



**talk
about it**

NUS Women's Department 2015 survey

REPORT

2015

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Foreword

The first 'Talk About It' survey was run in 2010, with the report published in 2011. Since then, questions of safety and gendered violence have gained more prominence in the media and part of public debate. The National Union of Students (NUS) 'Talk About It' survey aimed to gather information *specifically* about the experiences of women university students in Australia. The survey was open to women identifying and non-binary students. It had 54 questions, which covered accommodation, work, transport, representation and campus life, services, sexual assault, harassment, and economic difficulties that women enrolled in tertiary education institutions face.

The results from the 'Talk About It' survey help to paint a picture of the challenges and barriers that women students might confront. This survey had a broader range of background questions, as these shape the experience of women. Caring and support obligations to family members, partners and friends are disproportionately met by women. For many female students the weight of meeting these obligations can be onerous and significantly impact on academic performance and opportunities to participate in campus life. It is also the case that social and class background can intersect with other difficult or stressful experiences.

This survey dealt with personal questions about negative experiences, in particular physical abuse, sexual harassment, and sexual assault. Contact information was provided at the beginning and end of the survey for the national crisis line 1800 RESPECT. Advice regarding the questions was sought from a trauma specialist and

sexual assault counsellor. Some changes have been made to the 2010 'Talk About It' survey questions to use the most appropriate and professional language, to minimise distress and to obtain the most accurate information. There are both merits and overheads with the use of online surveys for gathering information around issues as those addressed in this survey, such as sexual harassment and assault. Due to the sensitive nature of some of the survey questions, responses to each question were optional.

I would like to thank survey participants for taking the time to complete the survey, and the women's officers and student organisations that used their networks and resources to help to get the word out. It is undoubtedly the case that support from student organisations increased participation rates. Data from this report will be used by student organisations to inform discussion, policy and campaigns on a campus and national level.

Jess McLeod
2015 National Women's Officer
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Part A

Income Support and Employment

Access to adequate income support can play a decisive role in maintaining or improving the access, participation and retention of women in higher education, particularly for those from disadvantaged backgrounds or facing financial hardship.

In this survey (Table 1) 34.18% of respondents were receiving a Commonwealth youth, student or employment allowance while studying. The nearest equivalent reference figure, based on the 2012 Universities Australia Survey of Student Finances, is 52.4% although this figure is not gender specific and also includes students on the Disability Support Pension.

Table 1: Do you receive government income support?

	Responses	%
Yes, Youth Allowance	345	26.88
Yes, Newstart	38	3.94
Yes, Austudy	42	2.25
Yes, Abstudy	17	1.31
No	851	65.82

(1,293 Answered, 73 Skipped)

Student income support in Australia is narrowly targeted with lots of bureaucratic hurdles and means tests to reduce eligibility. Nearly two thirds (64.4%) of those respondents receiving or seeking government income support reported that it had been somewhat difficult, difficult or very difficult to access this support. 23.6% of those respondents receiving or seeking government income support reported that it had been very difficult.

"I have found accessing Centrelink in the context of domestic violence/mental health/financial crisis extremely difficult and often punitive." (University of NSW, 27 year old)

Table 2: How easy or difficult is it for you to access government income support?

	Responses	%
Easy	82	6.04
Manageable	221	16.29
Somewhat Difficult	171	12.60
Difficult	176	12.97
Very Difficult	201	14.81
N/A	506	37.29

(1,357 Answered, 9 Skipped)

While the 2009 -12 Bradley-era reforms to student income support widened eligibility student poverty remains a widespread problem. The level of student allowances are simply too low. A single student living in a share house and receiving the maximum student allowance and rent assistance is 50% below the Henderson Poverty line.

This is reflected in this survey (Table 3). 59.6% of those respondents receiving government income support reported that it had been somewhat difficult, difficult or very difficult to meet their daily living needs. 16.9% of those respondents receiving government income support reported that it had been very difficult to meet their daily living needs.

Table 3: How easy or difficult is it to meet your daily living needs with government income support?

	Responses	%
Easy	79	5.86
Manageable	179	13.27
Somewhat Difficult	150	11.12
Difficult	123	9.12
Very Difficult	108	8.01
N/A	710	52.63

(1,293 Answered, 17 Skipped)

For the last decade the impact of excessive reliance on paid work while studying has been a central focus of NUS welfare campaigns and lobbying.

