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Violence at University Pilot Project

Student experiences of violence, harassment and discrimination

Key Findings

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Violence at University pilot project – Key Findings

The aim of this pilot study was to investigate the feasibility of measuring violence, in all of its forms, both within and beyond University Campuses. The study wanted to examine students' experiences of violence during their time as university students'. It was not a prevalence study, rather it was to assess whether such a tool could be developed, and potential prevalence work could be conducted. The core goals were to assess if:

- a) It is feasible to do this work.
- b) It helps to continue the sector wide Universities UK Changing the Culture Initiative and support the development of strategies at institutional level.
- c) It identifies any gaps with regard to tackling violence on campus.

The findings in this report are based on data gathered using the Violence at University Questionnaire. The full survey is available in the accompanying Appendix and the research team would welcome its use and any feedback from fellow HEI's.

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Introduction

In November 2020 City, University of London, in partnership with Universities UK (UUK), University of Surrey, De Montfort University and the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen), were awarded funding from the City, University of London, QR-Strategic Priorities Fund (QR-SPF) from Research England to undertake a small-scale pilot study on student experiences of violence, harassment and discrimination.

The purpose of the pilot study was to explore the feasibility of conducting survey research in this area. This included consideration of question design, survey structure and processes for survey dissemination. This study also sought to identify key themes relevant to student experiences of violence, discrimination and harassment to establish a basis for further exploration.

The core rationale of the research was to:

- ✓ Shine a light on students' lived experiences
- ✓ Highlight the scale and nature of the violence students encounter
- ✓ Develop evidence-led improvements to university policies and support

The team was interested in all kinds of victimisation that students experienced with regard to violence and wanted to know about a broad spectrum of different behaviours. These ranged from everyday microaggressions to interpersonal physical violence, both within and beyond the university itself.

University students are an important group in society but can be overlooked when it comes to research on crime and violence - this is despite young people being a high-risk group. This pilot project is the first step in trying to build a comprehensive picture of students' experiences of violence in the UK and to test the feasibility of gathering such a data set.

Background

Tackling violence, harassment and hate crime is high on the agenda for UK universities. Since 2010 the National Union of Students has conducted surveys that evidence problematic behaviours within university settings, including sexual harassment and unwanted sexual advances amongst the student population (NUS, 2010; NUS, 2014). Further research also provides evidence of staff sexual misconduct and predatory behaviours (NUS and The 1752

Group 2018), as well as racial and homophobic harassment, prejudice and (cyber)-bullying (EHRC 2019; Formby 2017; Myers & Cowie 2017).

The impact that violence, harassment and experiences of hate crime has on any age, but especially young people is considerable. Studies suggest not only long-term damage to self-esteem, emotional health and wellbeing (Myers and Cowie, 2019), but also increased propensity to contemplate suicide or self-harm, develop an eating disorder and engage in substance abuse (Stenning, MitraKahn and Gunby, 2013). Evidence also suggests that experiences of violence can negatively impact students' academic attainment, as well as negatively affect student retention and recruitment.

In light of this growing body of evidence, Universities UK (UUK) in 2016 launched 'Changing the Culture', a strategic framework to support universities to prevent and respond to violence against women, harassment and hate crimes affecting university students. Follow-up reports in 2018 and 2019 demonstrate that although some progress has been made, as Professor Julia Buckingham, UUK's then President, stated "there is much more to be done, with progress still variable across the higher education sector." (UUK 2019). Further work is therefore required to better understand HEI's awareness and prioritisation of violence, harassment and hate crime, and to identify what can be done to reduce incidences of violence within university settings.

One of the key gaps in understanding the prevalence of violence at university is sector wide data collection. This is also a problem for the student population nationally. The Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) ([Crime Survey for England & Wales](#)), the core victimisation survey that this pilot project essentially takes inspiration from, does not capture students when they are at university. The CSEW methodology uses households for its responses, therefore, students are rarely captured due to their living situation, for example living in halls of residence. There is a gap in knowledge to the levels of victimisation students experience whilst at university. Existing research is piecemeal at best but highlights some key themes that need to be included, for example Homophobic and Transphobic aggression (Rivers, 2016); Cyberbullying and Rape Culture (Shariff and DeMartini, 2016) Cyber-aggression (Simmons et al., 2016) Experiences of Harassment and Hate Crime (Wertans & Chakraborti, 2020) and the need to unpack the nature, prevalence, impacts and policy of cyberbullying in post-secondary institutions in a global context (Cassidy et al., 2018). The only way that a full understanding of violence, in all of its forms, from the online to the offline, the physical to the psychological, within HEI's, can be understood is to design a survey. In turn this can then be rolled out across the sector once the exact measurements/definitions of violence have been

established and piloted. Such surveys are already in use in the USA, Australia and the Republic of Ireland, but there is not yet a full survey available within the UK. This report details the results of the Violence at University Project, which established the feasibility of carrying out such work. It did not set to be a prevalence study, rather it is a feasibility study aimed at testing whether gathering such an evidence base is possible and what the students themselves understood violence to be.

Aims and Objectives

The main aim of the project was to conduct a pilot study to ascertain the feasibility of researching violence, in all its forms, on university campuses. Using three schools from the universities represented by the academic partners of the research team, the following core themes and sub questions were be considered and explored:

1. How prevalent is violence on university campuses?
 - a. How do university students recognise, experience and report/address forms of violence on university campuses?
 - b. What are the range of factors that support or hinder students from recognising and reporting/addressing forms of violence on campus?
 - c. How do digital technologies and communications alleviate, exacerbate and shift vulnerability to violence within universities?
 - d. In what ways do factors such gender, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation and gender identity affect the vulnerability of people to university violence?
2. In what ways do students understand, discuss or conceal their experiences of violence on campus?
 - a. How do these choices relate to narratives of violence on university campuses?
 - b. What are the range of relationships between students' experiences on campus and experiences prior to coming to university?

The core objectives were:

- To understand the prevalence of violence on the university campus test sites (City, Surrey and DeMontfort) and beyond if possible.
- To explore how students describe ideas/experiences of violence and narrate their experiences.
- To produce a questionnaire which can be used in future research to measure the prevalence of violence in the university setting.

- To bring together academic research collaboration with sector guidance, in the form of Universities UK and a global research centre, in the form of NatCen. A future project would need the cooperation of all partners to upscale and become sector wide. This study assessed the feasibility of this.

The planned activities achieved for the collaborative project included:

- To design a survey to measure the incidence of violence, in all of its forms on university campuses.
- To consult with students to make sure that terminology etc., was appropriate, to do this, the survey was cognitively tested using students recruited from the cohort of the host university.
- To disseminate the survey via Qualtrics to the undergraduate schools of the academic research team, with a desired response rate of at least 100-150 students.

The team initially wanted to conduct supplementary interviews with students to discuss conceptions, definitions and comprehension of violence but the Covid-19 pandemic prohibited this from happening which will be detailed later in the methods section.

