Sexual Assault and The Student Room, 2018). In addition, over 100 UK institutions were



named in testimonies of “rape culture” in the 2021 Everyone’s Invited project (EI University List, 2022). It is these studies and stories from students themselves that have lead researchers and academics to call sexual harassment a “normative aspect of student culture” (McCarry & Jones, 2021).

To investigate this issue, Universities UK (UUK) set up a taskforce to review sexual violence, harassment and hate crime in 2015. Their 2016 publication included many important recommendations, such as adopting an “evidence based bystander intervention programme” as well as training for staff, however as UUK is an advisory body the recommendations are not binding. This is unfortunate given the prevalence of PSH. Testimonies and statistics show that institutions are failing their students whose student experiences and safety are impacted by this violence, which Nicola Dandridge, Chief Executive of UUK, stated institutions “have a duty to ensure” (UUK, 2016). This “duty” for universities in England, Scotland and Wales is legally enshrined in section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 named the Public Sector Equality Duty. It states that HEIs are classed as public authorities and thus have “a need to eliminate discrimination and harassment of women” and must take this into account “when formulating policies and practices in areas such as sexual harassment, governance of student societies and sports teams, campus security, housing, bars and social spaces” (House of Commons, 2022). As PSH faced by students does not end with campus boundaries, OSNHE believes HEIs have a duty to work with the local community to tackle PSH as well. The campaign Reclaim The Campus acknowledged in their 2021 report that individual institutions are creating projects to tackle sexual violence, such as the University of St Andrews who are working with police to investigate SA claims made by the student group mentioned, as well as creating a compulsory module for incoming students about consent and assault (Reclaim The Campus, 2021). Additionally, the 2019 UUK Changing the Culture: Two Years On report suggests progress is being made (UUK, 2019). This could be in part due to the Catalyst Fund which was created by



the Office for Students in 2016 to resource initiatives that tackle hate crime and sexual violence and harassment (House of Commons, 2022).

Despite the studies stated thus far, there is a general lack of up to date and comprehensive research. As the student social media groups and statistics show, there is clearly a large amount of students facing sexual violence that is unreported to the institution and thus unseen. This paper concurs with Reclaim the Campus in their report that there is a need for intersectional data that investigates differing experiences of PSH for students with other intersecting identities. To allow for anonymity in this survey, the gender identity of the participants was the only recorded personally identifying demographic, alongside their institution. OSNHE are committed to collecting data on students' experiences of PSH regularly, disaggregated by institution and identity categories, and are actively looking into ways of conducting this research. OSNHE particularly encourages HEIs themselves to conduct comprehensive research into PSH faced by their students.

Aims

From an OSN perspective, the aim of this survey was to build on research conducted in the OSN 2020 survey, generating statistics that could be used in campaigning, as well as by media outlets such as The Tab, and HEIs themselves. Considering the limited amount of data gathered in the OSN 2020 survey, this survey aimed to give greater data to this issue, combining the reach of both The Tab and OSN. In doing so, OSNHE sought to gain a greater overall picture of harassment in HE that goes beyond prevalence, by looking at where harassment occurs, as well as specific impacts and experiences with institutional reporting/support bodies to identify areas to address. There is a need for evidence to show that institutions have a duty of care to their students that extends beyond campus boundaries given that the PSH faced by their students in any location over the course of attending their institution



can impact their studies. OSNHE wanted this report to be a starting point for more specific and comprehensive research into PSH in HE so that action can be taken by institutions.



Method

Participants

This survey used a volunteer sampling method. There were initially 1,462 respondents, however only 1,379 consented to The Tab and Our Streets Now (OSN) storing their answers for use within research, advocacy, writing and social media campaigning. Therefore, according to OSN's ethical guidelines, only these 1,379 participants were allowed to proceed with the remainder of the survey. The 83 participants who did not give consent were removed from analysis and the final sample size was 1,379.

