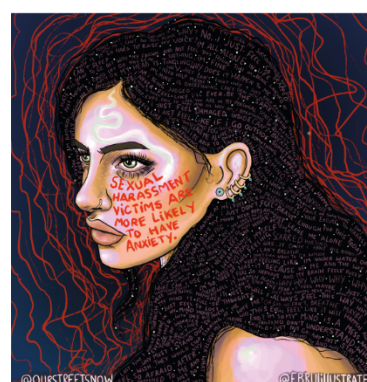
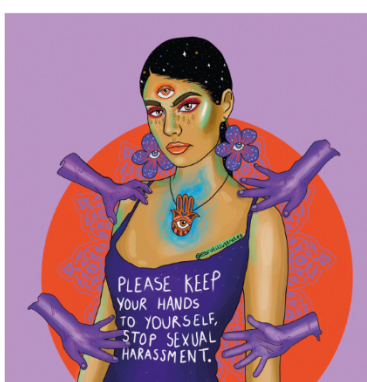
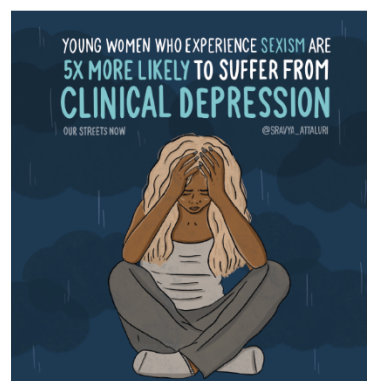




***“They saw my fear  
and laughed”***

**TACKLING PUBLIC SEXUAL  
HARASSMENT IN EDUCATION**



## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

We would like to thank all those who took the time to participate in our surveys and the responses they gave that helped us to compile this report.

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The testimonies given in this report have been anonymised in order to protect their identities.

**Our Streets Now 2020.**



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## Executive Summary

### Section One: Background

*Our Streets Now (OSN)* was born in 2019 as a grassroots, youth-led campaign demanding an end to public sexual harassment (PSH) in the UK. OSN aims to tackle PSH by enacting legislative and political change, and by increasing awareness and education around public sexual harassment. In less than 100 days the petition to make PSH a criminal offence in the UK had 100.000 signatures. It now stands at over than 210.000 supporters. The campaign has gained support from international organisations such as *UN Women* as well as non-governmental groups like *Plan International UK*. OSN also has the support of an internationally recognised group of lawyers with particular expertise in human rights and violence against



women. OSN not only is challenging the normative discourse towards PSH but also sparking a transformative national conversation on the issue.

### Section Two: Introduction

This report emerged from Our Streets Now's work and research to uncover the role of PSH within schools and universities. This report examines the findings of two surveys. The first survey asked secondary school pupils and recent school leavers about their experiences of discussing and reporting PSH to teachers, as well as the changes they would like to see at their school. 153 pupils answered the first survey. The second survey asked students and graduates about their experiences of PSH in higher education, their knowledge of existing university policies and the ways they think

universities should tackle PSH. 100 students answered the second survey. OSN followers and supporters mostly answered both surveys. Therefore, it represents the voices of one community who know about PSH and are likely to have experienced it. Nonetheless, it does paint a broader picture of how PSH is an issue in schools and higher education institutes. In summary, this report aims to understand and present the survey respondents' perspectives, as well as their experiences of PSH within an educational setting.





## Section Three: Previous Research

The National Union of Students (NUS) has done extensive work into violence, hate crime and harassment at universities. The NUS Hidden Marks Report highlighted the need for an improvement in procedures for reporting incidents. The Universities UK (UUK) taskforce and the OfS both also underlined the need for better reporting and data collection across universities.<sup>i</sup> Both NUS and UUK recommendations heavily focused on the need for a zero-

tolerance culture. There are several existing schemes at universities across the UK which aim to raise awareness and tackle harassment, hate crime and sexual violence. The Plan UK Report into street harassment in 2019 is an extensive piece of research which found that 38% of girls experience verbal harassment at least once a month and 35% have been sexually harassed while wearing their school uniform.<sup>ii</sup>

## Section Four: Methodology

The gaps in the literature guided the objectives of both OSN surveys. For school pupils, previous literature has focused on their experiences of PSH, rather than on reporting and discussing it with teachers. With this in mind, the OSN survey focused on pupils' experiences of being taught about PSH and of discussing it with staff. For higher education students, previous research focused on sexual violence between students without investigating the nature and impacts of PSH, including incidents which happen off-campus. Given that, the OSN survey focused on the location and nature of PSH, its effects and students' knowledge or perceptions of existing policy. Both surveys allowed participants to give suggestions for what they would like to change. This survey-based research was the first stage of OSN current work to tackle PSH through education. OSN shared both surveys through the social media platforms Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook, as well as through a Change.org petition update sent to

200,000 signers. As a result of the way both surveys were platformed, it does not necessarily represent the views of the broader population but rather the views of those who are largely aware of PSH and who are likely to have experienced harassment themselves. The participants most likely had a much higher than average knowledge of what constitutes PSH, its impacts and concepts such as intersectionality, misogyny and victim-blaming.