The results were used to examine the feasibility of rolling out a larger piece of work across the sector to inform national policy development and institutional practice. To do this, the project brought together the expertise of NatCen (National Centre for Social Research) who will use the pilot to see how the project could be scaled to a much larger piece of work and Universities UK, the sector lead, who can ascertain the progress made on the Changing the Culture initiative and promote the lessons learned in terms of policy responses and institutional practice. The academic partners have established research networks and expertise in the area and are crucial in the survey redesign and tweaking following the results, response rates and core areas and themes that emerged and are reported below.

Methodology

The Violence at University Project is a quantitative pilot research project that ran from November 2020 until December 2021. The survey was designed by City, University of London, in collaboration with Universities UK (UUK), University of Surrey, De Montfort University and the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen). It was a feasibility study to investigate the possibility of measuring violence, in all its forms, within the HE sector and was not a prevalence study. It did not ask for rates or frequency of violence, but was designed to ascertain whether

it would be possible to measure violence in all its forms, picking up both subtle and unsubtle events.

The survey was designed to collect data on a wide range of student's experiences, including sexual violence; identity-based violence; bullying; harassment etc. It also sought to collect data on the settings in which respondents experienced violence, as well as information on perpetrators and self-reported impacts. Data were collected between February and September 2021. The survey sought to focus on the experiences of UK domiciled undergraduate and postgraduate students enrolled within Higher Education Institutions at the time of data collection who were over the age of 18.

The original research design also included a plan to carry out supplementary interviews, but the COVID-19 pandemic prohibited face-to-face interviews taking place. Given the sensitive nature of the research and ongoing disruption to students as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the research team decided not to proceed with supplementary online interviews. Instead, the survey was designed to include open ended responses to capture any supplementary thoughts, views and opinions. The survey question design and demographic categories were based on pre-existing large-scale social surveys, such as the Census ([Census - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](https://www.ons.gov.uk)). The research team consulted with the host university's Trans Intersex and Gender Non-Conforming and LGBTQ+ working groups to produce a range of inclusive options concerning sexual orientation and gender identity. In total, the survey took four months, seven drafts and consultation with students to produce the finished version.

The final survey comprised of thirty-five questions with each core sub section having an open text qualitative question to record further thoughts and observations. In line with the need for anonymity, it was not possible to work out who had written the open free text and consequently the quotations given are completely anonymised but give depth to observations gleaned from the breadth of the statistics. The survey was hosted on Qualtrics, which meant a simple URL linking students to the survey could be disseminated via email and displayed on the project web pages. The ethics for carrying out the research were approved by the Sociology Ethics Committee, City, University of London, reference ETH2021-1058.

The Covid 19 pandemic could have been a factor for unsuccessful data collection however, not being able to carry out supplementary interviews was the only setback the project faced. In total there were n263 responses to the survey. It is also relevant to note that not all participants answered every question. There was the option to move on through the questions

if a respondent did not want to answer in a particular topic area. Qualtrics software estimated an average time of 15-20 minutes to complete the survey.

All questions were **voluntary**, except for the opening question (age), which was used to filter out potential participants aged under 18.

Students who took part were asked about their own experiences. They could report any/all experiences of violence, including:

- **Ongoing, recent events** or those **in the past** (as long as they were a student at the time they happened)
- Things that happened **onsite** (e.g., in halls, lectures, or in the Students' Union, etc.)
- Things that happened **elsewhere** (e.g., at home, at work, or on public transport)
- **One-off incidents**, as well as **repeated or regularly occurring** behaviours
- Things that happened **online or digitally** (e.g., on social media, messaging apps, etc.)

Responses and data were gathered in progress, meaning submitted answers were recorded even if the survey was incomplete (this was highlighted to participants beforehand).

All responses were anonymous and identifying data were not requested by the researchers.

The results represent only what was reported by those who took part.

The survey results are not representative of the UK student population, and only represent those who responded to the survey as the survey respondents were self-selecting. The data collected is therefore subject to a high degree of self-selection bias as propensity to respond will correlate with interest in the subject matter. Responses were also collected from beyond the three partner universities so identifying the exact university that the student attended is not possible. For the purpose of the pilot this was a positive situation as the research team were information gathering the survey design and methodology to assess the feasibility of this type of project within the HE sector.

The full questionnaire used for the survey is available as an appendix to this report. The findings of the survey will now be presented alongside recommendations for the future research in this area.

Key findings

Demographic profile of respondents

In this section the full demographic profile of the respondents is presented. As mentioned, open ended, self-complete sections were included in the survey to make sure everything was captured. The demographics section was no exception. It allowed the team to evaluate the survey design and it got respondents used to the style of questioning and allow for clarification and articulation which might have been missed.

The analyses contained in this report are based on the 263 respondents who took the survey. Of these 188 respondents, the majority (71%) were aged between 18-25, with 11% aged between 26 - 35, 5% aged between 36 - 45 and 3% aged between 46-55. The remainder were over 56. It is important to note that 7 participants started the survey but due to being under the age of 18 could not proceed or complete it.

Of the 196 who provided information regarding their ethnicity, 98 respondents (50%) reported as White British, 25 respondents (13%) gave an open text White Other answer in their own words and 37 respondents (19%) gave additional i.e. 'in your own words' ethnic identities, and the following categories were also used Indian (n.17), Bangladeshi (n.6), Chinese (n.5), Black British (n.5), Pakistani (n.3).

The next question sought to identify religion. There were 168 responses to this with 87 respondents (52%) declaring no religion. Those who did declare responded in the following ways: 40 (24%) Christian (including Church of England, Catholic, Protestant and all other Christian denominations), 20 (12%) Muslim, 5 (3%) Hindu, 4 (2%) Jewish, 2 (1%) Buddhist, with 5 (3%) preferring not to say and a further 5 (3%) gave an open text other answer.

Of the 263 who provided information regarding their gender identity, 75% were female (199) and 14% were male (38), 9% of respondents identified in other ways, including non-binary (6), agender (4) Femme (4) questioning (3) genderfluid (2) trans man (2) trans woman (1) transmasculine (1) genderqueer (1). The remainder chose not to disclose.

There were 187 respondents who provided information regarding their sexual orientation, 121 (64%) were heterosexual, 27 (14%) bisexual, 7 (4%) gay, 7 (4%) pansexual, 7 (4%) queer, 5 (3%) lesbian, 4 (2%) asexual, with 7 (4%) preferring not to say and a further 2 (1%) gave an open text answer.