Of these participants: 1,201 were currently studying at a HEI within the United Kingdom; 127 had graduated since 2018; 35 had graduated before 2018; and 16 preferred not to say. Participants were asked what their respective HEIs were and a total of 71 institutions were selected. The ten institutions with the greatest number of participants were: Cardiff University ($N=149$); University of Nottingham ($N=103$); University of Exeter ($N=101$); Newcastle University ($N=96$); Loughborough University ($N=92$); University of Southampton ($N=75$); University of Birmingham ($N=65$); University of Edinburgh ($N=59$); University of Manchester ($N=51$); University of Warwick ($N=38$).

Participants identified themselves as *female* ($N=1,156$; 84%), *male* ($N=179$; 13%), *non-binary* ($N=30$; 2%), *transgender* ($N=4$; 0%) or selected the “prefer not to say” or “other” options. Due to the gendered focus of this survey, we grouped the categories: *female*, *non-binary*, and *transgender* to form an umbrella category entitled “*students of marginalised genders*” ($N=1,190$; 86%).

The survey link was posted on a variety of social media platforms by OSN members and the official OSN accounts, including Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, as well as being accessible through The Tab's website and social media, and participants were recruited from any of these options. Participants were informed at the beginning of the survey that their



responses would be viewed as aggregate statistics, allowing no individual responses to be stored. Participants were also assured that the questionnaire was fully anonymous and contained sensitive topics relating to sexual violence and were signposted to relevant support organisations such as *Rape Crisis UK* (see Appendix for full list of signposted organisations).

Materials

To preface the survey, participants were given definitions of “sexual assault”, “causing sexual activity without consent” and “public sexual harassment” (PSH). Participants were also informed that for the purpose of the survey, sexual assault and causing sexual activity without consent were referred to under the umbrella term “sexual assault”.

Participants completed a 24-question questionnaire that contained questions designed by The Tab, with supporting revisions from members of OSNHE. The first question obtained consent, and questions two to four related to demographics, such as current education status and gender identification. The remainder of the survey assessed student perception of sexual and gender-based violence at their HEI.

Participants were given four categorical options for the majority of the questions (*yes; no; unsure; prefer not to say*), with the first set of questions addressing education around consent. The next section of the questionnaire investigated the participants’ opinions towards reporting PSH and SA to their respective institutions, followed by an assessment of prevalence of both PSH and SA, including participants’ experiences of spiking. Subsequently, the questionnaire looked at the participants’ potential avoidance behaviours, in relation to both HEI attendance and socialising, as well as inquiring about where students feel most unsafe during their time in higher education. The final section of the questionnaire explored who participants would feel comfortable sharing their experiences of sexual violence to. (See Appendix for the complete questionnaire).



Lydia Venn, for The Tab, initially approached OSN to discuss statistics relating to Freshers' week and sexual assault. Through a series of discussions between Lydia Venn and OSNHE, the questionnaire was created and was available online from Tuesday 26th October 2021 to Friday 12th November 2021. Participants required an internet connection, as well as a computer or smartphone to complete the questionnaire.

Procedure

When first completing the questionnaire, participants were informed of the nature of the survey and asked for their consent for The Tab and OSN to store and use their data. At this point, if any participants did not give their consent they were removed from the remainder of the questionnaire analysis. The information section of the questionnaire also gave the participants the relevant definitions for the topics that would be covered in the survey, and informed them that all data would be anonymous and aggregate.

Participants then proceeded to complete the questionnaire and upon completion were provided with an extensive list of support services, in the event that any participant had been triggered by the questionnaire and required them.

Following the closure of the online questionnaire on Friday 12th November 2021, analyses were carried out using the website's built in software. This gave the breakdown of each question by number and percentage. It also allowed for the breakdown of each question by individual HEI attendance or gender identification. Lydia Venn, for The Tab, provided the OSN Higher Education team with these breakdowns, who subsequently categorised the relevant statistics and analysed the responses to create this report, as well as for use in press releases and publication on social media.



Results

The results section of this report will be broken down into three Findings: Prevalence, Impact, and Institutional Policies. The third finding, *institutional policies* will be addressed in two subsections: i. Education, ii. Reporting and Support.

Finding One - Prevalence

The descriptive statistics relating to the experiences and prevalence of public sexual harassment and sexual assault amongst male students ($N=179$) and students of marginalised genders ($N=1,190$) is displayed below in Table 1.