## Section Five: Our Streets Now Surveys' Findings

PSH is as a consistent and recurring element of student life. 84% of the OSN survey's participants have experienced PSH as a university student. It has been discovered that almost half (49%) of respondents said they had been targeted with some form of unwanted harassment whilst commuting to university or around their university cities. A multitude of impacts, including short-term and long-term effects, often come after being subjected to various forms of PSH. Most prominently, students experience negative impacts on mental health and wellbeing, often citing a limited sense of safety and reduced self-worth as a result of PSH. Students also mentioned feelings of guilt, self-blame or embarrassment as consequences of harassment. OSN survey's answers also showed that only 37% of students knew of existing schemes or policies at their university relating to PSH. Through the survey,

OSN has received many testimonies that portray varying types of harassment in different settings. The survey therefore shows the prevalence of PSH within higher education environment.

Our secondary education findings discovered that 64% of respondents said they had never been taught about PSH and 14% saying only rarely (or once) had they been taught about it. The students suggested that they wanted PSH to be part of the curriculum as a way to help prevent it and would like this done in small interactive group sessions. Not surprisingly, several students highlighted the need to tackle victim-blaming attitudes within school settings with 5% suggesting they were taught about PSH in the context of victim-blaming narratives.

## Section Six: Discussion

Previous research carried out by the NUS and UUK focused on campus-based incidents, and also tended to encompass all forms of sexual violence and bullying. On the contrary, the OSN survey centred on PSH and considered both commuting to university/ around university cities, as well as on campus-based incidents. By directing its attention to these elements, OSN aims to counter the fact that PSH is often considered an inevitable part of everyday life for young women. More so, that while PSH is a less severe form of gender-based violence, it can have a profound impact on daily life, including

wellbeing and access to public spaces. The OSN survey shows that the top priorities for university students were an increase in education regarding consent as well as raising awareness in order to stop the normalisation of PSH. Respondents also mentioned the importance of university policies focusing on zero-tolerance and reporting. Yet, first and foremost, university students have expressed their eagerness for a cultural shift.

The surveys were designed to discover and understand the prevalence of PSH within teaching and education. It



discovered that 64% of respondents had never been taught about PSH in school. Those who told they had, frequently said that it was very brief or focused on staying safe from strangers and clothing choices. By taking these actions, schools are both excluding an essential topic from PSHE and

reinforcing victim-blaming narratives. OSN survey shows that pupils are eager for education on PSH to become a regular and consistent part of the school curriculum.

## Section Seven: Conclusion

There is a distinct gap between how schools and universities are responding to PSH and the ways that young people want them to take actions. The most frequently mentioned priority for change in both OSN surveys was about education to promote cultural change and prevent PSH, which exists at very few schools or universities. Punitive measures do not acknowledge the cultural context which allows unacceptable behaviours to flourish. These measures often assume that all perpetrators are students themselves. The OSN survey demonstrates that this is not the case. Mentions of PSH around the university were twice as common as mentions of on-campus incidents. Despite this, university policies do not acknowledge or tackle this type of harassment. OSN recommends not only better reporting, but also better data collection on the prevalence and impact of PSH that

students face. As well as measures dealing with the aftermath of harassment, prevention work is highly necessary. This work should tackle not only on-campus harassment but also incidents on the way to, from and between higher education facilities.



## Section Eight: Our Streets Now Recommendation

### SCHOOLS

1. Include PSH as part of the curriculum
2. Train all staff in responding to PSH
3. Monitor PSH outside of school
4. Take action against harassment within school

### UNIVERSITIES

1. Raise awareness of PSH through education
2. Provide support for students who experience PSH
3. Improve reporting platforms for PSH on and off campus



## Section One: Background

### Who are Our Streets Now?

In April 2019, sisters Maya and Gemma Tutton started an intersectional national campaign, called Our Streets Now (OSN), demanding an end to public sexual harassment (PSH) in the UK. Both felt scared walking home at night, anxious about being alone in public spaces, and being sexualised whilst wearing their school uniforms. Their fear turned into anger about how normal and prevalent this behaviour is within our society.

With over 200,000 supporters signing the petition to make PSH a criminal offence in the UK, the campaign sparked a national conversation around the issue of harassment, bringing forward the voices of victims of PSH.



**In less than 100 days it had received 100,000 signatures.**

To ensure that PSH is taken seriously, OSN aims to tackle this issue in two ways: by enacting legislative and political change, and by increasing awareness and education around PSH. The campaign has gained support from international organisations such as *UN Women* as well as non-governmental

groups like *Plan International UK*. A group of internationally recognised lawyers with particular expertise in human rights and violence against women also supports the campaign.

**We demand the right for women and girls to feel safe and be safe in public spaces.**





## What is Public Sexual Harassment?

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

Previous research has tended to use the term 'street harassment', but it is essential to emphasise that women and marginalised groups experience harassment across a variety of public spaces. With that in mind, OSN chose to use the term 'public sexual harassment'. The word 'public' helps expand people's understandings beyond just street-based incidents to include all public spaces, from gyms and parks to shops and nightclubs. Also, moving away from pre-existing phrases like 'catcalling' might allow people's preconceived notions of intrusions as compliments to fall away. Finally, the term highlights the interlinked nature to different forms of sexual harassment and, consequently, to all forms of violence against women and girls.