Of the 180 who responded, 44 (24%) reported as being disabled or having a long-term condition, with 10 (6%) being unsure and 6 (3%) preferring not to say. The next question asked individuals who had responded to having a disability or long-term condition were to describe their condition. This question allows for all categories to be ticked that apply, so some respondents could have more than one answer. Those who did, described their disability and conditions as, a mental health problem, such as depression, schizophrenia or an anxiety disorder, 29 (35%), a long-standing illness or health condition such as cancer, HIV, diabetes, chronic heart disease or epilepsy, 14 (17%), a specific learning difficulty such as dyslexia, dyspraxia or AD(H)D, 13 (16%), a social/communication impairment such as speech and language impairment or autism, 7 (8%) a physical impairment or mobility issues, such as a difficulty using your arms or using a wheelchair or crutches 6 (7%) or being blind or having a visual impairment, 2 (2%). Of note, 6 respondents (7%) had an impairment, health condition or learning difference that was not listed or captured in the survey, 5 (6%) stated that none of the categories applied and 2 (2%) preferred not to say.

Of the 212 who responded about university entrance, 23% were first generation students (48), 12% received free school meals (26) and 13% (28) were mature students. From the 177 responses provided, 14% (25) were international students with the majority being from the UK and home students. The same number responded to the next demographic, which was the current year of study. There was a relatively equal distribution of 1st, 2nd and 3rd year students (27%; 26%; 23%) respectively, with the remainder in other categories, including Foundation year, postgraduate study, placement year, 4th or 5th year, PhD' students or PGCEs.

There were 177 responses to the question on the broad subject area of current study, most students were Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences 42% (74), or Health Sciences / Health Care and Medicine 37% (65). There were 15 maths, engineering and physical/computer science student, 14 who studied business, management finance and law, with 6 in subjects not captured in the categories and 3 who did not want to state their area of study.

The majority of respondents, 49% were living at home or with family (88); 27% were in university accommodation (47). The remaining 24% (42) were either in privately rented accommodation or described living with partner(s) or friends.

As can be seen a wide variety of demographics were captured and initial fears that there would not be a viable response rate were overcome. Some of the questions would need a revisit and redesign, which shall be picked up in the recommendations section. The following sections discuss the findings of the survey:

- Sexual violence
- Identity based violence
- Broad experiences of other forms of violence
- Reporting violence
- Barriers to reporting

Sexual violence

As has been explained, this was not a prevalence survey but a feasibility of measurement study, so the reported results are of what students had experienced whilst they had been at university. As with the demographic questions respondents were prompted to tick ALL or ANY that applied to their experience. From the 263 respondents to the survey, 481 incidents of experiencing some form of sexual violence was recorded.

Of these 481 incidents the following experiences were reported:

- 66 incidents of unwelcome / inappropriate touching or physical contact, including kissing, hugging or cornering
- 79 incidents of inappropriate staring or leering that made them feel intimidated or uncomfortable
- 66 incidents of sexually suggestive comments, jokes or gestures that made them feel offended
- 10 incidents of indecent exposure (flashing) or inappropriate displays of the body
- 24 incidents of sexually explicit material (e.g. images, videos or posters) that made them feel offended
- 27 incidents of repeated or inappropriate invitations to meet or go out on dates, and/or inappropriate gifts
- 47 incidents of intrusive / inappropriate questions or comments about their private life or their physical appearance that offended them
- 12 incidents of sexual bullying or harassment (repeated behaviour)
- 21 incidents of requests or pressure for sex, or other sexual acts (21)
- 18 incidents of rape or sexual assault
- 19 incidents of sexually explicit emails, text messages, or other communication
- 30 incidents of repeated or inappropriate advances over email, social media, text message, or other communication
- 5 incidents of inappropriate video, photos or commentary of themselves distributed digitally (via social media, email or messaging service) without their consent

There were 51 counts that were not covered by the categories and 3 forms of inappropriate conduct of a sexual nature where the respondents specified what had happened in the open text section as they did not know where to put their response. From this question it is difficult to establish if some individuals are experiencing more than one form of sexual violence. But as has been stated, this research was to try to uncover the range and rates of experience and whether it is possible to capture this in the research process.

The next question asked the respondents who provided information to detail the location(s) in which they experienced sexual violence, there were 294 location counts:

- 31 incidents occurred on public transport
- 59 incidents occurred on the street / in public
- 64 incidents occurred in a club, pub or other social space
- 6 incidents occurred in a University teaching space (e.g., lab, seminar room, lecture hall, office)
- 21 incidents occurred in a University social space (e.g., cafe, bar, refectory, shops, students union)
- 27 incidents occurred elsewhere on university premises / campus (including halls of residence)
- 14 incidents occurred at their home / place of residence
- 19 incidents occurred at someone else's home / place of residence
- 13 incidents occurred at their workplace
- 40 incidents occurred in a digital environment (via mobile, messaging, social media etc.)

What could not be established was which of the reported experiences of sexual violence occurred in what location and this is something that could be potentially designed into a prevalence study. What was interesting was the volume of incidents and the variety of locations, with a majority of incidents occurring beyond the university campus.

The next consideration was who had displayed the behaviour, in total 192 counts of perpetration of sexual violence were identified:

- 8 were a partner / someone a respondent was intimate with
- 3 were a family member
- 36 were someone known to them / in their community or social group
- 52 were a fellow student at the university
- 4 were a staff member at the university

- 9 were someone at work (boss, colleague, employee, customer, etc.)
- 75 were someone they did not know
- 5 preferred not to say

Again, there was no way to link the perpetrator to the form of sexual violence and it would be wrong to make assumptions. However, it does lead to questions that would need to be factored into future research design, for example, what is the link between the 75 counts of unknown perpetrators and the type of sexual violence? This would be an interesting pattern to establish and shows that the measurement of sexual violence is possible but the complicated patterns need unpacking.

As mentioned, the data were gathered during the Covid 19 Pandemic, so there was a conscious effort to include an open text, qualitative section in order to gather information that would have been gathered in face to face interviews. Question 16, asked for the elaboration of the experience of sexual violence and asked for any more details that the respondents wanted to add in their own words. In total 1,428 words were written in qualitative text and some examples are presented below:

“One experience was when an acquaintance inappropriately hugged me as a greeting. She realised that she should have had consent and apologised profusely which was much appreciated. The other experience was when my housemates in halls asked me intrusive questions and harassed me about my sexuality.”

“Sexually explicit comments and grabbing in SU nightclub toilets. Explicit intrusive sexual questions from straight housemates to me (a lesbian).”

“The uni I go to has a rape culture on campus, with a Facebook group dedicated to posting photos and videos of other students on there kissing and undertaking sexual acts. People then comment on them, rating people or making comments about their appearance, often tagging their profiles. Rape is seen as a joke, so a lot of the comments joke about a video showing rape, people having 'rape eyes' or running a 'rape train'. This group has been active for 6+ years and the uni is trying to pretend it doesn't exist. Joking about rape is common around campus too, and I have several friends who have been sexually assaulted, reported it and never heard anything back.”

“It would happen when I used to get dressed for a night out and people who stare at me in the tube.”

“From my experience the two biggest perpetrators of sexual harassment or indecent behaviour have been male students on nights out or in social spaces and male

customers at my job (I'm a waitress at a bar/restaurant) where inappropriate behaviour are both really common."