Table 1.

Breakdown of prevalence of public sexual harassment (PSH) and sexual assault (SA) by gender identification (by percentage)

Gender	Experienced PSH	Experienced PSH online	Had Freshers' week affected by PSH	Experienced SA	Had Freshers' week affected by SA
Male	17%	8%	20%	13%	13%
Marginalised genders	43%	23%	57%	26%	38%

30 of the male participants have experienced PSH whilst at their HEI, equating to nearly a fifth of the male student population in this survey, furthermore, 39 of the male participants (21%) stated that they've experienced PSH at their HEI once every few months or more. In comparison, just over 500 participants who identified as students of marginalised genders



(SOMG) have experienced PSH whilst at their HEI, with over 350 (30%) of these students experiencing PSH several times a month or more. This percentage increases when investigating whether PSH has impacted their Freshers' week either this year or in previous years, with nearly 700 participants disclosing they have been affected by PSH in these circumstances.

The prevalence of PSH and SA can also be investigated by addressing individual HEIs. The descriptive statistics for the five HEIs with the highest number of participants are shown below in Table 2.

Table 2.

Breakdown of prevalence of PSH and SA by HEI attendance for the most populous HEIs

HEI	Experienced PSH		Experienced PSH online		Experienced SA	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Cardiff (N=149)	73	49	21	14	34	23
Nottingham (N=103)	45	44	29	28	28	27
Exeter (N=101)	36	36	17	17	26	26
Newcastle (N=96)	35	36	19	20	28	29
Loughborough (N=92)	49	53	19	21	25	27

At all of these HEIs, approximately a quarter of the students in this survey have experienced SA whilst at their respective HEI, this percentage rises when observing the prevalence of PSH: between 23% (University of Exeter) and 34% (Cardiff University and



University of Nottingham) of participants experience PSH several times a month or more. One of the most damning statistics occurs at Loughborough University, where over half of the students report that they have experienced PSH during their time at Loughborough, with 32% of the participants experiencing it several times a month or more. Nevertheless, all five of these HEIs have an alarmingly high proportion of students experiencing PSH, the lowest of which equates to just over 35% (University of Exeter and Newcastle University).

Furthermore, this study also included issues of online PSH due to the growing use of technology in academia and socialising throughout the Covid-19 pandemic. In the case of these five HEIs, Cardiff University reported the lowest rate of PSH online, with 14% of the students at this HEI experiencing it. Worryingly, however, nearly 30% of the participants at the University of Nottingham reported facing PSH online whilst at their HEI.

Prevalence within participants' social life

This study understands that a students' time at their HEI is not limited to their experiences within academia and therefore sought to understand the prevalence of PSH and SA within wider student activities. It found that just under a fifth of participants ($N=234$) who took part in this survey have felt pressured to do something they were not comfortable with at either a sports or society social, or both. Similarly, when participants were asked about their experiences with spiking, a fifth of participants ($N=282$) responded that they have been spiked on a night out during their time at their HEI, with a further 185 participants unsure of whether they have been spiked. Whilst it is useful to observe SOMG together, it is important to disaggregate genders as nonbinary and transgender people often face more frequent harassment. Specifically, it seems that nonbinary students are disproportionately affected by spiking, with 27% of the nonbinary participants reporting that they have been spiked, and 53% of them worrying about spiking every time they go on a night out.



Finding Two - Impact

Experiencing PSH and sexual assault whilst at a HEI can impact a student both academically and socially. As we have seen, prevalence of PSH and SA are gendered and, thus, so are the impacts. From an academic perspective, 98% of the male students surveyed have not felt the need to avoid attending in person teaching for fear of SA or PSH. On the other hand, 4% of all SOMG in this survey have avoided face to face teaching based on this fear. Furthermore, nearly a fifth of male participants have had their participation in student life affected because of the shortening of daylight hours. In comparison, over 70% of SOMG have had their participation affected, feeling the effects of the shortening of daylight hours. Additionally, approximately 65% of students of marginalised genders feel unsafe in their university town and on public transport, highlighting the impact of PSH and SA on students' freedom of movement.