Students have been trying to bridge the gap between low levels of student income allowances (both in terms of eligibility and the value of allowance received) and the rapid cost rises (rentals, communications, etc) by taking up unprecedented amounts of paid work. There is a level where the amount of paid employment has a significant negative impact on academic performance and the opportunities to participate in the broader campus experience outside of the classroom.

A study by University of Canberra's Centre For Labour Market Research found a small positive academic impact of part-time work for students working up to 11 hours. However, it found that students working more than 22 hours a week that the impact on academic grades was negative.

Table 4 below outlines the employment situation of respondents. Even if we discount for the small number of respondents who work full time (and are presumably studying part-time) at least 19% of respondents were in paid employment for more than 20 hours a week while studying and facing possible negative consequences for their academic performance.

The other issue raised by respondents is the difficulties faced by disabled students to obtain paid work:

"I am unable to work on top of full-time uni due to my disability, but am unable to qualify for DSP, so my parents help me financially. I would work if I could." (Monash University, 23 year old)

"On disability pension due to health issues precluding work and the lack of employment for mature aged, disabled females." (University of Tasmania, 62 year old).

Table 4: Do you work while studying?

	Responses	%
Yes, I work full time	59	4.34
Yes, I work part-time	208	15.29
Yes, I am employed as a casual on average under 10 hours a week	285	20.96
Yes, I am employed as a casual on average under 20 hours a week	226	16.62
Yes, I am employed as a casual on average under 30 hours week	99	7.28
Yes, I do seasonal work	71	5.22
No. I am not employed but I am looking for work	212	15.59
No, I am not employed	155	11.40
Other	45	3.31

(1,360 Answered, 6 Skipped)

¹Applegate C, and Daly A, "The Impact of Paid Work on the Academic Performance of Students: a Case Study from the University of Canberra", Discussion Paper, Centre for Labour Market Research, University of Canberra, 2005

Women were also asked about how they viewed their prospects for finding work in their field after graduation (Table 5). The majority of respondents (52.1%) were concerned or very concerned about finding work in their field after graduation.

Table 5: Are you concerned about finding work in your field after graduation?

	Responses	%
Unconcerned	94	6.90
Mostly Unconcerned	178	13.06
Some Concerns	381	27.95
Concerned	364	26.71
Very Concerned	346	25.39

(1,363 Answered, 3 Skipped)

Student Services and Support

Campus support services play an important role in the maintaining or improving the access, participation and retention rates of women in higher education particularly for those from disadvantaged backgrounds or those going through difficult circumstances.

In this survey the three most common personal circumstance factors that caused a negative impact on study were related to mental health problems, financial stress and difficulties, and illness or health problems. The weighted score in Table 6 reflects the number of responses and how highly the respondents ranked the factors.

Table 6: Have any of the factors below have had a negative impact on your ability to study? (Number in order, starting with 1- 12, for the factor that has had the greatest impact. Only put a number next to issues that have affected you.)

	Responses	Weighted Score Reflecting Ranking of Impact
Mental health problems	846	10.43
Financial stress or difficulties	860	9.95
Illness or health problems	595	9.60
Family breakdown or difficulties	566	9.11
Relationship breakdown or difficulties	513	8.86
Lack of social support network	521	8.56
Unstable living arrangements	397	8.25
None of these have negatively impacted me	250	7.78
Lack of services	329	7.16
Disability	245	7.05
Supporting Dependents	236	6.74
Other	168	5.38

(1,348 Answered, 18 Skipped)

Table 7 looks at the level of student awareness of the support services available to them via their university or student organisation. There is considerable unevenness in knowledge about campus support services. The majority of respondents (over 73%) were aware of their campus academic support, medical and mental health services. The services that students were least aware of (below 40%) were childcare and financial grants and loans. University orientation programs and campus diaries should be adjusted to give greater prominence to information about these less well known services.

Table 7: Which services are you aware that you can access through your university or student organisation? (Select all that you are aware of or know about)

	Responses	%
Childcare	440	33.43
Financial grants	636	48.33
Loans	520	39.51
Medical services	966	73.40
Mental health services	1,078	81.76
Disability support services	851	64.67
Academic support	1,129	85.79
Student assist (appeals)	716	54.41
Other	25	1.90

(1,363 Answered, 3 Skipped)

Table 8 looks at female student use of the support services available to them via their university or student organisation. This shows a similar pattern to Table 7 with a wide variation in the student use of particular campus services. The most used services were academic support and medical services. Unlike Table 7 the use of financial grants was higher than the use of mental health services. Use of disability services are discussed below.

