



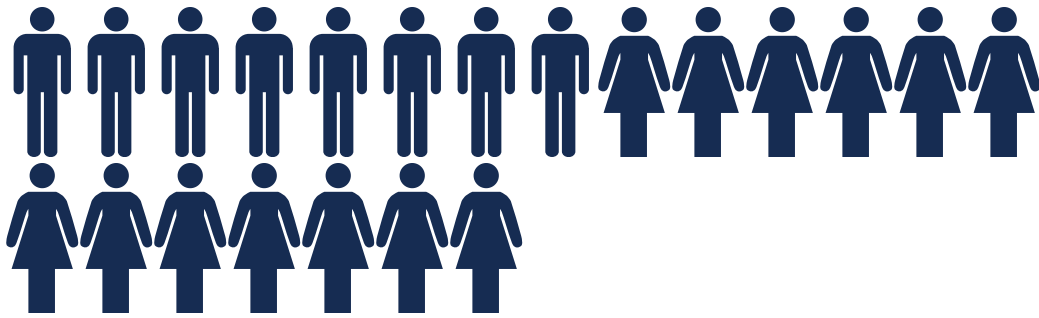
A lot left to learn:

Student  
experiences of  
gender based  
violence at  
university



EMPOWERED  
CAMPUS





# 8106

Students from 124 universities filled in the survey

Empowered Campus are delighted to launch this research which has enabled students to anonymously disclose instances of gender based violence. This was a collaborative national research project led by Trendence, a student market research company and a consortium of 26 UK Students' Unions. 8106 higher education students from 124 universities filled in the survey. The questionnaire was conducted online and quota sampling was used to enhance the representativeness of the sample.

Throughout the last decade sexualised misconduct within higher education has remained high on the news agenda and whilst we have seen some improvement, there is so much left to learn. Each term brings new stories to light, and with students trapped in halls with Covid restrictions, we expect the rates to be higher than ever. Many universities still feel paralysed and unempowered to take steps that protect those involved, support staff are still left to navigate internal frameworks that have integrated a legacy of prioritising institutional reputation. Even now, not all universities have specific policies to deal with sexual misconduct, in-house specially trained staff are hard to come by and there is a lack of standardised process across the UK.

Students who disclose these experiences face a lottery depending on where they attend and who they disclose to. Universities have begun to encourage disclosures, however without specialist policy, pathways and training - survivors are left retraumatised by an experience that should be supporting them.

There is no doubt that the impact of COVID-19 has made this ad-hoc approach much more dangerous.

For many, university life has become more insular, with students confined to halls and unable to have the same access to student support services. It may be some time before we can measure the effect this has had on those now deciding between a lock down with their abuser, or dropping out.

After working to prevent and respond to gender based violence in higher education for many years, we have set up Empowered Campus to offer a new way for universities who want to do the right thing. For a while now, approaches to this work have been a tick box, which has left gaps which survivors continue to slip through. Empowered Campus are survivor centered, their needs and narrative are at the heart of our work, we are trauma informed which means our strategies understand the traumatised brain and work with it, not against it. We also provide an exclusively holistic approach. Rather than being another box to tick, we work in partnership with universities to understand what's currently going on, where work can be strengthened and we produce bespoke solutions which include policy, pathways, training and engagement strategies. This leaves universities with everything that they need in order to offer the gold standard of survivor care.