"I am fortunate enough to be highly cyber-safe and able to avoid online harassment. However, "in person" harassment at clubs, pubs, on campus social spaces and university "flat parties", lead to me ultimately no longer going out to those places. Being groped and leered at and sexually harassed is "normal" in these places and it shouldn't be. All I want to do is dress up nice and dance with my friends."

"Nothing major, just annoying and unnecessary. I was groped in a club a few times and whenever my flatmate got drunk or bored of his girlfriend he would ask me for sex and claim that I loved him and that he liked me and he knew he shouldn't like me because of his girlfriend. To stop it being awkward I always brushed it off as a joke."

"A student kept making fake accounts to try and message me. I was too scared to report him because I was worried he was going to hurt me if I did."

"It was just this group of guys who were speaking to my friend and refusing to go when she wouldn't give them her social media. Another time we were out near the smoking area and a different group of guys came over and asked what year of study we were in/how old we were (presumably to see if the age gap between us and them were ok) and when challenged why they needed to know they laughed and walked off."

"A lot of the incidences happened at the student union club. Most were pretty commonplace unfortunately. I have many female friends in particular who have had similar experiences (more rarely male friends but they talk about it less)."

"From a young age I've experienced it. Even dressed in school uniform. Men that find it okay to touch me or make me feel uncomfortable because I said no."

As can be seen from the selected qualitative responses, sexual violence took a variety of forms, occurred in a variety of locations, with a dominant theme being in the night-time economy. The fact that some viewed the behaviour as normal, expected behaviour is a cause for concern and is something our future project will address.

After allowing for qualitative details the next question sought to understand the impact of the experiences of sexual violence. In total, 1,551 words were written in qualitative text and a selection of these responses are presented below:

“These experiences have largely become normalised for me, although the more severe experiences (assault/abuse from a partner) had a greater impact on my mental health and I suffered from complex PTSD.”

“Some of the more minor things have not had an impact other than immediate short term discomfort/feeling of unsafety, but being sexually assaulted has caused me to have real difficulties with being intimate”

“The spam messages have not really bothered me. They did at first, but they have died down. The other comments made me lose a lot of respect for some classmates and made it difficult for me to enjoy events that happened to involve this other individual as I spent a lot of time making sure he did not try what he suggested.”

“I generally feel disgust and disbelief, sometimes even fear. But because this happens so often I've just become used to it, and that's sad and should never be the case.”

“Just makes me hate being a woman”

“Feel unsafe it makes me feel nervous to be out at nights or walk alone when its dark sometimes.”

“It was very uncomfortable – especially because it would happen in the evening and not during the day when there is light and transports are crowded.”

“It makes me feel dehumanised, I guess? Like I'm just an object walking around for men to look at. I'm more than just my body or my face but men have trouble seeing past that and it really makes you rethink your worth. For example when I've received good grades at uni or I've been promoted at work my peers will start rumours and presume I've only succeeded at something because I've slept with my lecturer or my boss etc and it's really disheartening and upsetting that just because I'm a woman and I'm sexually active means there's nothing else to me. It's almost like it takes over my entire identity at times, I'm so much more than “a pair of tits and a smile” to quote one of the guys I work with.”

“I went through a phase of thinking 'if you suggest sex or just agree to do anything any time someone comes at you then it will never be assault'. Trying to change this mindset meant I had quite bad paralysing anxiety around male friends who I know want more.”

“Has led to lack of trust in men around me, as I have to constantly be cautious of who I am around, since I don't feel safe. It's now hard to distinguish between people who have good intentions and those who don't.”

“Growing to hate my body, because it brought unwanted attention so much. Stopping going out to clubs and pubs to avoid being put in those situations and missing out on fun evenings of dancing with my friends. Growing to fear working with certain people because they made me so uncomfortable and nervous.”

“I don't approach people as much and try to wear an 'angry face' so that I seem less approachable.”

“It does make me more wary when out - I always want to be with someone or have an escape route.”

“Lowered my feeling of being safe to go out on my own. If I'm going out and walking somewhere I wear a coat that covers my outfit.”

These selected responses demonstrate the complexity of understanding the impact of sexual violence. A lot of the narratives are very much rooted in the fear of crime debate, that is the relationship between victimisation and the perceived risk of victimisation. This a core area of study within victimology and once again the normalisation comments are concerning. Detailing the self-policing that occurs amongst this age group and the expectation that sexual violence is going to happen will be unpacked further in our follow up project. Future research will definitely examine previous experience and how this relates to current life impact. It will also take into consideration the emotional responses to the impact of a violent experience. The self-reported mental health impacts are definitely an area that is under researched and not fully understood.

Identity-based violence

The next core area considered was incidents of violence that were identity based. This was particularly important because of the rise of hate incidents across the sector and the need to understand the importance of protected characteristics as detailed in the Equality Act 2010.

Like the question on sexual violence the participants were asked to record while they had been a student had they experienced any of the following in relation to their identity, or perceptions of their identity. From the 263 respondents 404 incidents were recorded with:

- 24 being treated less favourably than others (i.e., direct discrimination)
- 33 being left at a disadvantage compared to others (i.e., indirect discrimination)
- 34 excluded or ignored in a social, work or group situation
- 27 noting negative treatment after raising concerns / speaking up (i.e. victimisation)
- 26 noting derogatory name-calling, insults or slurs (directly - i.e., at them)
- 29 noting derogatory name-calling, insults or slurs (indirectly)
- 14 noting exposure to offensive material, messages, comments, images or displays
- 29 incidents of insensitive / offensive comments, toxic 'jokes' or rhetoric (directly - i.e. at them)
- 43 incidents of insensitive / offensive comments, toxic 'jokes' or rhetoric (indirectly)
- 29 incidents of subtle or nuanced hostile behaviours, such as microaggressions
- 30 reports of a hostile, toxic or humiliating environment
- 25 reports of abuse in any form (verbal, online, etc.)
- 9 reports of threats (including against person, property, etc.)
- 21 noting bullying or harassment (repeated behaviour)
- 8 incidents of physical attacks or assault
- 5 reports of other criminal acts - such as arson, property damage, graffiti etc.
- 13 incidents of hostile, hateful or offensive digital communications (via email, social media, text messages etc.)
- 4 incidents of sexual (i.e., intersectional) violence
- 1 report of any other hostile, offensive or discriminatory behaviour

The next question sought to understand which identity characteristics (perceived or actual) related to the disclosed experiences. Again, respondents were asked to tick all that applied and in total 179 were reported:

- 33 incidents of race, ethnicity, nationality, skin colour (e.g. racism)
- 8 incidents of religion (e.g., Islamophobia)

- 2 incidents of trans identity (e.g., transphobia)
- 20 incidents of sexual orientation (e.g., homophobia)
- 16 incidents of disability (e.g., ableism)
- 44 incidents of gender (e.g., sexism / misogyny)
- 23 incidents of background or accent (e.g., classism)
- 10 incidents of age (e.g., ageism)
- 5 incidents of family status (e.g., civil partnership, parenthood, pregnancy)
- 12 incidents of something else that concerned looks, body image, appearance etc.,
- 3 incidents where the respondent was not sure / didn't know
- 3 incidents that were none of the categories asked