Table 8: Which services have you accessed through your university or student organisation? (Select all that apply)

	Responses	%
Childcare	5	0.52
Financial grants	198	20.50
Loans	88	9.11
Medical services	464	48.03
Mental health services	391	20.19
Academic support	390	40.37
Academic appeals	123	12.73
Other	42	4.35

(1,363 Answered, 3 Skipped)

Table 9 looks at changes to the availability and accessibility of campus support services. The majority of female students (76%) had not noticed any changes to the availability and accessibility of services. However, of those who had noticed changes, the more common scenario was that the change (70%) was negative (less services or access).

Table 9: Have you noticed any changes to the availability and accessibility of these services since you started accessing them?

	Responses	%
Yes, more services available	77	6.05
Yes, less services available	57	4.48
Yes, it is difficult to access services	120	9.43
No, I haven't noticed any changes	978	76.89
Other	40	3.14

(1,244 Answered, 94 Skipped)

Table 10 looks at student use of disability services. Over 13% of respondents were using the campus disability services. This is higher than the official Department of Education reference figure that currently has 5.1% all domestic students (male and female) identifying themselves as disabled.

Table 10: Do you access disability support and services ?

	Responses	%
Yes, on campus	182	13.48
Yes, off campus	51	3.78
No	1,117	82.74

(1,350 Answered, 16 Skipped)

Table 11 looks at changes to the availability and accessibility of campus disability support services. The majority of female students (50.4%) accessing disability services had not noticed any changes to the availability and accessibility of services since they started using them. However, of those who had noticed changes, the more common scenario was that the change (75%) was negative (less services or access).

“They have combined some of the services which means there are less overall and they are harder to find but when you do find them what’s there is better organised” (University of Melbourne, 20 year old)

“They are not very well advertised. Even if so, social stigma and internal/external expectations still act as one of the biggest hurdles.” (University of Tasmania, 20 year old, international student)

Table 11: Have you noticed any changes to the availability and accessibility of disability services since you started accessing them ?

	Responses	%
Yes, more services available	46	3.43
Yes, less services available	59	4.40
Yes, it is difficult to access services	83	6.18
No, I haven’t noticed any changes	267	19.90
Not Applicable	908	67.66
Other	18	1.34

(1,342 Answered, 24 Skipped)

Caring and Support Obligations

Caring and support obligations to family members, partners and friends are disproportionately met by women. For many female students the weight of meeting these obligations can be onerous and may significantly impact on academic performance and opportunities to participate in campus life.

Survey respondents commented:

“Severely limits the time I can be on campus” (University of Western Australia, 19 year old)

“Depends on issues happening, some months never. Other months constantly” (University of NSW, 21 year old)

“Indirect impact due to making my health poorer due to exhaustion” (Curtin University, 33 year old)

This aspect of female students’ experience has been rarely examined prior to this survey,

Table 12 looks at the extent to that female students have significant financial, caring or support obligations to others and who that dependent is. Over 28% of respondents described themselves as having these obligations. The most common dependents were parents and siblings.

Table 12: Do you care for or provide financial or other means of support to any of the following? (select all that apply)

	Responses	%
Yes, my children	62	4.61
Yes, partner	114	8.47
Yes, grandparents	19	1.41
Yes, parents	137	10.18
Yes, siblings	108	8.02
Yes, friend	80	5.94
No	962	71.47

(1,346 Answered, 20 Skipped)

Table 13 looks at the frequency that support is required. 16.2% of all respondents were providing regular daily or weekly support.

Table 13: On average, how often do you provide support or care?

	Responses	%
Daily	120	9.02
Weekly	96	7.21
Fortnightly	31	2.33
Monthly	15	1.13
As required	160	12.02
Not applicable	899	67.54
Other	10	0.75

(1,331 Answered, 35 Skipped)

Table 14 looks at the frequency that the provision of this support impacts on study commitments such as attending classes or completing assignments on time. 13.7 % of all respondents were impacted on a daily or weekly basis.

Table 14: How often do caring and support responsibilities impact on your ability to study, attend classes or complete assignments?

	Responses	%
Every day	84	6.76
Once a week	87	7.00
Once a fortnight	54	4.35
Once a month	59	4.75
Once a semester	76	6.12
Never	672	54.11
Not sure	210	16.31

(1,242 Answered, 124 Skipped)

Representation and Campus Life

Student rights are protected on campus by their student organisation (including women's departments) and in their workplace by their trade union.