Even though PSH is usually directed towards women and often oppressed groups within society, all can experience it. **Not all experiences of PSH are the same** since PSH is an intersectional issue. The intersection of identity categories (e.g. race, disability, sexuality, etc.) influences an individual's experience of PSH, as perpetrators exploit the many characteristics of a victim's identity.

**PSH is carried out because of gender discrimination and/or power dynamics.** The harasser seeks to dominate over the harassed. PSH perpetuates an environment and culture that disregards historically vulnerable and oppressed groups of people, diminishing their sense of self-worth and denying them equal access to public space.

“

**It's an ingrained aspect of daily life that slowly grinds away at your self-worth and that's just the less extreme forms of it.**

”





### Intersectional

Involves members of various social categories and combines 'multiple forms of discrimination' to marginalise individuals and groups.<sup>iv</sup>

### Patriarchy

A social system that is broadly controlled by men holding a 'disproportionately large share of power'.<sup>iii</sup>

### Feminism

A movement that advocates for women's rights based on gender equality.

## KEY TERMS

### Misogyny

Generally described as the dislike of, or ingrained prejudice against women in society.

### Privilege

The advantage available to certain groups of individuals based on particular characteristics such as race, gender and wealth.

### Victim Blaming

Implying a victim is responsible for an attack or harassment rather than the perpetrator.<sup>v</sup> Assuming 'an individual did something to provoke the violence by actions, words, or dress'.<sup>vi</sup>



## Section Two: Introduction

### Surveys and Report Aims

PSH is the most common form of gender-based violence and has been experienced by two-third of girls.<sup>iii</sup> **42% of girls tell no one they have been harassed**, which is indicative of the shame and stigma which still surrounds PSH.<sup>iv</sup> Places of education have the opportunity to change this by committing to tackle PSH and encourage young people to speak up.

As a grassroots campaign, OSN has the aim of criminalising PSH in order to protect women and girls across the United Kingdom. Other countries across the globe have varying levels of criminal punishments for PSH, yet the UK possess none. Alongside the legislative campaign to make PSH a reportable offence, **OSN aims to end PSH through education and cultural change**. OSN believes that schools and universities must become part of this process. Nevertheless, OSN must also ensure that its recommendations and campaigns are guided by the voices of young people themselves, and by their knowledge or lived experiences of PSH.

Both OSN surveys and this report had a broader aim to give young people the space to communicate their experiences on PSH and to share their thoughts on possible changes in the education setting concerning this issue. Therefore, OSN priorities were to **understand students' experiences of PSH** and **assess their knowledge and perception of how education institutes are tackling it**. Nonetheless, both OSN surveys and this report counted with secondary aims. Firstly, to **produce informed recommendations** – based on the survey respondents' feedback – for future projects and research on PSH in the education setting. Secondly, by focusing solely on PSH, OSN research and materials can **fill the gaps in the existing literature**, which has tended to amalgamate PSH with sexual violence as a whole.



## Section Three: Previous Research

### Higher Education

#### Research on the Problem

PSH is a frequent occurrence for some students, yet it is often overlooked or trivialised when investigated in conjunction with more severe forms of gender-based violence. The National Union of Students (NUS) has done extensive work into violence, hate crime and harassment at universities. Their largest survey in 2010 had over 2000 female students as respondents. **68% of whom had experienced some kind of verbal or non-verbal harassment in and around their institution.**<sup>v</sup> Furthermore, the Office for Students (OfS) has suggested that

**students may be less inclined to report harassment that occurs on their university commute.**<sup>vi</sup>

Focusing on addressing specifically PSH in higher education, OSN asked university students about their experiences of PSH and the impacts it had on their studies. In addition, the OSN Survey with graduate students investigated the effects of off-campus harassment as this is also university responsibility.

#### Research on the Solution

The NUS Hidden Marks Report in 2010 highlighted the need for an improvement in procedures for reporting incidents of sexual violence and hate crimes. A subsequent NUS survey in 2014 found that **more than half of students were unaware of reporting procedures for unwanted sexual advances and comments.**<sup>vii</sup> The Universities UK (UUK) taskforce and the OfS both also underlined the need for better reporting and data collection on sexual violence and hate crime across universities.<sup>viii</sup> The UUK and NUS recommendations heavily focus on the need for a zero-tolerance culture, suggesting that the solution to the problem is punishing individual students. In contrast, the OfS praises

programmes which attempt to achieve cultural change. It notes that training and awareness-raising must happen at the beginning of the year. Otherwise, it is too late, since standards of what is acceptable behaviour have already been established.<sup>ix</sup> Focusing too heavily on punitive measures could undermine this training and awareness-raising by suggesting that the problem is with individuals and not the culture which allows for and normalises PSH.<sup>x</sup> Consequently, OSN examined the changes that students themselves are seeking within their universities.