On a wider social scale, 1,064 participants (77%) stated that they feel unsafe at clubs and bars, this percentage increases when breaking the finding down by gender identification, as 83% of SOMG reported feeling unsafe in these environments. Consequently, over half of SOMG have avoided going on nights out for fear of PSH or SA and worry about spiking every time they go on a night out. Whereas, in this study, only 8% of male students avoided socialising, showing the vast disparity within the social barriers created by GBV.

Finding Three - Institutional Policies

i. Education

Addressing the need to educate students of all genders is crucial, with this study finding differences amongst students' perceptions of consent education and their awareness of consent



classes within their HEI. The breakdown of statistics relating to consent classes by gender identification is shown below.

Table 3.

Breakdown of student perception of consent classes within their HEI by gender identification

<i>Gender</i>	<i>Unaware of consent classes at their HEI</i>		<i>Unsure of consent classes at their HEI</i>		<i>Believes their HEI needs compulsory consent classes</i>	
	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
<i>Overall</i>	643	47	433	31	996	72
<i>Male</i>	64	36	52	29	81	45
<i>SOMG</i>	578	48	376	32	911	77

From this table we can see the high proportion of students who are either unaware or unsure (78%) of whether there are consent classes available at their HEI. The results relating to awareness of consent classes differ slightly when breaking them down by gender identification. Surprisingly, male students seem to be more aware of consent classes than students of marginalised genders, however this can perhaps be explained by the large variance in sample size, with a much higher population of SOMG in this study. Furthermore, only 45% of male students believe that their HEI needs to employ compulsory consent classes, compared to the 80% of SOMG who responded by endorsing compulsory classes. This is worrying, as sexual violence in HE is gendered and perpetrated primarily by men (Humphreys & Towl, 2020) and yet according to the results of this survey, male students are overwhelmingly less concerned about



consent education than those who are at greater risk of experiencing sexual violence: students of marginalised genders.

ii. Reporting and Support

The statistics relating to reporting PSH and SA in this survey are alarming, with nearly 85% of participants unsure or unaware of where to report incidents of sexual violence at their HEI, and this figure rising to 90% amongst nonbinary students. The descriptive statistics summarising the extent to which students would trust their HEI to handle sexual violence claims appropriately are displayed below.

Table 4.

Breakdown of student perception of HEI sexual violence claims approach by gender identification

<i>Gender</i>	<i>Do not trust their HEI to handle a PSH claim appropriately</i>		<i>Do not trust their HEI to handle an SA claim appropriately</i>	
	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
<i>Overall</i>	716	52	660	48
<i>Male</i>	62	35	57	32
<i>SOMG</i>	655	55	595	50

The lack of trust within HEIs is extremely high, with approximately half of students believing their HEI would not handle a PSH claim or SA claim appropriately. When looking at gender differences, it is apparent that male students have a much higher level of trust in their



HEI than students of marginalised genders, with around a 20% variation. This can again perhaps be explained by the fact that sexual violence is gendered, and subsequently SOMG are more likely to have experience with reporting instances of harassment or assault to their HEIs which may have been negative.

This demonstrable lack of trust in HE reporting services creates distance and barriers between students and their institutions, preventing students from accessing the support required following instances of sexual and gender-based violence. This is apparent in the survey, when only 14% of SOMG reported that they would feel comfortable sharing their experiences of PSH to their HEI, this figure dropping to 13% when asked if they would feel comfortable sharing instances of SA. In contrast and following the above trend of male students' higher trust, 28% of the male participants stated that they would be comfortable sharing experiences of PSH, and a quarter of these students would feel comfortable sharing experiences of SA to their HEI.



OSNHE Recommendations

These recommendations, concerning areas of education, support and reporting, are grounded in student experiences garnered by the study and build upon the recommendations proposed in the OSN: Higher Education 2020 survey, reflecting where HEI policies and efforts are currently limited. OSNHE's recommendations only focus on PSH as this is the scope of our organisation, however, we acknowledge that there is much to be done to improve policies about other forms of sexual violence as well.