According to the latest Universities Australia Student Finances Survey over 80% of Australian students were in paid employment for at least part of a 12 month period.² Full time students are often in casualised employment in industries such as hospitality and services with low membership of trade unions. Table 15 shows a trade union membership rate of 13% that is low but not unexpected.

Table 15: If you work while studying are you a member of the relevant industrial or trade union?

	Responses	%
Yes	167	13.33
No	885	70.63
Not Sure	162	12.93
Other	39	3.11

(1,253 Answered, 113 Skipped)

Payment of the university Student Services and Amenities Fee is compulsory for domestic students and many international students but membership of campus student organisations remains voluntary. Typically universities will have some form of opt in or opt-out arrangement at enrolment where students can indicate if they wish to be a member. Table 16 indicates that over 56% of respondents identified themselves as members of their campus student organisation (s).

Table 16: Are you a member of your campus student organisation? (Usually called a student union, student guild or student association)

	Responses	%
Yes	772	56.76
No	481	35.37
Not Sure	107	7.87

(1,360 Answered, 6 Skipped)

As lectures are increasingly delivered in on-line formats there has been a trend towards students spending less time on campus. Table 17 looks at the average time female students are regularly on campus. Just over a quarter spend over 20 hours a week on campus. This partly reflects enrolments in courses with lengthy compulsory practicals (science, engineering, health, performing arts) but also those students regularly taking part in campus life activities run by student organisations (see Table 18).

Table 17: On average how many hours do you spend on campus each week during tuition periods?

	Responses	%
0-5 hours	131	9.63
5-10 hours	242	17.78
10-15 hours	373	27.41
10-20 hours	267	19.62
more than 20 hours	348	25.57

(1,361 Answered, 5 Skipped)

²Universities Australia, "University student finances in 2012: A study of the financial circumstances of domestic and international students in Australia's universities", July 2013

Table 18: Do you participate in events or activities facilitated by your student organisation? (Including events or activities run by clubs and societies).

	Responses	%
Yes, often	295	21.69
Yes, sometimes	354	26.03
Yes, but rarely	431	31.69
No never	264	19.41
Not sure	16	1.18

(1,360 Answered, 6 Skipped)

Table 19 looks at the level of awareness about whether or not the campus student organisation has a women's officer. The finding that nearly 40% of female students were not sure is a concern. Much more needs to be done to lift the profile of the position.

Table 19: Does your student organisation have a women's officer?

	Responses	%
Yes	725	53.43
No	102	7.52
Not Sure	530	39.06

(1,357 Answered, 9 Skipped)

Table 20 looks the participation rates of women in Women's Department events and activities. A participation rate of nearly 28% from survey respondents is higher than their use of most university support services (see table 8).

Table 20: Do you participate in events and/ or activities organised by the women's department?

	Responses	%
Yes	379	27.97
No	789	58.23
Not Sure	530	39.06

(1,357 Answered, 11 Skipped)

Transport

Getting to and from campus is a women's safety issue. Over a third of respondents to this survey indicated that they had been harassed while travelling to and from university.

"I had an older man, a student pursue me. When I avoided him (I saw him on the train to uni), in retaliation he would try to intimidate me on the walk from the station to the campus by walking closely behind me in a threatening manner." (Victoria University, 21 year old)

"Had a car slowly trail us and make sexual comments while we walked back from the city campus to parking in markettown. There is no parking at the city campus. They're building a new city campus that will only have 5 car parks available. As law students this is where our campus will be and where our competitions are held, at night. My friend will no longer attend the campus or competitions because she no longer feels safe because of harassment."(University of Newcastle, 20 year old)

"I was indecently assaulted on the bus between Central and Kensington." (University of NSW, 21 year old)

Common examples of safety problems are: infrequent after hours public transport, car parks that are scarce, poorly lit and isolated, and walking and bike routes that are isolated.

Table 21 looks at the primary mode of transport for female students. Over 52% used public transport followed by 22% who came by car.

Table 21: What is your primary mode of transport to university?

	Responses	%
Car	299	21.99
Motor bike	2	0.15
Bicycle	58	4.26
Walk	253	18.68
Public transport	720	52.94
Other (i.e. distance ed, residential on-campus)	28	2.06

(1,360 Answered, 6 Skipped)

Table 22 looks at the adequacy of public transport to and from the university. Nearly 17% reported that is was inadequate due to poor availability or distance.

Table 22: Is there adequate public transport to and from your university?

