Tackling Public Sexual Harassment in Education

“They saw my fear and laughed”

Higher Education Executive Summary
WHO ARE OUR STREETS NOW?

Our Streets Now is a national intersectional campaign demanding an end to public sexual harassment. With over 200,000 supporters signing our petition to make PSH a criminal offence, the campaign has started a UK-wide conversation around the issue of harassment. We wanted to find out how this is affecting university students.

What is Public Sexual Harassment

Public Sexual Harassment (PSH for short) comprises unwelcomed and unwanted attention, sexual advances and intimidating behaviour that occurs in public spaces, both in person and online. It is usually directed towards women and often oppressed groups within society however, it can be experienced by all.

Our Research

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 followers and supporters and therefore represents the voices of a community who has knowledge or lived experience of PSH.
Where do students experience PSH?

- 49% Have been harassed while travelling to or around university
- 25% Have been harassed in clubs or bars
- 24% Have been harassed on campus

A boy saw me and my female friend having a friendly cuddle whilst on a night out. Neither of us knew him but he came up to us and asked us to kiss so he could watch.

What types of PSH are experienced by students?

- Name-calling
- Sexual comments
- Whistling
- Groping
- Persistent sexual advances
- Unwanted sexual attention
- Sexual jokes
- Being followed
- Cars slowing down
- Rape threats

While walking to university during my postgraduate degree, a van stopped in the middle of a main road and shouted across at me 'how much would it cost for me to rape you? I bet you'd do it for a fiver'.

How often do students experience PSH?

- 38% Several times a month
- 10% Several times a week
- 1% Every day
- 12% Never
- 38% Every few months

It’s an ingrained aspect of daily life that slowly grinds away at your self worth.

@sravya_attaluri
The Impacts of PSH on Students

- Negative effect on mental wellbeing
- Feeling unsafe
- Choosing a different route home
- Avoiding certain outfits
- Being distracted from education

Inability to complete daily tasks and activities
- Triggering past experiences
- Difficulty forming friendships
- Avoiding going to campus

Being harassed and groped on public transport just makes me dread my commute to uni and makes me not want to go in

University Policies

37% of students had knowledge of existing schemes or policies at their university relating to PSH, but 43% of those who had knowledge of a scheme criticised it in their answer.

Criticisms included:

- Weak campus presence
- Limited capacity to support victims
- Lack of policy regarding off-campus PSH

There is the campus patrol, however they are not in town and so offer no protection to students living off campus.

Are students aware of reporting platforms or support services for PSH?

27% said YES
53% said NO
19% were UNSURE

I believe this is a huge issue amongst university students. Too often it is dismissed due to age or general university behaviour, but it shouldn’t be. The amount of people I know who have been sexually harassed whilst at university without any relief or justice is disgusting.

Students were hesitant to use services that are designated for victims of sexual violence as they felt they may not be taken seriously.
It’s not a compliment. It’s Harassment.

Students’ Priorities for Change

01. Workshops and training to prevent students from becoming perpetrators of PSH
02. Awareness raising to empower students to speak up
03. Clear and visible reporting process
04. Punitive measures and a zero tolerance culture
05. Counselling and support for those who experience PSH
06. Training for staff
07. Bystander training
08. Campaigns specific to off-campus PSH

Public sexual harassment is everywhere. We won’t rest until it’s nowhere.

Just empowering people to speak up and be heard. No matter how “small” an incident feels it has an impact on the victim and escalates the apparent validation of this behaviour if someone isn’t held accountable.

Outside of the institution, I would like to see universities offering stronger support and solidarity with their students rather than stating that it isn’t their problem if it happens off campus.
RECOMMENDATIONS

Women and girls deserve to feel safe. Women and girls deserve to be safe.

Education

~ Mandatory workshops on PSH which can be included as part of consent workshops
~ Bystander training compulsory for all campus staff or students in positions of responsibility
~ Visible campaigns on campus to raise awareness and provide platforms for students to speak up
~ Training and awareness raising to happen at the start of the year

Support

~ A full-time sexual assault and harassment advisor
~ Training for all wellbeing and support staff to consider reports of PSH sensitively
~ Work with local specialist sexual violence agencies to shape these services

Reporting

~ Clear and anonymous (if desired) reporting process
~ Encourage students to seek support around PSH whether it happened on or off campus which may include reporting it
~ Monitor reports of PSH off campus and develop strategies to tackle it, for example working with transport providers to reduce harassment on university buses
~ Clear and consistent zero tolerance policy

Acknowledgements

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