## Existing Schemes and Solutions

There are several existing schemes at universities across the UK which aim to raise awareness and tackle harassment, hate crime and sexual violence. Many schemes have enacted positive change, although they tend to lack coherence or a systematic approach to the whole institution.<sup>xi</sup> Campaigns such as *#NeverOk* at the University of Bath or *Speak Up! Stand Up!* at the University of Manchester combine harassment with hate crime or bullying.<sup>xii</sup> These two campaigns focus on voluntary bystander training and promoting their platforms for reporting and seeking support.

“ **Telling student services may be an option, however as street harassment is so common it feels unlikely that it would be taken seriously.** ”

*The Good Night Out Campaign* had success with training bar staff to intervene and respond to incidents of sexual harassment and assault.<sup>xiii</sup> When the OfS evaluated funded schemes, they discovered that **communications teams at universities often did not want to discuss sexual violence openly for fear it could damage student recruitment.**<sup>xiv</sup> The existing work done by the NUS, UUK and OfS provide an insight into the extent of PSH in higher education and the existing schemes to tackle it.

The OSN Survey went further by asking students about their experiences of

“ **The university allows people to report sexual assault/hate crime however I would never feel that PSH would be seen as serious enough not to just be dismissed, even when it occurs on university campus.** ”

PSH, their perception of university campaigns and what they think needs to change. Besides, OSN investigated if students knew about existing schemes at their Universities to tackle PSH and their perceptions of it. Specifically, OSN investigated whether students could name where they would go to report PSH. This is particularly relevant considering that previous research, as well as existing university policies, have tended to merge PSH with all sexual violence or bullying. OSN aimed to fill this gap and find out whether students considered PSH to be included in their university sexual violence schemes, considering that PSH is often considered an inevitable, everyday occurrence.

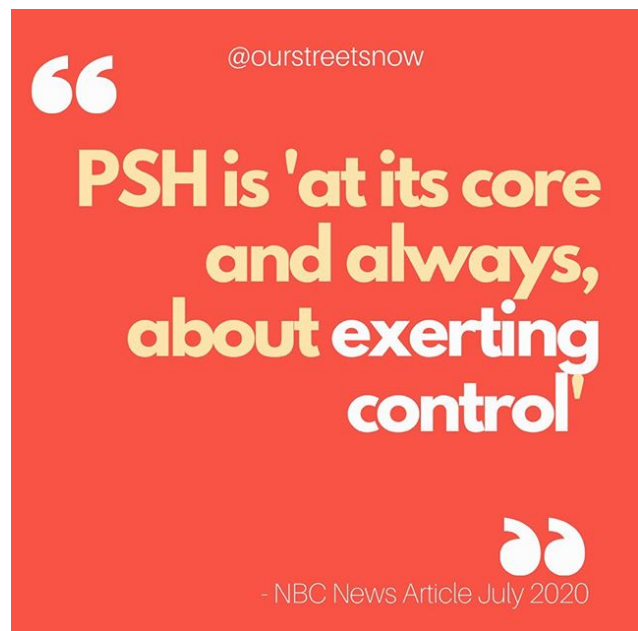




## Secondary Education

### Research on the Experience of PSH for Young People

The Plan UK Report into street harassment in 2018 is an extensive piece of research which found that **38% of girls experience verbal harassment at least once a month and 35% have been sexually harassed while wearing their school uniform.**<sup>xv</sup> This is not only a problem for young people in the street, as 59% of girls and young women (13-21 year-olds) had faced sexual harassment at their school or college in the past year.<sup>xvi</sup> Therefore, this is a huge problem for secondary school pupils that can start from a young age, with 1 in 8 girls saying their first experience happened before they turned 12.<sup>xvii</sup> A key part of this problem is that adults tend to respond to reports of harassment in a way that helps perpetuate a culture which normalises PSH or blames those who experience it.<sup>xviii</sup> **64% of girls (11-16 year-olds) say that their teachers sometimes or always tell them to ignore sexual harassment.**<sup>xix</sup> The OSN Survey strived to collect testimonies from pupils about their experiences of reporting PSH to staff, whether positive or negative. The goal was to understand the challenges students were facing when reporting, as well as any changes they suggested for reducing barriers.





## The Importance of Education

In 2015, **84% of girls affirmed that they wanted education on violence against women and girls, nevertheless, only 47% of girls said they were being taught about this topic.**<sup>xx</sup>

The government guidance on the new mandatory PSHE and RSE curriculum states that by the end of secondary school, pupils should know 'what constitutes sexual harassment and sexual violence and why these are always unacceptable'.<sup>xxi</sup> This is important as research shows that education on healthy relationships means young people are more likely to disclose abuse.<sup>xxii</sup> There is no specific mention of PSH or street harassment within this guidance.