Education

OSNHE recommends that HEIs ensure:

1. Mandatory workshops on PSH which can be included as part of consent workshops
2. Compulsory bystander training for all staff and students in positions of responsibility
3. Visible campaigns on campus to raise awareness and provide platforms for students to speak up
4. Recurring training and awareness raising to happen at the start of the year
5. Training specifically aimed at the male student body

As an initial course of action, HEIs urgently need to provide education and awareness on the issue of PSH. This is evident from our research where 78% students were either unaware or unsure of whether HEI have consent classes, reflecting limited presence of such education.



Moreover, HEIs must address PSH as widespread; 40% of students have experienced PSH at their HEI, and recurring; 28% experience PSH several times a month or more in student life. Taking this into account, the need for in-depth and continuous education on PSH is clear. Education on the issue of PSH, either as standalone workshops (for instance, through utilising OSN resources) or as part of mandatory consent workshops and bystander training, must be accessible and well advertised within institutions to ensure all students have knowledge of the training.

As 52% of students felt that PSH has affected their Freshers' week, this year or in previous years, we also advocate that training should take place before Freshers' week. Due to the link between increased alcohol consumption (notably because of perceived vulnerability of potential victims and raised disinhibition amongst potential perpetrators) and sexual violence, Freshers' week and the first few weeks at HEIs may be a particularly high risk time (Humphreys & Towl, 2020). Thus, introducing training before students begin HE is crucial. OSNHE recognises that due to the Covid-19 pandemic, delivering face-to-face compulsory consent workshops might be logistically problematic. As a remedy to this we recommend live, online consent workshops before a student can enrol. These workshops should be up to date and repeated every academic year by students re-enrolling to their HEI.

Furthermore, this study demonstrated a staggering discrepancy between almost 80% of SOMG supporting compulsory classes contrasted to that of only 45% male – in turn highlighting the need for specific education by HEIs aimed towards and concerning its male students. Therefore, OSNHE recommends that to complement mandatory consent workshops for all of the student body, specific workshops should also be aimed at male students. This need is further compounded by the gendered nature of sexual violence both within HEIs and beyond (Office for National Statistics, 2018), necessitating a particular education of those who are the most likely to become perpetrators which could be carried out by organisations such as Beyond



Equality (2022). A recent study into male student sexual aggression found that one in nine students self-reported sexual aggression, solidifying this recommendation and the need to address male attitudes on the issue of PSH (Hales & Gannon, 2021).

Education, ranging from mandatory workshops to bystander training, should concern staff as well as students. It is crucial for HEI staff, who have a duty to students, to be adequately equipped to handle issues of PSH – whether they are receiving disclosures or acting as bystanders. Additionally, awareness and visibility campaigns on campus can further promote educational resources and conversations, whilst providing platforms for students to speak up. In turn, this will help ensure a cultural shift, in which PSH is rightfully recognised and addressed, countering the idea of PSH as an aforementioned “normative aspect of student culture” (McCarry & Jones, 2021).

Support

OSNHE recommends that HEIs:

1. Have a full-time Independent Sexual Violence Advisor (ISVA)
2. Ensure training for all wellbeing and support staff to be able to consider reports of PSH sensitively for both staff and students
3. Work with local specialist sexual violence agencies to shape support services
4. Ensure that internal and external support as well as counselling services are easily accessible and signposted to



Due to the many impacts of PSH, there is a need for extensive, available and well-advertised support services for students. For example, students should be able to access their institutions' counselling services or be signposted to relevant external support services. This support should be visible and students should be able to access it, irrespective of whether they need to report an incident. Institutions must prioritise student wellbeing and follow their desired course of action.

HEIs have a duty of care towards their students who have experienced PSH. Firstly, in order for HEIs to adequately support its students, we advocate for the appointment of full-time, accredited ISVAs. Secondly, to ensure HEIs ability to correctly handle a PSH claim, training for all wellbeing and support staff to handle reports of PSH safely and sensitively is crucial. Lastly, taking into account HEIs limited student trust, we encourage HEIs to work with local specialist sexual violence agencies to help shape its support services. Such expertise will not only enhance HEIs support services, but can also provide insights into PSH occurring within the HEI city or local area and ensure that these experiences are equally addressed, given their prevalence, as 60% of students feel unsafe in their university town. This mental toll must also be addressed.