	Responses	%
Yes, at all times	361	26.70
Yes, most of the time	638	51.53
No, is only available during business hours and is unreliable outside of those times	156	11.54
No, public transport is not an option for me due to distance or poor availability	73	5.40
Other	64	4.73

(1,352 Answered, 14 Skipped)

Table 23 looks at the typical car parking experience on campus. Nearly two thirds (65.5%) reported that it was difficult to find a parking bay and 59% reported that the parking fees were expensive. Respondents reported that parking at night is a problem due to poor lighting (17.9%) and distance from campus (16.5%).

Table 23: What is it like finding car parking on your campus? (Select all that apply)

	Responses	%
It is easy to find a parking bay	59	5.03
It is difficult to find a parking bay	766	65.30
It is expensive	694	59.16
It is cheap	25	2.13
It's free	36	3.07
Parking at night is a problem due to poor lighting	210	17.90
Parking at night is a problem due to distance from campus	194	16.54
I have no problems with parking	129	11.00
Other	162	13.81

(1,173 Answered, 193 Skipped)

Tables 24 and 25 look at the extent that students responding to this survey have felt harassed (over 35%) or have been assaulted (over 5%) while travelling to and from university.

Table 24: Have you ever felt harassed while travelling to or from university?

	Responses	%
Yes	485	35.74
No	763	56.23
Not Sure	109	8.03

(1,357 Answered, 9 Skipped)

Table 25: Have you ever been assaulted while travelling to or from university?

	Responses	%
Yes	74	5.44
No	1,241	91.25
Not Sure	45	3.31

(1,360 Answered, 6 Skipped)

Part B

Sexual Harassment

Nearly three quarters of respondents (72.75%) had experienced some form of sexual harassment or unwelcome sexual behaviour while enrolled at their current institution (although not necessarily while on campus). Physical mistreatment and sexual assault are considered in the subsequent sections of this report

"Supervisor had a meeting in his underwear once." (University of Queensland)

"Inappropriate sexual innuendos/sexist comments in lectures." (University of Melbourne, 20 year old)

"Romantic advances from men who acknowledged that the age difference made their advances inappropriate." ((University of Western Australia, 19 year old)

"Being in personal space. Beckoning towards me. Being condescending in a way that makes me feel powerless." (University of Melbourne, 31 year old)

"Had a few people, individual instances, following me off campus and trying to talk to me and ask me out making me very uncomfortable." (University of Melbourne, 22 year old)

"Some of the clubs and societies contained sexist comments in their welcome booklets that made me feel excluded from that space." (University of Melbourne, 19 year old).

"There are many societies which are male-centric, particularly the chess society, and although I love to play and am a decent player, I stopped attending matches and playing games because of the verbal harassment I received. Opponents would make references like "my queen is gonna rape your pawn". (University of NSW, 20 year old)

Table 26 outlines the types of sexual harassment experienced by women students. The most common forms of sexual harassment are: 'staring or leering' (53%), 'suggestive jokes or comments' (48%), 'unnecessary familiarity' (37%) and 'intrusive questions or statements about your private life' (37%).

Transgender students report that transphobic harassment is widespread on campus:

"I have experienced numerous levels of verbal harassment about my being trans. I often receive many micro-aggressions calling me a man/sir/he/him/bro/dude, and then people acting like it's me making a fuss if I call them out. It's incredibly draining and coupled with the looks I get and muttered comments received makes me feel incredibly unsafe on campus." (La Trobe University, 26 year old)

Comments in the 'other' category raised the issues of drink spiking in university taverns and sexual harassment through social media:

"Unwanted sexual advances at uni tav which resulted in my drink being spiked" (University of Western Australia, 22 year old)

"I have heard of many instances where male (residential) college students have "spiked" girls drinks." (University of Queensland, 21 year old)

"Inappropriate targeted messages on Confessions at Murdoch facebook page." (Murdoch University, 21 year old)

"Harassment online including publicly sharing photos of me and discussing my appearance" (Curtin University, 20 year old)

Table 26: Whilst enrolled as a student at your current institution, have you ever experienced any of the following unwanted or unwelcome sexual behaviour? (Select all that apply)

	Responses	%
Staring or leering	715	53.24
Unnecessary familiarity. Such as deliberately brushing up against you	492	36.83
Unwelcome touching	417	31.05
Suggestive comments or jokes	642	47.80
Insults or taunts of a sexual nature	337	25.09
Intrusive questions or statements about your private life	495	36.86
Displaying posters, magazines or screen savers of a sexual nature	207	15.41
Sending sexually explicit emails or text messages	107	7.67
Inappropriate advances on social networking sites	261	11.00
Accessing sexually explicit internet sites	162	19.43
Requests for sex or repeated requests to go out on dates	241	17.94
Indecent exposure	83	6.18
Repeatedly followed you, watched you, phoned you, texted, written, emailed, communicated with you through social network sites, or communicated with you in other ways that was unwanted and seemed obsessive	196	14.59
I have never experienced any unwanted behaviour	366	27.25
Other	53	3.95

(1,343 Answered, 23 Skipped)

Table 27: If you indicated that you have experienced any of the above behaviour whilst a student at your current institution, how many times did it happen?