“**There should be some level of education, especially when we have to take public transport home at a young age.**”

### Best practice for education

Before working with pupils, it is important to guarantee the necessary safeguarding procedures are in place and to ensure a whole-school approach.<sup>xxvi</sup> It is also essential to create a safe environment for pupils to speak their mind. They should be reminded of ethical considerations, such as the limits of confidentiality. Also, educators need to signpost support services when necessary.<sup>xxvii</sup>

When discussing PSH with young people, it is more impactful to explore the root causes of this issue with the pupils, rather than to instruct them on

The government guidance, from the perspective of OSN, does not go far enough for two reasons. Firstly, bystander intervention is proven to reduce the perceived harm of an incident, but it does not suggest that schools give bystander training to pupils.<sup>xxiii</sup> Secondly, it doesn't acknowledge that teachers are perpetuating the problem and that more staff training is an essential part of the solution. By working with staff, the *Speak Up/Out Bystander Training Programme* in schools found that **staff failed to engage with the impact of PSH and often leaned towards victim-blaming narratives.**<sup>xxiv</sup> Furthermore, *Girlguiding UK* recommends the engagement of young people in the development and delivery of educational tools, which is why the OSN Survey directly asked pupils how they think schools should teach about PSH.<sup>xxv</sup>

“**We were just told to wear longer skirts and skin-tone bras**”

what is right or wrong.<sup>xxviii</sup> In workshops around consent, pupils should be allowed to discuss or disagree with each other and to interrogate their own belief system.<sup>xxix</sup>

The OSN Survey looked into what schools are already doing regarding PSH and pupils' experiences of reporting PSH. It also explored the changes pupils want to see in their schools. All this helped in shaping the OSN Education Programme.



## Section Four: Methodology

The gaps in the literature, explained above, guided the objectives of both OSN surveys. One survey focused on pupils' experiences of being taught about PSH and of discussing it with staff. The other survey focused on the location and nature of PSH, its impact and graduate students' knowledge or perceptions of existing policy. **Both surveys allowed participants to give suggestions for what they would like to change.** These materials and the research followed were the first stage of OSN current work to tackle PSH through education.

OSN recommendations and resources for education institutes must be guided by the opinions and experiences of the community of people who have largely experienced PSH themselves. That is the reason for carrying out the surveys. OSN shared both surveys through the social media platforms Instagram, which has over 20,000 followers, Twitter and Facebook. More so, OSN distributed both surveys to all those following the progress of OSN petition and campaign through a Change.org update. As a result of the way both surveys were platformed, it does not necessarily represent the views of the wider population but rather the views of those who are largely aware of PSH and who are likely to have lived experiences

themselves. **The participants most likely had a much higher than average knowledge of what constitutes PSH,** its impacts and concepts such as intersectionality, misogyny and victim-blaming. While both surveys were intended to inform OSN campaigns and work, OSN felt a responsibility to publish the surveys' results through this report for the respondents, educators and society at large to be able to see students' experiences of PSH in education settings.

In terms of respondents' demographics, the survey target to current secondary school pupils and recent school leaver had 153 responses. 51 of these were recent leavers, 46 were in the sixth form, 32 were in years 10-11 and 22 were in years 7-9. 11% described their school as private or fee-paying, which is slightly higher than the national average. The survey targeted to university students, recent alumni and university staff had 100 responses. 77 were current undergraduate students, 7 were postgraduate students, and 16 were recent alumni.



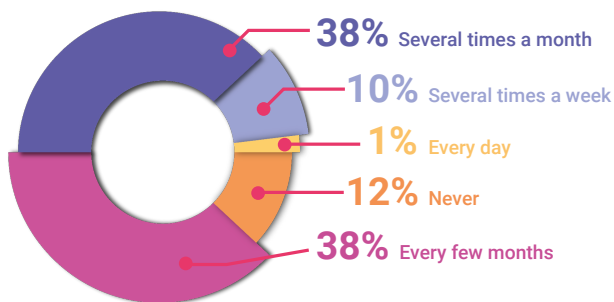


## Section Five: OSN Surveys' Findings

### Higher Education

#### Public Sexual Harassment Experienced by Students

Students were asked whether they had experienced PSH and to elaborate on the nature and location of their experiences. Despite the variation in frequency, PSH appears to be a consistent and recurring element of student life. 84% of the OSN Survey's participants had experienced PSH as a university student. The prevalence of PSH experienced by students ranged between every day (1%), several times a week (10.1%), several times a month (38.4%) and every few months (38.4%). **Only 12.1% stated they never experienced PSH as a student.**



**Respondents mentioned off-campus and city-based stories of PSH twice as many times as PSH on campus.** Almost half (49%) of students said they had been targeted with unwanted harassment while travelling to university or around their university city. 25% said they had been harassed

in clubs or bars and half of those specified that it took place in Student Union clubs or bars or on nights out organised by their university. 24% said they had been harassed on the campus itself or within university buildings and 4% mentioned PSH incidents within sports or on sports nights.



**Usually the supporters for the opposition who come to watch and will yell at the girls on my team and me**



When asked to elaborate on their experiences, students most frequently described name-calling, comments or whistling, often while commuting to or around their university campus. Unwanted touching, such as groping, occurring in the Student Union clubs was also a frequent type of harassment and was identified by twelve students.



**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**





Persistent unwanted sexual advances, jokes or attention, including by fellow students in the class, were described by six students. Several students mentioned other forms of harassment, such as cars slowing down and beeping, staring, being followed or rape jokes or threats. Five students described their experiences of PSH as homophobic and racist.