We are so excited for the next chapter for universities and the students that they care for - we hope you will join us on this journey

Charlotte Fischer & Martha Jephcott  
Empowered Campus Co Founders

# Student Experiences



After being sexually assaulted at university, it became clear that the university didn't have sufficient support service in place to help me deal with my experience

## What are students going through?

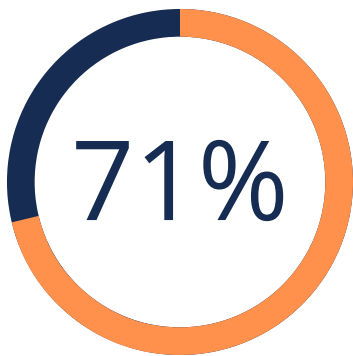


In 2010, the NUS launched their Hidden Marks report , in which **1 in 7** female students reported having experienced a **physical or sexual assault**. Today, almost **1 in 5 students** told us about having experienced **sexual assault alone**

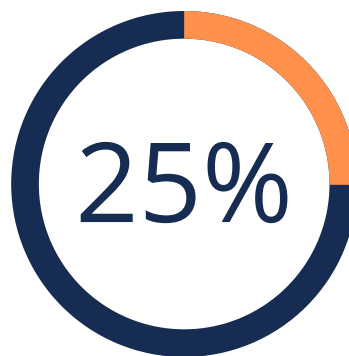
Over half of all students who have experienced sexual assault and/or sexual harassment experienced it **on campus**



Of the students who had been sexually harassed 12.3% had at least one incident take place in **university halls**



Of male students who are sexually assaulted deal with it entirely on their own



One in four female students experience sexual harassment



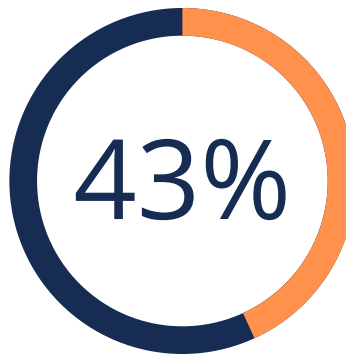
One in five female students experience sexual assault

# Survivor Engagement

Some progress has been made in alerting students to where support can be reached ahead of time. However, this has not translated into disclosures to university support departments

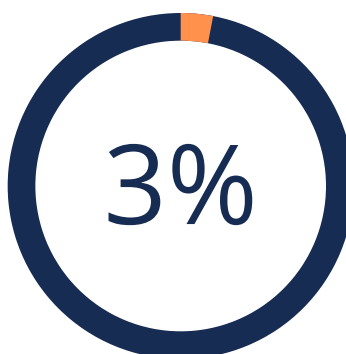
## Expectation vs Reality

We asked female students who **didn't** identify as survivors of sexual assault where they would go for support **if** they were to experience it



43.5% said that they would go to university support services **if** they were to experience sexual assault

We then asked female students who **did** identify as survivors of sexual assault where they actually went for support



Just 3.4% actually engaged with university support services

# An Intersectional Understanding

In order to close this gap in disclosure, it is essential that our analysis of these experiences recognise the impact that identity and circumstance have on the way that gender based violence manifests.

## The impact of identity



Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual students are 15.1% more likely to experience sexual harassment

Students with a self reported disability are 11.8% more likely to experience sexual harassment



White students reported being sexually assaulted in the SU at twice the rate of BME students, which may reflect who is using those services, and are more likely to use SU support

Black and minority ethnic students are twice as likely to be sexually assaulted in a class room, lecture room, lab or theatre compared to their white peers

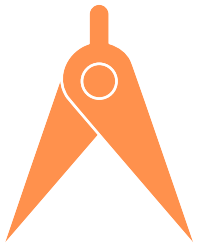


Black and minority ethnic students are over twice as likely to experience hate crime compared to their white peers

# Recommendations



Approaches to gender based violence should not be solely driven by disciplinary processes. Universities should strive towards a trauma informed, survivor centered approach. In recognition of the unique approach needed, external services should be brought in, such as Empowered Campus



Response and prevention work in this area should be a priority in light of COVID-19. Students are currently experiencing lock down in halls, a high risk area. We can expect a sharp rise in cases of sexual harassment and assault



Universities should move away from a 'tick box' approach which can create gaps through which survivors can fall through. A holistic approach is needed. One that clearly links policy formation, care pathway creation, training and engagement.



In order to engage student survivors from all backgrounds, an intersectional analysis is needed to identify which communities the support is and isn't reaching