The next area of investigation was to establish where this took place and all responses that applied could be ticked. In total 195 locations were reported:

- 10 occurred on public transport
- 23 occurred on the street / in public
- 24 occurred in a club, pub or other social space
- 14 occurred in a university teaching space (e.g., lab, seminar room, lecture hall, office)
- 20 occurred in a university social space (e.g., cafe, bar, refectory, shops, students union)
- 23 occurred elsewhere on university premises / campus (including halls of residence)
- 18 occurred at their home / place of residence
- 15 occurred at someone else's home / place of residence
- 11 occurred at their workplace
- 29 occurred in the digital environment (via mobile, messaging, social media etc.)
- 3 occurred somewhere else not listed
- 5 incidents respondents preferred not to say

The next consideration was who had displayed the behaviour, in total 162 counts of perpetration of identity based violence were identified:

- 12 stated a partner / someone they were intimate with
- 7 stated a family member
- 37 stated someone known to them / in their community or social group
- 41 stated a fellow student at the university
- 11 stated a staff member at the university
- 8 stated someone at work (boss, colleague, employee, customer, etc.)

- 34 stated someone they did not know
- 4 were not sure
- 3 stated someone else not listed
- 5 cases preferred not to say

Question 22, asked for the elaboration of the experience of identity based violence and asked for any more details that the respondents wanted to add in their own words. In total 817 words were written in qualitative text and some examples are presented below:

“I am Asian-White. I don't at all look Asian but I identify very strongly with my Asian side and have spent the majority of my life in Asia. I've found it very difficult when I constantly get questioned about this, as people often don't believe and feel the need to 'test' if I'm really telling the truth. People constantly throw around Asian jokes and make other comments without realizing the impact (discomfort etc) this can have. From a young age I've struggled with my cultural/ethnic identity and these endless experiences have just perpetuated this.”

“To be specific these were antisemitic comments made about/to me (I am white with Jewish ancestry) by a group of people who made antisemitic, Islamophobic, racist and misogynistic comments regularly”

“The most common perpetrators are men in these situations, I'm extremely privileged as I am white so I have never experienced any form of racism. I have experienced sexism and misogyny almost on a daily basis. I am also from a northern working class town which doesn't seem to go down well at university, I've been relentlessly tore down and made fun of because of my accent and made to feel like I'm stupid. I also have been tormented because I am bisexual, told that I'm not gay enough or called a homophobic slur or that I'm only going out with women for male attention.”

“I was living with four black guys in second year and they were quite racist to me.”

“I was in a group I was going to move in with, they didn't let me have much say in looking for a house and I was forced into the background but I figured it would be okay because we all discussed what we wanted. Then we got a house and I got put in an unsuitable room that didn't fit what I asked for, then got harassed and insulted over a month for standing up to myself, it caused immense unnecessary stress and I subsequently left that group. There was a repeat conflict with the group a few months later over finding a replacement because they neglected to find one, then complained when I put up adverts to find one, they were particularly unhinged in the way they communicated with me about this. When I brought up my mental health issues they

immediately dismissed them, despite me being very gentle and kind about theirs. Now I'm terrified of seeing them at university and am fearful to just come in. I don't know if it is personal, because of my mental illnesses, because of my darker skin, because of my much lower economic class background, but they never even gave me a chance."

"People shouting slurs and hate on the streets because of my ethnicity."

*"I'm only a quarter Korean, but I still look semi or like a mix. I've had people make fun of my eyes by them asking me what was wrong with them, I've been called slurs such as ch*nk and "slit eyed"."*

"The person in question insinuated that people from the LGBTQ+ community only get into uni so the uni can seem more diverse and not because of their individual skills etc.,"

As before there was a variety of incidents reported and the experiences of identity based violence were wide ranging and complex. Of note are the two mentions of class-based exclusion. Although class is not a protected characteristic, it is an area that students reported as contributing to experiencing negative behaviours towards them. Not fitting in, not feeling good enough, the stigma of being working class, all suggest that future work has to consider this element, especially as universities are pushing a widening participation agenda and are trying to break the barriers of class and elitism.

Once again, after gathering further qualitative details the next question sought to understand the impact of the experiences, in total 706 words were written and a selection of responses are presented below:

"It has made me paranoid and anxious, fearful of going out alone or trusting anyone I don't know very well."

"Loss of confidence and trust in the university and made me question whether I would go onto postgraduate study."

"Wanting to leave uni. Wanting to move out. Suicidal thoughts when comments came at a time I was already struggling."

"Exasperation due to lack of understanding."

"Again dehumanised and objectified I feel like I'm not taken seriously and I'm just trying my best to keep my head above water whilst at uni because I have to prove to everyone around me that I deserve to be here because they have this preconceived notion that because I'm a woman and because I'm working class I must have lied or cheated to

get here or the university is using me as the token poor working class student and I don't deserve to be here."

"Over the years I've learned to hide my origins and religious identity out of fear of hateful comments or actions."

"I'm afraid of seeing these people at university, we are in the same course and same year."

"It creates self-doubt with the ablism, I've always struggled with the feeling of I could work harder but if you are falling asleep and have a thrashing migraine the work you do is not going to be of much use to anyone and with the sexism it just feels gross like why would anyone need to say those things it makes me cross I can't really explain the combination of anger and disappointment you get from a sexist comment or inappropriate joke."

"I feel insecure about talking to the opposite sex if I don't already know them. I'm constantly analysing myself, so I don't seem annoying after being excluded for reasons that I don't know."

"It's made me feel a bit sad that casual racism still exists and the fact that I'm only a quarter and get this type of reaction sometimes, I can't imagine what those who are more than me must get in terms of abuse or comments etc.,"

"Feel worthless and like I'll never be respected"

"I continue to try discussing these issues with people I know who do not largely have malicious intent. However, this is often difficult."

"Heavily reduced self-confidence."

As before these narratives gave depth to the survey responses and the links to mental health issues are an area that will be explored in follow up work. Asking questions about violent experiences highlighted a need to address student wellbeing, as it appears to be the case that a number of those who have experiences identity based violence suffer in silence through fear of repercussion. This in turn has an impact on university study and desire to remain in the higher education system. An interesting element that students raised in this section is the notion of classism, or not being from the 'right background'. Although class is not a protected characteristic, background origin of ones family is clearly an issue for some who enter the HE sector, and again is an area that the team will pursue in the follow up work.