“ **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'** ”

### Impact of PSH

OSN Survey's answers showed that a multitude of impacts, including short-term and long-term effects, often follow after students were subjected to various forms of PSH.

“ **Even harmless comments can trigger thoughts about sexual assault when you've had those experiences.** ”

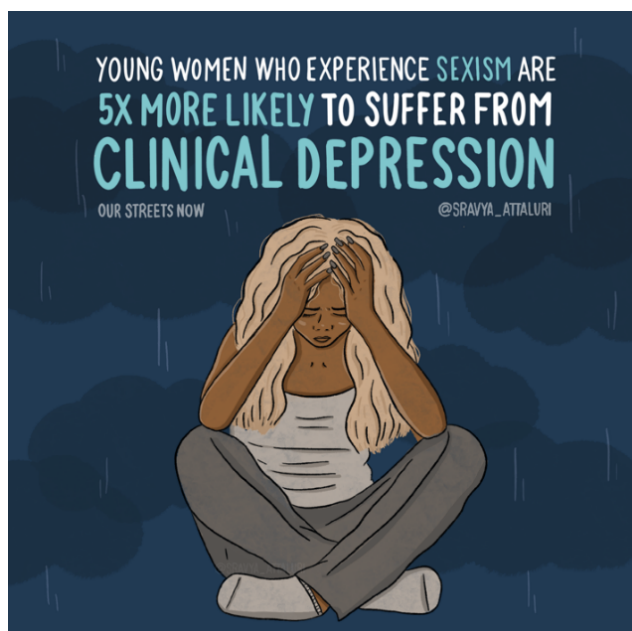
“ **Society activities are often in the evening and so always pose the threat of walking home alone, because of the constant fear of street harassment.** ”

Respondents specifically mentioned feelings of guilt, self-blame or embarrassment, following instances of PSH.

Most prominently, students declared that they experienced negative impacts on mental health and wellbeing, often citing a limited sense of safety and reduced self-worth as a result of PSH.

These extensive impacts of PSH affect students' education. Certain students described being distracted from schooling due to distress from or fear of PSH. In contrast, others mentioned the inability to complete specific tasks (e.g. groceries) or attend university activities (e.g. at societies) as a result of constant fear of harassment. Nearly twenty students stated impacts on their daily routines, such as having to change behaviour or university route as a result of PSH.

Similarly, several students reported change or discomfort in clothing following or in anticipation of another occurrence of PSH.





**“ I changed every route between classes I knew I might see him...I went out of my way to not spend time in common areas he may be. ”**

Even further, certain students avoided their university campus, stayed at home or isolated themselves following

incidents of PSH. Moreover, PSH also appears to influence personal relationships and friendships as students cited trust issues or an emotional burden of constantly having to look out for female friends. Lastly, PSH can trigger past experiences, including those of sexual assault, further taking a toll on students' mental health and wellbeing.

### Knowledge of Higher Education Policies

OSN Survey asked students whether they knew of any university schemes or policies relating to PSH. Just 37% could name a policy or an action that their university had taken to tackle PSH. Various forms of zero-tolerance policies were among the recurring schemes mentioned, including the **#NeverOkay** scheme at the University of East Anglia or the **#NoExcuses** campaign at Edinburgh University.

**“ The response I received from attending a session was that I was wasting their time and needed to ‘move on’ ”**

However, 43% of those who knew about a scheme criticised it in their answer. Criticisms included a weak presence on campus, poorly advertised policies, limited capacity for supporting victims and lack of policy regarding the PSH

**“ There is the campus patrol however, they are not in town and so offer no protecting to students living off campus ”**

When asked if they would know where to go to report or seek support 53% said no, 27% said yes and 19% speculated about where they might go but were unsure about whether that would be the right decision. For example, many students named services designed for tackling sexual violence but said they wouldn't feel comfortable reporting PSH there as it might not be taken seriously.

**“ An understanding that showing a video about a cup of tea and consent during freshers week is not even nearly enough ”**



## Students' Priorities for Change

When asked how they would like to see universities tackling the issue of PSH, OSN could identify many common themes from the responses.

“ **I would like to see universities offering stronger support and solidarity with their students** ”

The most frequent priority, mentioned by almost a third of students, was that universities must organise training on consent in some form. 29% suggested

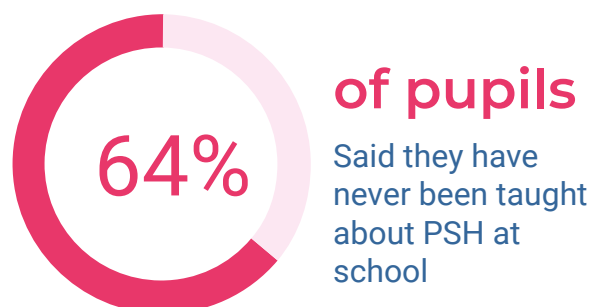
an awareness-raising campaign which should tackle the way PSH is normalised. 24% considered improved reporting mechanisms which should be visible and easy to find. 17% referred to a zero-tolerance policy with consistent punitive measures, and 15% suggested better support or counselling for those who have experienced PSH. Other recurring suggestions included staff training, bystander initiatives, policies on city harassment, administrative support such as mitigating circumstances forms and education on how to respond to PSH.