	Responses	%
Once	131	13.14
Two to five times	437	43.83
More than five times	221	22.17
More than ten times	167	16.75
Other	41	4.11

(997 Answered, 369 Skipped)

Table 28 outlines where the sexual harassment incident(s) took place. The most common location for these incidents were public spaces both on campus (62%) and off campus (68%).

Table 28: If you indicated yes to any of the above experiences, please indicate where the incident took place. (Select all that apply)

	Responses	%
At work	59	4.34
Public university space (library, class)	285	20.96
At student organisation event	208	15.29
In university accommodation (college, student housing, hall)	226	16.62
At somebody's house (yours, a friend's, partner's)	99	7.28
Public space (pub, shopping centre, etc)	212	15.59
Whilst studying abroad	71	5.22

(952 Answered, 414 Skipped)

Table 29 outlines the person responsible for the harassment's relationship (or not) to the respondent. The most common response was they were "unknown" (61%), "a student at your university of institution" (51%) and "acquaintance" (41%). Over 5% of respondents indicated that they had been sexually harassed or been exposed to unwelcome sexual behaviour from academic or non-teaching staff at the institution.

Table 29: If you indicated yes to any of the above experiences, please indicate who carried out the unwanted behaviour? (Select all that apply)

	Responses	%
An acquaintance	399	40.80
A friend	222	22.70
A co-worker	104	10.63
A manager or employer	61	6.24
Academic or non-teaching staff at your institution	52	5.32
A student at your university or institution	494	50.51
A partner or ex partner	93	9.51
A family member	14	1.43
Unknown to you	598	61.15

(978 Answered, 388 Skipped)

Table 30 outlines the gender of the person responsible of this type of behaviour. 98% were male.

Table 30: Were they?

	Responses	%
Male	936	98.01
Female	19	1.99

(955 Answered, 411 Skipped)

Physical Mistreatment

Physical mistreatment covers a range of violent behaviour ranging from hair pulling and slapping to strangulation, burning or having a weapon used the respondent. 15.7 % of respondents had experienced some form of physical mistreatment while enrolled at their current institution (although not necessarily while on campus).

“I was physically assaulted while on placement.” (Victoria University, 25 year old)

“Someone lit my hair on fire at a university pub” (University of Melbourne, 22 year old)

“Grabbed, pulled, pushed, cornered” (University of Sydney, 19 year old)

“Being physically stopped from leaving a room” (Curtin University, 33 year old)

Table 31 breaks down the types of physical mistreatment experienced by women who had been subject to this violent behaviour.

Table 31: Whilst enrolled as a student at your current institution, have you been subject to any of the following behaviour? (select all that apply)

	Responses	%
You were pushed, slapped, shoved or had your hair pulled	90	48.65
You had something thrown at you that could hurt you	66	35.68
You were kicked, bitten, hit with a fist or something else that could hurt you	31	16.76
You were choked, dragged, strangled or burnt	26	14.05
A weapon (such as a knife) was used against you	10	5.41
You have experienced another form of physical mistreatment or violence not described above	67	36.22

(185 Answered, 1,181 Skipped)

Table 32 outlines the responses about the frequency of the physical mistreatment incidents. Unlike sexual harassment and sexual assault the most common response (47%) was that it has been occurred once.

Table 32: If you indicated that you have experienced any of the above behaviour whilst a student at your current institution, how many times did it happen?

	Responses	%
Once	83	47.16
Two to five times	62	35.23
More Than five times	21	11.93
More than ten times	10	5.68

(176 Answered, 1,190 Skipped)

Table 33 outlines where the physical mistreatment incident(s) took place. The most common locations for these incidents were off campus: public spaces (38%) and somebody’s house (35%). The most frequent on-campus locations were public spaces (31%) and student organisation events (15%).