This research demonstrates alarmingly low levels of trust in HEIs. Ultimately, an effort on behalf of a HEI to better its support services by acquiring new expertise and educating all wellbeing and support staff, and efficiently advertise available services, has the potential of raising crucial student trust within HEIs. It is paramount that students feel comfortable to seek help from their respective institutions and receive competent and compassionate support, regardless of whether or not they choose to report. This need is further aggravated by the fact that most students are living away from home and/or in new locations where previous support networks, personal or public, are unavailable. Thus, HEIs are the only or one of few sources of support, particularly during the beginning of the academic year when over half of students are



affected by PSH. Providing reliable support to students who experience PSH is paramount to prevent or limit the grave and extensive impacts PSH can have on the student experience. For instance, 57 participants of our study avoided attending in person teaching because of fear of sexual assault and PSH. This evidence makes the need for support from HEIs and institutional trust clear.

Reporting

OSNHE recommends that HEIs:

1. Have a clear and consistent zero tolerance culture and sexual violence policy
2. Have a clear, accessible and anonymous (if desired) reporting process
3. Encourage students to seek support around PSH whether it happened on or off campus, which may include reporting it
4. Monitor reports of PSH off campus and develop strategies to tackle it alongside external services (such as transport or nightlife)

HEIs must first promote a zero tolerance culture towards PSH to guide subsequent reporting and foster an environment where PSH is not accepted by any student or staff member, nor in any part of the student experience. To ensure the effectiveness and consistency of a zero tolerance culture, a sexual violence policy must be enforced. OSNHE follows Reclaim the Campus' recommendations that these policies should be clearly defined and must be intersectional as intersecting factors can affect students' experiences of sexual violence (RTC,



2021). The policy must be effectively communicated to the student body and staff, for instance as part of previous recommendations on education. We also advocate a clear and anonymous (if desired) reporting process to ensure that SESV are aware of reporting systems and feel comfortable coming forward. Practical measures must be in place to enable this, such as improving accessibility and via clear, interactive webpages that are easily located on a HEIs website. Taking into account how 79% of students were either unaware or unsure of where to report sexual assault or PSH at their HEI, this need is unmistakably clear. As only 5% of students would feel comfortable sharing their experiences of PSH to their HEIs, the need to encourage students to seek support around PSH whether it happened on or off campus, (which may include reporting it), is large. For instance, such encouragement can be carried out alongside education on PSH, as well as normalising reporting through continuous promotion.

Lastly, the presence and impact of PSH on student life is ubiquitous, within and outside campus parameters. For instance, 77% of students feel unsafe at clubs and bars, whereas 58% stated that they feel unsafe on public transport. This evidence demonstrates the need to monitor reports of PSH off campus, and develop strategies to tackle it. All students deserve to feel and be safe when travelling to access their institutions, or when taking part in student experiences beyond campus. HEIs should work with local transport providers to reduce harassment on buses that serve the HEI or work with local clubs and bars frequented by students. HEIs' duty of care to students must extend beyond its institutional confines to accurately reflect the student experience.

Conclusion

This report has served to provide evidence on the prevalence and impacts of PSH in UK higher education, attesting to it as an issue of urgency that must be addressed by HEIs. There



is a distinct and concerning discrepancy between how HEIs treat the issue of PSH and its prevalence in student life. Our research makes it clear that PSH widely impacts students, particularly SOMG, creating a disparate student experience. Additionally, the dangerously low levels of student trust in HEIs on issues of PSH and sexual assault are deeply concerning.

This research provides evidence to lobby institutions to undertake changes and we have provided a set of comprehensive recommendations in the areas of education, support and reporting to address current limitations in HEIs. The proposed recommendations seek to ensure that UK HEIs provide adequate support to students who face PSH, extend their duty of care beyond institutional parameters, and ultimately treat PSH with the gravity the issue deserves. The OSNHE recommendations hold the wellbeing and safety of students, and their right to an equal student experience, at its core.