## **Secondary Education**

### Teaching

OSN Survey asked if students were taught about PSH at school. **64% of the respondents said no**, 14% said rarely or once, and 5% said yes. 10% of pupils mentioned receiving education on consent related topics, but not PSH and **5% answered they were taught about PSH but only within the context of victim-blaming narratives** such as wearing longer skirts or avoiding strangers.

“ **They definitely talked about not engaging with strangers, but there was no explanation of what sexual harassment is, more just advice about staying safe** ”



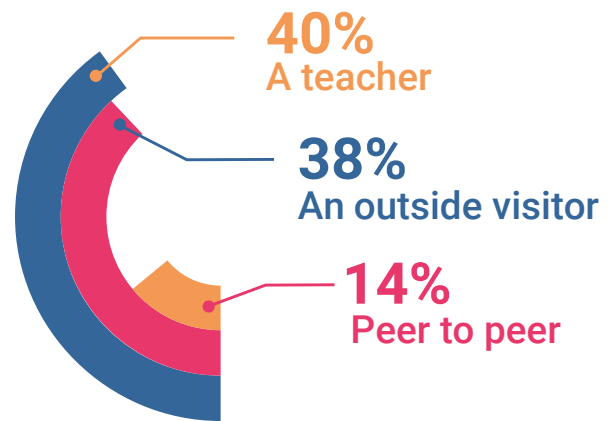
When asked about their suggestions for teaching PSH, pupils expressed that they wanted PSH to be a part of the curriculum as much as possible, with many highlighting how it should be taught regularly and from a young age because this could help prevent it. The most common suggestion was during lesson time or as part of the PSHE curriculum with many students declaring a preference for small groups, interactive discussion and the chance to ask questions. Assemblies were mentioned but much less frequently.



“ **Teaching people different forms of sexual harassment and the effects they have on people. Making it less taboo to talk about by encouraging students to talk freely without judgement** ”

In terms of lesson content, the two most frequently mentioned priorities were deterring pupils from becoming perpetrators and raising awareness of what PSH is and the seriousness of it. Other preferences addressed often were tackling victim-blaming narratives, encouraging empathy for those who experience PSH and teaching on how to respond or stay safe from PSH. Stated less frequently were encouraging reporting of PSH and bystander intervention. 40% of pupils said they would prefer a teacher to teach about PSH in school.

38% said an outside leader and 14% said peer to peer teaching.



Several pupils highlighted the importance of the process being ongoing and integrated. Therefore, a teacher would be more suitable, or a combination of an outside visitor with follow-ups from teachers.





## Reporting

Most respondents had never reported or discussed PSH with staff before. Specifically, 47% of students said they would not report an incident of PSH to their school either because they wouldn't know how or didn't think they'd be taken seriously. Only 24% of students said they would know how to report PSH while 28% said they were unsure whether they knew how to or questioned whether they would report it or not.



The most common reason for not reporting was that students felt the school would do nothing, followed by the fact that they didn't think it was serious enough to report at the time. Forty-one pupils said that they had reported or knew someone who had.

**“ I reported a guy who was a persistent offender for six years straight...nothing ever happened. I probably reported him over ten times. ”**

Only seven of them described a vaguely positive or positive response after reporting. Fifteen respondents mentioned that little or no action was taken. Similarly, five students said that their report was dismissed or laughed off. Four students mentioned victim-blaming responses. Three students said they were forced to continue being around their harasser and one student mentioned that the teacher tried to fix the situation with the boys but made it worse.

When asked how they would like to be able to report PSH, students mostly talked about wanting to make the reporting process comfortable. Many students mention the importance of anonymity and other ways to reduce embarrassments, such as using forms, online reporting or a box system. Students also desire the process to be clear, simple, easy and not to have too many steps.





“ **It is very important that the person coming forward can rely on the person they speak to and know their privacy will be protected**

”

A few cautioned against blanket procedures because each case is so different, and individuals might get lost in a formal process. Finally, students require it to be very visible and obvious that staff are trained and can respond well to reports of PSH. Although some mentioned that they would prefer to talk to a teacher of choice, all staff should therefore know how to respond.

## Section Six: Discussion

According to Plan UK, adults tend to underestimate the extent of harassment that young people face or can reinforce victim-blaming narratives.<sup>xxx</sup> This was evident across multiple questions in both surveys. Both pupils and university students were reluctant to report incidents of PSH because they feared they would not be taken seriously or had not been listened to in the past, **with almost three-quarters of secondary pupils saying they had a negative response when they reported PSH.**

“ **Their response was for me to ignore the boys that were groping me because boys will be boys**

”

When students named their university policies, many were confused about whether the policy would cover ‘just harassment’. Both in research and policy, PSH must be treated as a distinct issue to encourage students to speak up, rather than trivialising it. OSN’s recommendations reflect this.