Table 33: If you indicated yes to any of the above experiences, please indicate where the incident took place. (Select all that apply)

	Responses	%
At work	15	8.76
Public university space (library, class)	54	31.21
At student organisation event	26	15.03
In university accommodation (college, student housing, hall)	22	12.72
At somebody's house (yours, a friend's, partner's)	61	35.26
Public space (pub, shopping centre, etc)	67	38.73
Whilst studying abroad	2	1.16

(173 Answered, 1,193 Skipped)

Table 34 outlines the person responsible for the mistreatment's relationship (or not) to the respondent. The most common responses were that they were "unknown" (34%), "a student at your university of institution"(23%), a "partner or ex partner" (19%) and "acquaintance" (19%). Over 6% of physical mistreatment incidents were reported as being perpetrated by academic or non-teaching staff at the institution.

Table 34: If you indicated yes to any of the above experiences, please indicate who carried out the unwanted behaviour? (Select all that apply)

	Responses	%
An acquaintance	33	19.19
A friend	31	18.02
A co-worker	5	2.91
A manager or employer	5	2.91
Academic or non-teaching staff at your institution	11	6.40
A student at your university or institution	40	23.26
A partner or ex partner	34	19.77
A family member	17	9.88
Unknown to you	58	33.72

(172 Answered, 1,194 Skipped)

The category of physical mistreatment is broader than heavily gender structured categories of sexual harassment and sexual assault. According to Table 35 nearly a quarter of the physical mistreatment incidents were carried out by a woman (or women) on another woman. Despite this complication the central dynamic here is widespread male violence against women as over three quarters of those responsible for this behaviour were male.

Table 35: Were they?

	Responses	%
Male	127	76.51
Female	39	23.49

(160 Answered, 1,200 Skipped)

Sexual Assault

27% of all survey respondents indicated that they had experienced some form of sexual assault while enrolled at their current institution (although not necessarily while on campus). Nearly 14% of all survey respondents indicated that they had experienced rape, attempted rape or assault by penetration. These results include the respondents who skipped this section and thus vary from the tables below. For the purposes of calculating the figures used above we inferred that those who skipped the section had not experienced sexual assault so the figures may slightly understate the prevalence of sexual assault.

Table 36 breaks down the types of sexual assault experienced by women who completed this section of the survey.

Table 36: Whilst enrolled as a student at your current institution, have you been subject to any of the following behaviour? (select all that apply)

	Responses	%
Had sex when you were, or felt, unable to consent	187	17.48
Had an unwanted sexual experience	269	25.14
Experienced rape	78	7.29
Experienced attempted rape	52	4.86
Experienced assault by penetration	60	5.61
Experienced any other unwanted sexual experience	167	15.61
I have never experienced any of the above	696	65.05

(1,070 Answered, 296 Skipped)

Table 37 outlines the responses about the frequency of the sexual assault incidents. In nearly 90% of cases the respondent had been sexually assaulted two to five times, and nearly 60% of the respondents who had been sexually assaulted were assaulted more than once.

Table 37: If you indicated that you have experienced any of the above behaviour whilst a student at your current institution, how many times did it happen?

	Responses	%
Once	154	40.96
Two to five times	186	49.47
More Than five times	24	6.38
More than ten times	12	3.19

(376 Answered, 960 Skipped)

Table 38 outlines where the sexual assault incident(s) took place. The most common location for these incidents were off campus: at somebody's house (64%) and public space (27%). The most frequent on-campus locations were university accommodation (24%) and student organisation events (12%).

"At a uni sports camp." (University Melbourne, 21 year old)

"Orientation Camp" (University of Western Australia, 22 year old)

"In the lecturer's car" (Deakin University, 22 year old)

Table 38: If you indicated yes to any of the above experiences, please indicate where the incident took place. (Select all that apply)

	Responses	%
At work	10	2.73
Public university space (library, class)	31	8.47
At student organisation event	45	12.30
In university accommodation (college, student housing, hall)	86	23.50
At somebody's house (yours, a friend's, partner's)	224	61.20
Public space (pub, shopping centre, etc)	97	26.50
Whilst studying abroad	5	1.37

(366 Answered, 1,000 Skipped)

Table 39 outlines the person responsible for the sexual assault's relationship (or not) to the respondent. Unlike sexual harassment the most common responses indicate that the person(s) responsible for the sexual assault was known to the respondent: acquaintance (37%), friend (34%), and partner or ex-partner (30%). In only 21% of incidents the person responsible for the sexual assault was unknown to the respondent prior to the incident. 2% of sexual assault incidents were reported as being carried out by academic or non-teaching staff at the institution.

