

Hidden Marks: a study of women students' experiences of harassment, stalking, violence and sexual assault

Executive Summary (Wales)

Key Findings

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

The full report can be read here:

http://resource.nusonline.co.uk/media/resource/NUS_Hidden_Marks_web_1.pdf.

10 per cent of respondents (208) were women studying in Welsh institutions. In the following two sections we provide the specific statistics for the Welsh responses.

Women students' perceptions of safety

- 1) More than one third of respondents in Wales (33 per cent) reported they sometimes felt unsafe when visiting their university or college buildings in the evening. This is in notable contrast to perceptions of safety during the day when 98 per cent of students always or mostly felt safe.
- 2) Women in Wales were most likely to feel unsafe in the evening at their institution because of concerns about inadequate lighting (71 per cent) and because they felt unsafe alone (79 per cent).
- 3) Students in halls of residences reported feeling unsafe because of concerns with security breaches.

Prevalence of violence and harassment

- 4) Women students reported experiences of a range of unwanted behaviour during their time as a student, ranging from 'everyday' verbal and non-verbal harassment, to serious episodes of stalking, physical and sexual assault:
 - a) 12 per cent of survey respondents has experienced a serious physical or sexual assault during their time as a student.
 - b) Over two thirds of women students (72 per cent) have experienced some kind of verbal or non-verbal harassment in and around their institution. This kind of behaviour - which includes groping, flashing and unwanted sexual comments - has become almost 'everyday' for some women students.
 - c) Nine per cent of respondents reported being subject to stalking.
 - d) One in ten has been a victim of serious physical violence.
 - e) 19 per cent have experienced unwanted kissing, touching or molesting during their time as a student, the majority of which has taken place in public.
 - f) Six per cent have been subject to a serious sexual assault, the majority of which occurred in somebody's home.

- g) A small number of student women (two per cent) reported that their finances have been controlled by family members or a partner, or that their educational choices have been influenced using threats of violence.

In the next three sections we provide statistics from the overall sample, since numbers from the Welsh sample were too low to break down to this extent. However, in the context of findings from previous research, and the similarity of the prevalence rates above to the national sample, we would expect the following experience to be typical for students in Wales.

Profile of perpetrators

- 5) The majority of perpetrators of stalking, sexual assault and physical violence were known to the victim.
- 6) Men were the majority of perpetrators of stalking (89 per cent) and physical violence (73 per cent).
- 7) Students were the majority of perpetrators in most categories, the majority of whom were studying at the same institution as the respondent. The exception to this rule is in the category of physical violence where just under half of offenders were students (48 per cent).
- 8) Respondents were most likely to report that the perpetrator was a student at the same institution in the case of stalking; 60 per cent were students and 49 per cent were at the same institution.

Reporting levels and factors influencing reporting

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

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

- 15) Respondents reported a range of different consequences of violence, stalking and sexual assault to their health, experience of learning, confidence, and relationships, with the most common consequence in any category being deterioration of mental health.
- 16) Experiences of stalking, violence and sexual assault can negatively affect a student's education; one in four victims of serious sexual assault stated that their studies had been affected by the incident, and one in seven victims of serious physical assault reported that their attendance had suffered.
- 17) Approximately one quarter of stalking victims reported that the obsessive behaviour they had been subjected to had affected their mental health, studies and relationships. Furthermore, students in this category were more

likely to report concerns if the behaviour had persisted more than three months.

- 18) Women who have been victims of serious sexual assault reported the most significant impact in nearly every area. Just under two thirds (63 per cent) said that their relationships had been affected, approximately half (49 per cent) reported issues with their mental health, and more than one in ten (12 per cent) said there had been consequences to their physical health. 13% had considered leaving their course.