Broad experiences of other forms of violence

The last core area of questions considered broad areas of violence, including online, digital, bullying, other forms of harassment and discrimination etc. In total 252 incidents were reported and as above, respondents were encouraged to tick all that applied. This question enabled the research team to unpack the full spectrum of violence that occurred amongst students:

- 15 experiences of physical attacks, assault or abuse
- 35 experiences of emotional or psychological abuse
- 18 experiences of bullying
- 27 experiences of persistent unwanted behaviour causing fear or distress (harassment/stalking)
- 12 experiences of tracking / monitoring or surveillance causing anxiety or stress (harassment/stalking)
- 36 experiences of verbal abuse
- 14 experiences of threats (including threats of violence)
- 6 experiences of degrading / dehumanising treatment or torture
- 4 experiences of blackmail or exploitation
- 4 experiences of other criminal acts (such as arson, property damage, graffiti etc.)
- 7 experiences of threatening or menacing messages / communications (digitally enabled)
- 13 experiences of silent, hoax or abusive phone calls
- 16 experiences of upsetting online content or behaviour (such as trolling, flaming or abuse)
- 6 experiences of embarrassing or upsetting images or video of you being shared (online or digitally)
- 9 experiences of exclusion from online groups, games or activities
- 2 experiences of hate sites or groups being set up about them or abusive use of polls / apps
- 3 experiences of fake accounts or identities set up to embarrass, humiliate or cause distress
- 2 experiences of messages encouraging self-harm or suicide
- 5 experiences of revealing personal or private information about them (i.e., address) making them feel at risk (also known as 'doxxing')
- 6 experiences of online bullying or 'pile-ons'
- 7 experiences of any other forms of violence (including online or digital) - please specify

- 5 experiences where respondents preferred not to say

As before, the next area of investigation was to establish where these disclosed incidents of violence took place and all responses that applied could be ticked. In total 149 locations were reported:

- 5 happened on public transport
- 19 happened on the street / in public
- 16 happened in a club, pub or other social space
- 7 happened in a university teaching space (e.g., lab, seminar room, lecture hall, office)
- 14 happened in a university social space (e.g., cafe, bar, refectory, shops, students union)
- 13 happened elsewhere on university premises / campus (including halls of residence)
- 19 happened at their home / place of residence
- 11 happened at someone else's home / place of residence
- 8 happened at their workplace
- 30 happened in a digital environment (via mobile, messaging, social media etc.)
- 2 happened somewhere else not on the list
- 1 the respondent was not sure
- 4 incidents the respondents preferred not to say

Finally, in line with the rest of the survey, the respondents were asked who had carried out the behaviour, in total 124 counts of perpetration of broader forms of violence were identified:

- 16 stated a partner / someone they were intimate with
- 2 stated a family member
- 28 stated someone known to them / in their community or social group
- 27 stated a fellow student at the university
- 3 stated a staff member at the university
- 4 stated someone at work (boss, colleague, employee, customer, etc.)
- 33 stated someone they did not know
- 1 was not sure
- 5 stated someone else not listed
- 5 cases preferred not to say

Question 26, asked for the elaboration of the experience of broad areas of violence and requested any more details that the respondents wanted to add in their own words. In total 115 words were written in qualitative text and some examples are presented below:

“It’s horrifying. These guys would force me to watch videos of women being raped and murdered, and would laugh at my horrified reactions and the video itself, because “it’s just weird innit””

“There was an Instagram account pretending to be me to scam people into getting their money”

Question 28, sought to understand the impact of the experiences. In total 157 words were written in qualitative text and a selection of these responses are below:

“I became unwell, and had to stop my work and studies”

“It has destroyed the illusion of law and order and presumed safety - violence without cause or consequence is common in our society.”

“Extreme social ‘awkwardness’, loneliness, depression”

“It makes me nervous to trust other men. These guys were normal looking average guys who I got along with at first, but who devolved into incredibly scary people. If these average joe’s can watch videos of rape and murder and laugh, what else are they capable of??”

“I got physically ill and developed anxiety.”

“Feeling worthless, inadequate and anxious.”

“It was emotionally draining and I stopped going out to socialise in case I came across the people responsible.”

As before the impacts were linked to health deterioration, notably mental health disclosure. The themes of fear, distrust and loneliness/withdrawal from situations are once again reported. Wellbeing will take more of a centre stage with the follow up work. It is also interesting to note that the qualitative responses diminished at this point in the survey. This lack of extra narrative could be due to ‘survey fatigue’ and a drop in engagement. This is quite common when participants progress through a lengthy questionnaire and is something that will be headed in the next study.

Reporting violence

After uncovering a number of different forms of violence, who had been the perpetrator and what the impact had been, it was important to establish if any help had been sought.

Respondents were first asked if they had spoken to anyone about the experiences they had highlighted, in total 141 answered. With 47% saying they had, 46% saying they had not and 7% preferring not to answer.

To explore this further, the next question asked if the respondents had spoken to anyone at their university about their experiences, in total 76 answered, 26% had spoken to someone at their university, 63% had not, and 11% preferred not to answer. Even though this was the lowest response rate, this could mean that a large number of incidents were not related to being at university or on campus so it was felt that this question did not need to be answered. Again our future project will make the distinction between university and non-university experiences more distinct and will also seek to understand pre university life experience.

Nonetheless, the next question did ask for those that had spoken to someone at university about their experiences, who had they spoken to. As before all applicable categories were asked for. In total there were 48 identified sources of support sought:

- 9 spoke to a friend or fellow student
- 7 spoke to a student representative (e.g., a course rep, Students Union rep)
- 5 spoke to a member of teaching staff (e.g. lecturer, VL, module leader)
- 8 spoke to a member of professional staff (e.g. student support or admin staff)
- 10 spoke to a personal tutor
- 1 spoke to a senior tutor
- 2 spoke to someone referred through someone else (e.g., a charity or local service)
- 4 spoke to someone else not listed
- 2 preferred not to say

For those that answered they had spoken to the university in some capacity the next question asked to specify what support had been offered. All and any forms of support could be recorded and in total 25 avenues of support were noted:

- 1 stated the Student Centre
- 8 stated Counselling, Mental Health and Accessibility
- 2 stated the Students Union
- 3 stated the Accommodation Team
- 4 stated Disability or Neurodiversity Support

- 2 stated other not listed
- 3 stated the Health Centre
- 2 stated the Chaplaincy Team

The final section considered in the reporting series of questions asked for respondents to rate, overall, how positive or negative they found the support they received from the university. There were 25 responses, correlating to the 25 who had sought university support. The results to this were mixed:

- 2 found it very positive
- 3 found it quite positive
- 5 found it neither positive nor negative
- 5 found it quite negative
- 4 found it very negative
- 2 preferred not to say
- 1 said it did not apply to them
- 3 gave more detail / comments

The 3 responses who chose to add more detail noted the following negative experiences:

“Long waiting times.”

“They will not publicly give support at all for fear of their reputation. The only support I got was an offer for counselling, which as I have previously described is more harmful than good. My DSA tutor is the only helpful one, and she is not affiliated with the university at all. The uni exists within its own little bubble and operates like an old boys club, with everyone having each other’s back so nothing ever changes. I have had friends physically and verbally assaulted, racial attacks and comments, sexual assault, targeted harassment and physical violence, the list goes on. I have told everyone I can but nothing seems to change.”