Moreover, this report establishes PSH in HE as an area in need of further and more comprehensive research. OSNHE hope this report and its recommendations can provide a starting point for future research. Developing knowledge and a deeper understanding of PSH in HE is crucial to provide adequate recommendations and ultimately wider and more impactful change on this issue.

This report is an active effort to champion the mission of Our Streets Now to combat public sexual harassment. We thank everyone who has taken part in this research and supported the making of this report, and especially all students who participated in this survey.



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Appendix

The Tab Articles

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Complete questionnaire

Following are survey questions developed as a joint project between Our Streets Now and The Tab to explore sexual violence at university.

Public Sexual Harassment (PSH) refers to unwelcomed and unwanted attention, sexual advances and intimidating behaviour that occurs in public spaces, both in person and online.

Sexual assault refers to the non-consensual touching of another person. This can include a range of behaviours, such as touching over clothes, under/without clothes, or kissing. This does not include rape, which refers specifically to the penile penetration of a vagina, anus or mouth. This survey will not be addressing instances of rape.

Causing sexual activity without consent refers to making someone carry out a sexual act. This can include carrying out sexual acts with their own person, a third party who may be willing or not, or with the offender, and can be done through words alone.

For the purpose of this survey, sexual assault and causing sexual activity without consent will be referred to under the umbrella term “sexual assault”.

Answers collected through the following survey will be viewed as aggregate statistics by Our Streets Now and The Tab, and could be used within advocacy, social media posts and submissions to government bodies. No individual responses will be stored. Disclosing your experience of sexual violence at university is difficult, and we thank you for taking the time to contribute to our survey. *Rape Crisis UK* (0808 802 9999) offer support and guidance to victims of sexual violence, and we recommend calling them for support on how to process an experience of public sexual harassment.

1. Do you consent to The Tab and Our Streets Now storing your answers for use within research, advocacy, writing and social media campaigning? (Mandatory)
2. What is your current status? (Mandatory)



3. How do you identify? (Mandatory)
4. Which higher education institution do you attend? Prefer not to say is available in drop down menu. (Mandatory)
5. Are you aware if your higher education institution has consent classes? (Mandatory)
6. Do you think your higher education institution needs compulsory consent classes? (Mandatory)
7. Do you know where to report sexual assault or PSH at your higher education institution? (Mandatory)
8. Would you trust your higher education institution to handle a PSH claim appropriately? (Mandatory)
9. Would you trust your higher education institution to handle a sexual assault claim properly? (Mandatory)
10. Has PSH affected your Freshers' week this year or in previous years? (Mandatory)
11. Has sexual assault affected your Freshers' week this year or in previous years? (Mandatory)
12. Have you ever felt pressured to do something you weren't comfortable with at a society social or a sports social? (Mandatory)
13. Do you worry about spiking on nights out? (Mandatory)
14. Have you ever been spiked on a night out? (Mandatory)
15. Have you avoided going on nights out for fear of sexual assault or PSH? (Mandatory)
16. Have you experienced public sexual harassment at your higher education institution? (Mandatory)
17. How often do you experience public sexual harassment whilst at your higher education institution? (Mandatory)



18. Have you experienced sexual assault whilst at your higher education institution?

(Mandatory)

19. Have you experienced PSH online since the pandemic started? (Mandatory)

20. Have you avoided attending in person teaching because of fear of sexual assault or PSH? (Mandatory)

21. Does the shortening of daylight hours affect your participation in student life? E.g. attending in person teaching, attending campus based socials, or going to SU bars? (Mandatory)

22. Where do you feel unsafe during your time in higher education? (Mandatory)

23. Who would you feel comfortable sharing your experience of PSH to? (Mandatory)

24. Who would you feel comfortable sharing your experience of sexual assault to? (Mandatory)

We recognise that sharing these experiences can be difficult. We encourage you to seek support as and when you need it. Here's a list of services below

VAWG services:

Rape Crisis: 0808 802 9999 Open 12:00pm-2:30pm and 7:00pm-9:30pm daily. Offers support and guidance for all victims of all forms of sexual violence. Rape Crisis also offer web chat services for victims of sexual violence.