OSN Survey’s findings on where university students experience incidents shows that universities must take action against off-campus PSH, which was mentioned twice as many times as PSH on campus. Previous research has tended to focus on campus-based incidents between students. This may have reinforced the message that the everyday aggressions or sexualisations which women and girls face on their commute are inevitable or normal.





While PSH is a less severe form of gender-based violence, it can have a profound and impact on wellbeing and access to education with some participants telling us that they avoided campus or university activities due to PSH. This is a particular concern for young people who are already at risk of isolation if they have moved away from home, being the responsibility of universities to take action. OSN Survey findings showed that **schools are not only excluding an important topic from PSHE but are also reinforcing victim-blaming narratives.**

“ **Two boys in my art class would regularly take objects from around the art classroom (often large, fake flowers) and try to insert them up my skirt** ”

Pupils consistently mentioned that they were taught more about how to stay safe than about why PSH is wrong. This message reinforces the harmful narrative that it is the responsibility of the victim to avoid being harassed. Similarly, only 37% of OSN Survey university participants knew of a university policy around PSH and almost half of those criticised that policy in their answer for being ineffective or invisible. Participants displayed confusion around whether the schemes that did exist included an official policy on PSH rather than focusing on more severe forms of sexual violence. Students who were aware of university policies most frequently mentioned zero-tolerance measures, which is a problem for two

reasons. Firstly, it undermines the need for cultural change and educational work. Secondly, it relies on reporting, but **over half of the students said they would not report an incident of PSH to their university.** Both OSN Surveys results suggest a distinct gap between how schools and universities are responding to PSH and how young people want them to take action. Secondary pupils expressed their eagerness for education on PSH to become a regular and consistent part of the school curriculum. **Currently, however, most pupils are never taught about it at all.** Their suggestions - that PSH education should focus on discouraging boys from perpetrating PSH and raising awareness about the severity and impact of PSH - go far beyond the way they described to be currently taught. Pupils' priorities for a PSH reporting policy at school mostly focussed on ways to reduce embarrassment, which is indicative of the continuing stigma and shame surrounding PSH. A change in how PSH is taught therefore may both deter boys from harassing and encourage victims to speak up if they believe they will be taken seriously.

“ **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** ”



The top priorities for university students included an increase in education regarding consent as well as raising awareness to stop the normalisation of PSH. As mentioned before, most university policies focus on zero-tolerance and reporting, which

were also mentioned by students and are important. However, first and foremost, **students have expressed their eagerness for a cultural shift.** Punitive measures do not acknowledge the cultural context which allows unacceptable behaviours to flourish and assumes that all perpetrators are students themselves.

## Section Seven: Conclusion

There is a distinct and dangerous gap between how schools and universities are responding to PSH and how young people want them to take action. The most frequently mentioned priority for change in both surveys was about education to promote cultural change and prevent PSH, which exists at very few schools or universities. Schools and university settings often ignore PSH when discussing harassment. Pupils mentioned that policies on harassment are more likely to focus upon on inter-pupil relations and in universities, a distinct focus on sexual assault is much more prevalent.

Educational work in schools must go further than the minimum government guidance of telling pupils that harassment is unacceptable. The aim shall be on challenging the cultural myths that are causing this stigma and allowing the behaviour to continue. Punitive measures do not acknowledge the cultural context which enables unacceptable behaviours to flourish and assumes that all the perpetrators are students themselves. The OSN Survey with university students found that this was not the case: mentions of PSH on the way to, from and between higher education facilities were twice as common as mentions of harassment on the campus itself. Universities policy do not acknowledge this. OSN considers better reporting a very relevant recommendation, but universities should also be collecting data on the PSH that students face. Measures which deal with the aftermath of PSH are also necessary, but they must be accompanied by actions which deal with prevention mechanisms for travel to, from and between university campuses, not just once students have arrived.







## Section Eight: OSN recommendations

It is crucial to challenge the cultural myths that are causing PSH-related stigma and allowing the behaviour to continue.

### Secondary Education

1

#### Include PSH as part of the RSE and PSHE curriculums

- Teach what constitutes PSH and the impact it has on women, girls and marginalised groups
- Engage all pupils as potential bystanders and teach bystander initiatives
- Run a visible school campaign which aims to tackle the stigma around PSH

#### Education for staff

- Train staff in how to intervene in incidents of PSH
- Train staff how to respond if a pupil reports PSH
- Work with local specialist support services to better support pupils who are distressed following an incident of PSH

2

3

#### Take action against PSH outside of school

- Encourage pupils to report PSH and monitor the locations where it is happening
- If many pupils report PSH at a particular location near school, arrange for a teacher to be present before and after school when pupils are travelling

#### Take action against PSH which occurs in school

- Introduce a clear reporting process with designated staff which allows pupils to remain confidential if they choose to
- Develop a clear policy to tackle PSH, distinct from a school bullying policy

4





## Higher Education

### 1 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

### 2 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

### 3 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

**PUBLIC SEXUAL HARASSMENT IS  
EVERYWHERE.**

**WE WON'T REST UNTIL IT IS  
NOWHERE.**



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Get involved in the #NeverOK campaign : Speak Up! Stand Up! Campaign  
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