“I had to fight to move out of accommodation, when experiencing bullying and harassment from flat mates.”

At this point in the survey response rates were not high enough to ascertain any potential trend in the data, but the responses do suggest that in some cases, those who did disclose to their university are not getting the desired support they seek. The follow-on project will take account of this and explore what support the students would like and what level of engagement from their universities they expect. It is important that universities ensure their policies and support

services are clearly communicated and well understood. As indicated in the sample of qualitative responses above, this is not always the case and there appears to be confusion on who to report to.

Barriers to reporting

The last section of the survey wanted to find out what potential barriers there were to disclosing and reporting incidents. As before the questionnaire asked for all reasons why they might be put off from sharing experiences openly or reporting to others to be noted. There were 323 responses to this question:

- 56 noted emotional reasons (e.g., Emotional reasons could mean feeling embarrassed, ashamed, scared, upset, traumatised; or perhaps not wanting to re-live your experience, or have to think about it again).
- 46 noted practical reasons (e.g. Practical reasons could mean not knowing how to report or who to talk to; perhaps not wanting to escalate things to police or other authorities; not having the time or not wanting the hassle of going through the processes involved in reporting).
- 59 noted social reasons (e.g. Social reasons could mean not wanting other people to know about your experiences, or treat you differently; or fear of 'causing a fuss' or causing friends and family to worry; fear about making things awkward socially, or any other social impacts you might be concerned about).
- 47 noted trust reasons (e.g. Trust reasons could mean thinking you may not be believed; perhaps concern there wasn't any 'proof'; not trusting that the information would be kept confidential; or perhaps feeling like no action would be taken at all, or it wouldn't result in any positive outcomes).
- 23 noted perpetrator reasons (e.g. Perpetrator reasons could mean that you were worried about the perpetrator finding out if you reported something; perhaps concern that the perpetrator was someone known to you, or close to you, or that they were someone with more power or authority than you; it may also be fear that people could side with the perpetrator, or the consequences would be worse for you than them).
- 68 noted personal reasons (e.g. Personal reasons could mean that you made a personal decision that it wasn't right for you to report it; perhaps you didn't feel it was 'serious' enough or important to report; you may not feel like you wanted or needed any help, or didn't feel 'badly affected' enough; or simply because you just didn't want to).
- 9 noted other reasons not listed

- 10 didn't know / were not sure why they didn't report
- 5 preferred not to say

The response to this question was interesting and challenged the initial hypothesis that fatigue had set in since the rate was up to the levels at the beginning of the survey. It could be the case that sharing, reporting and disclosing is one of the most challenging and under researched aspects of violence research, the follow up project will need to be mindful of this.

The final question was an open text question that allowed the respondents to reflect on what they thought could, or should have been done differently to support them or make a positive difference to them. Over 1,100 words were provided by participants in response to this question. This is interesting as it was the final question in the survey and (arguably) could have been predicted to receive the lowest number of responses for that reason. However, it garnered more than one sixth of the total words submitted, which indicates that this was an important question that participants wanted to contribute to. It gave a number of useful insights and themes, a selection is presented below:

“No - I did not speak up about violence until much after the situation had passed. The one time I reached out to a university tutor, he gave me really good support and signposted me to counselling, my GP and other support services.”

“There should be a support system where students who become absent from university are picked up on and offered help.”

“I ought to have made a bigger stand against the more upsetting comments about my ethnicity. The reasons I did not do not make justification for me. I left my course for a year and when I returned the individuals behind these comments had graduated. My new cohorts have been much better behaved but when I hear of my old classmates doing similar unsavoury stuff I do call it out. I wish I did it earlier.”

“Probably not, as it was mostly outside of university setting as such, but at parties or online spaces.”

“My university dealt with the situation poorly, despite numerous people coming forward, proof and media attention - we always felt like the people responsible were being protected”

“The union should stop being racist, while thinking of themselves as morally righteous antiracists.”

“Being from a majority group does not mean I don't experience marginalisation.”

“Some actual support from the university, proper counselling offered, and not going to a university where blackface parties, shooting clubs and animal abuse happen in the first place. This experience has put me off universities for good, I don't think I will ever return.”

“I just want universities to recognise that this is happening and that something needs to be done in terms of preventative measures not just support for victims afterwards. Also instead of looking at what happens to victims all the time maybe consider looking into why men commit these assaults in the first place and why people bully each other so much at uni and get to the root of it and stop it there.”

“I am not sure. Maybe greater education on what to do if something happens. A leaflet with helplines is fine, but when you feel very isolated and dissociative, a phone call feels a million miles away. I mean, I think I would have contacted the police more often if I wasn't quite so headstrong that I'll sort it myself. Maybe more advice on what to do and how to handle lower level or minor harassment. Especially with male friends in hidden locations. I have, however, been well supported by the police and university when I have reported certain incidents.”

“I honestly do not know... How can others help when they don't know that anything has happened?”

“Harsher discipline for people who harass and abuse others at uni.”

“A greater awareness of sexual assault and the impact it can have on people.”

“I think the university should have provided me with other options to help with the situation instead of escalating it against my wishes, which actually made the situation worse.”

“I just wish they were all taught to be better when they were young. I have no idea what can cause people to be so awful.”

“I think my university are ok, there’s a system where you can anonymously report situations which have made you feel uncomfortable/if something awful happens and there are a lot of support systems in place if you ever need help. Maybe it would help to have compulsory seminars or videos that students have to watch about consent/respecting everyone’s opinions, views, beliefs, race, sexuality etc just to remind them what is morally ok and what isn’t. Also students should be reminded that they can have a different opinion on subjects such as if their religion means they cannot support certain types of individuals and that they can have debates on it, but they should be respectful of other’s and not discriminate or exclude someone solely due to this.”

“People should be taught from a young age through to their adult life (in an age-appropriate way) about what consent really is. Freely given, reversible, informed, enthusiastic, and specific. Discrimination should also be introduced and discussed. If people feel uncomfortable asking questions then they won’t learn.”

“Educate men and socialise them to be more caring.”

“Police and criminal justice reform.”

The core theme that runs through these responses is the lack of clarity on who should be spoken to and what the support should be. It seems that students do not have a consistent understanding of how to report incidents of violence and seek support at their university. There are calls for education, but before university, which again points to the need to understand the student and their needs before they enter the higher education system. Future work would need to consider pre existing welfare needs of students. Experiences that happen before going to university are having an impact on the student experience. There are also responses that highlight and suggest that violence is a societal problems and university’s need support from other agencies such as the Criminal Justice System, in order to tackle the problem.

Conclusions

This study set out to test the feasibility of running a survey to measure violence in all of its forms. As reported above the response rate was better than hoped for and with 263 participants the team did gather enough data to evaluate the survey for future work and potential upscaling. A follow-on prevalence survey could be established to benchmark and monitor student experiences of violence in all of its forms and how it impacts on student well-being, whilst at the same time helping universities to establish targeted interventions that deal with the dominant forms of violence on their particular campus.