Victim Support: 0845 30 30 900 Offers guidance to all victims of crime and their families. A crime does not need to have been reported to police to access the support and guidance that is offered by Victim Support.

Refuge: 0808 2000 247 Open 24/7. Female advisors listen to victims of domestic violence and offer support regarding decisions for one's future.



Women's Aid: Offers support and guidance for women experiencing domestic violence, including legal advice.

Mental health services:

Mind: 0300 123 3393 Open 9:00am-6:00pm Monday to Friday. O operates as an initial space to discuss mental health thereupon Mind can signpost relevant services for an individual.

Anxiety UK: 03444 775 774 Open 9:00am-10:00pm Monday to Friday, and 10:00am-8:00pm Saturday and Sunday. Offers tailored support for those with anxiety (both diagnosed and undiagnosed).

No Panic: 0844 967 4848 Open 10:00am-10:00pm, costing 5p per minute to call. Offers support for those suffering from panic attacks, OCD, phobias, and other anxiety disorders.

Samaritans: 116 123 pen 24/7. Samaritans is a listening service, offering a caller the opportunity to share how they are feeling. They will not tell an individual what to do, but they will contact the emergency services if needed (according to their safeguarding policy).

Papyrus: 0800 068 4141 Open 9:00am-10:00pm Monday to Friday and 2:00pm-10:00pm Saturday to Sunday and on Bank Holidays. They offer suicide advice to young people.

Religious and spiritual services:

Suzy Lamplugh Trust: 0808 202 0300 Open 9:30am-4:00pm Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday, and 1:00pm-4:00pm on Wednesday. They offer support and guidance on understanding and reporting stalking.

Childline: 0800 11 11 Open 9:00am-12:00am daily for young people. Offers support on understanding racism at a young age and dealing with anger and sadness that arises from racist abuse.



The Monitoring Group: 020 7582 7438 Open 11:00am-6:00pm, Monday to Thursday. Offers support on racist harassment and abuse.

CST: <https://cst.org.uk/report-incident> Focuses specifically on anti-semitic harassment and racism. Offers support to the victim and encouragement to report incidents to the police.

Tell MAMA: <https://tellmamauk.org/submit-a-report-to-us/> Offers support to victims of Islamophobia.

The Traveller Movement:

<https://thetravellermovement.org.uk/advocacy-support/useful-resources> Entitled 'Have you been affected by hate crime?' this PDF offers support to understand what a hate crime is in relation to being a Traveller.

LGBTQ+ services:

Stonewall: 0800 050 2020 Open 9:30am-4:30pm Monday to Friday. Offers support to LGBTQ people and their families. Stonewall are not an advice service, so will refer on to legal advice services should you request it.

LGBT Foundation: 0345 330 30 30 Open 9:00am-9:00pm Monday to Friday, and 10:00am-6:00pm Saturday and Sunday. Offers support and advice to LGBTQ people and offers specific advice and support regarding homophobic/biphobic/transphobic harassment.

Mermaids: 0808 801 0400 Open 9:00am-9:00pm Monday to Friday. Offers support to trans youth, up to the age of nineteen, regarding protection under the law, and signposts other resources.

Disability discrimination services:

Scope: 0808 800 3333, Textphone 18001 followed by 0800 800 3333 Open 8:00am-8:00pm Monday to Saturday, and 10:00am-6:00pm on Sunday. Offers impartial advice and support on



issues related to disability. Scope will refer to third party organisations should it deem it to be necessary.

Equality Advisory Support Service: 0808 800 0084, Textphone 0808 800 0084 Open 9:00am-7:00pm Monday to Friday and 10:00am-6:00pm on Saturday. Offers advice on issues related to equality and human rights.

Sub-culture discrimination services:

The Sophie Lancaster Foundation: <https://www.sophielancasterfoundation.com> Offers general support and guidance for those who experience discrimination due to their participation in a sub-culture.

Activism services:

Counselling for Social Change: 01736 364 722 Offer counselling and support for activists to enable their work. Their phone line invites activists to practice self-care within their work.

There are further support services on the Our Streets Now website available [here](#).