There are of course limitations, a number of demographics are underrepresented. There appears to be an element of survey fatigue towards the end with the last few qualitative narratives yielding less word count and response, but interestingly it also happens around the questions on disclosure, which it is apparent is the least researched and understood area within this age group. The open text narratives point to confusion, a lack of trust and a widely held belief that a university can do nothing. Clearly more work is needed in this area.

Violence is a huge concept to measure but it is possible to do so and consider the spectrum and range of incidents that fall under its umbrella. What would need to happen in future work would be the supplementary qualitative work. Such narratives could have pushed some of the themes briefly reported in the free text sections. From this study there are three core areas which have implications for future research design and will need further consideration: Survey Design, Demographics and Prevalence of some forms of violence over others

Survey design

As mentioned the survey received the most qualitative open text responses to the first set of questions, those on sexual violence. This could be due to the survey format/structure which could impact qualitative responses. In other words, it may be the case that questions about sexual violence were more likely to elicit a qualitative response simply because they appeared at the beginning of the survey. A drop in engagement as a participant progresses through a questionnaire is quite common (sometimes referred to as 'survey fatigue'). This theory can only really be tested by altering the order in which the topics are presented to participants to see if this makes a difference. For example, if the survey began by asking about Identity-based violence, the team could have found that this elicits the highest volume of qualitative responses. Ditto with questions around violence more broadly (including online). The questions will undergo a reordering/reframing, which will also help some underrepresented

student populations to engage with the work. For example, did having sexual violence as the first area of questions put some potential participants off of continuing/taking part?

Demographics

It may also be the case that the demographic of our participants (who identified mostly as White, British, Heterosexual Women, with no disability or religion, and no Widening Participation characteristics) has resulted in this uneven spread of qualitative responses and survey participation.

It is possible that this demographic is more likely to have experienced sexual violence than any of the other kinds of violence listed in this survey. Furthermore, the White British women were less likely than other groups to be minoritized as a result of their ethnicity/religion etc., and this could potentially explain the lower levels of identity-based violence focussed on these characteristics. Therefore, it is perhaps unsurprising that there are fewer responses to the open-text questions in the section that focusses on identity-based violence.

It does not, however, explain why there were comparably fewer responses to questions about violence more broadly (including online). Regarding the student population the relationship between online and offline violence needs to be unpacked further, for example, the reported incidents of online violence being committed by predominantly unknown perpetrators or acquaintances. How does this play out in the offline world? And if it does what is the relationship with the night-time economy?

Prevalence of some forms of violence over others

Another straightforward explanation for the uneven distribution is the prevalence of experiences of sexual violence among participants. It is well documented in previous research that sexual violence and misconduct has been described as 'rife' among university students. It is possible that the volume of qualitative responses to this section simply reflects that lived reality for participants, most of whom were women. It's also the case that the issue of sexual violence has been prevalent in the news media in the run up to the launch of this survey. Furthermore, there could be a campus bias if students who were responding had a high profile case happen on their campus, it could result in targeted interventions and more awareness of a topic.

Furthermore, in the year leading up to the survey launch, a string of 'scandals' around sexually inappropriate behaviour within higher education had been in the press. In addition, the 'Everyone's Invited' website – which provides an opportunity for open text testimony to be shared by survivors of sexual violence – had elicited 10,000+ responses. ([Everyone's Invited](#))

(everyonesinvited.uk) Alongside this, the campaigns that students' unions and universities also ran to raise awareness of sexual misconduct and encouraging students to come forward to make reports, in line with UUK's Changing the Culture Initiative (2016, 2017, 2019) and the Office for Students statement of expectations (2021) mean that the universities that this survey obtained student responses from, would have had some form of awareness raising initiatives occurring around the time the survey was live, so the subject matter would have been known to students. Especially if they were engaged with their students' unions and active campaigns.

This perhaps indicates that people want those spaces to share their experiences of sexual violence and opportunities to tell their stories in their own words. The open text options can therefore be a powerful tool within research design on this topic. Many participants did not use the open text boxes at all, but those who did tended to use them across the survey (i.e., wrote responses to multiple open questions). With the absence of the supplementary interviews, the full impact of qualitative data collection around violence in all of its forms remains untested, but the open text sections did give respondents a chance to have their voices 'heard'.

This survey has asked more questions than it has answered but has given some areas that do need follow up and further exploration, possibly within a welfare/wellbeing agenda. Finally, what some students view as trivial and not worth bothering anyone about, are precisely what needs to be understood. All forms of violence have been experienced and reported and we know this has a significant impact on the student, including their mental health and wellbeing and academic attainment. It is therefore vital, **that universities, working with their students**, must continue to do more to ensure all forms of violence are never part of students' higher education experience.

Recommendations

Violence, in all its forms, needs to be placed firmly on the agenda for the higher education sector. From the results of this survey a number of recommendations can be made for future research and will be carried out to upscale the project.

- A targeted sample is required, as this was a self-selecting sample, and there are clearly voices absent from the narrative, for example, male experiences. As noted the results could suffer from an element of selection bias and the high profile incidents of sexual violence that were occurring in society and at universities at the time of writing could explain the engagement with this area of questioning and the demographic who responded.

- The survey, whilst gathering invaluable data, would benefit from a reorder of questions and a revisit of the language used. Violence is an emotive term, and from the qualitative responses which detail impact and more broadly need, wellbeing is the theme that needs to be addressed, a refocus on mental health and wellbeing will allow the discussion of experiences of violence. Perhaps the term violence puts potential respondents off from participating. Especially if they do not perceive their own experiences as being violent in the 'traditional' 'physical' sense and view their involvement as somehow 'normal'.
- Future research will add the prevalence questions to note when and how often incidents are experienced, along the lines of the CSEW.
- The relationship between online and offline incidents needs to be investigated further too. To see if offline behaviours are continuing online, or they are stand alone events. This is a very under researched area but in the context of this age group, and students specifically, needs more thought.
- Future research design will take into consideration pre university wellbeing needs and experiences as some respondents note they had problems before, as well as during, their time at university. This is crucial. Students do not come to university as a blank slate ready to learn, they bring a wealth of experiences and from a vast range of demographic backgrounds, that also requires further attention.
- Alongside the protected characteristics, the self-reported concept of classism needs further thought and development. Students who feel they are somehow discriminated against because of their perceived class background, family circumstances, colloquial accent etc., needs to be factored in. Especially as universities are proactively pushing a widening participation agenda. The students are coming to university, but then feel they are 'not up to the standard required' due to their pre university experiences.
- Finally, ALL forms of violence were experienced and reported in varying degrees, therefore it follows that for the Changing the Culture initiative and future work into this important policy area, ALL forms of violence need to be considered and understood. From everyday microaggressions to physical acts of violence, from the online to the offline, both within and beyond the university itself.

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