Table 39: If you indicated yes to any of the above experiences, please indicate who carried out the unwanted behaviour? (Select all that apply)

	Responses	%
An acquaintance	141	37.01
A friend	130	34.12
A co-worker	15	3.94
A manager or employer	7	1.84
Academic or non-teaching staff at your institution	9	2.36
A student at your university or institution	84	22.05
A partner or ex partner	116	30.45
A family member	4	1.05
Unknown to you	81	21.26

(381 Answered, 985 Skipped)

The category of physical mistreatment is broader than heavily gender structured categories of sexual harassment and sexual assault. According to Table 35 nearly a quarter of the physical mistreatment incidents were carried out by a woman (or women) on another woman. Despite this complication the central dynamic here is widespread male violence against women as over three quarters of those responsible for this behaviour were male.

Table 40: Were they?

	Responses	%
Male	349	95.88
Female	15	4.12

(160 Answered, 1,200 Skipped)

Reporting

We asked women students who reported being subject to sexual harassment, physical mistreatment or sexual assault whether or not they had officially reported the incident(s) to the relevant university official and/or police? The level of reporting is very low; 5.5% to the university and 4.8% to police. This low level of reporting is consistent with Hidden Marks, a similar survey of British women university students conducted by NUS-UK.³

Table 41: If you answered yes to any of the questions related to harassment, mistreatment or assault, did you report the incident to somebody in an official role at your university?

	Responses	%
Yes	48	5.54
No	819	94.46

(867 Answered, 499 Skipped)

Table 42: If you answered yes to any of the questions related to harassment, mistreatment or assault, did you report the incident to the police?

	Responses	%
Yes	39	4.78
No	777	95.22

(816 Answered, 550 Skipped)

We asked the women who had not reported the incident the reasons why they had not done so. The results are set out in Table 43. The three most commonly cited reasons were that they did not think it was serious enough to report (81%), that they thought they could deal with it themselves (42%) and that they didn't think that what happened was a crime (37%). These were also the most commonly cited reasons in the British Hidden Marks survey.

Other commonly cited reasons were: feelings of embarrassment or shame (32%), being uncomfortable talking to police about it (28%), expectation that respondent would be blamed for what happened (25%), didn't want family to find out (23%), and being frightened by the consequences of reporting (22%).

"Last year I experienced continual unwanted sexual advances by an academic staff member who was my supervisor at the time. Even though I knew it wasn't my fault and I knew that I was within my rights to report it I didn't feel I could because I was in a subordinate position to the offender. I was so concerned about the consequences for me (academically; like not having a supervisor, having a sexual harassment claim against my name), that I did not report it. This was an awful experience and should not be happening in any institution let alone in an academic setting where there should be the support available." (University of Tasmania, 23 year old)

Nearly a quarter of women (23%) said that one of the reasons that they did not report was because they did not know who to report the incident(s) to.

"When I experienced harassment by teaching staff at the university, I could not find any information about who I could report it to." (University of NSW, 23 year old)

"I know of many, many women who have been harassed and/or assaulted on campus or in university housing. The procedures for reporting such an incident are impossible to find online, let alone actually go ahead with. This is an issue that so many universities need to address." (University of Adelaide, 32 year old)

³Universities Australia, "University student finances in 2012: A study of the financial circumstances of domestic and international students in Australia's universities", July 2013

“My university has recently decided to change a lot of face to face interaction with administration to online interaction via the student portal. I have heard from many students, including myself, that because of the loss of many admin positions, this cut has made it difficult to access or know how to go about finding quick and accurate answers to questions we may have.” (University of Melbourne, 20 year old)

This indicates the need to improve information about reporting processes.

Table 43: If you did not report the incident, please indicate reasons for choosing not to report the incident. (Select all that apply)

	Responses	%
I didn't think it was serious enough to report	663	81.15
I didn't think what happened was a crime	304	37.21
I thought I could handle it myself	351	42.96
I felt ashamed or embarrassed	269	32.93
I felt I would be blamed for what happened	209	25.58
I was frightened about the consequences of reporting	186	22.77
I didn't think I would feel comfortable talking to police about it	230	28.18
I didn't want my parents/family to find out	184	22.52
I didn't want my friends to find out	117	14.32
I didn't think I would be believed	151	18.48
I didn't know who to report to	189	23.13
I did not know how to get support to report	144	17.63
I was experiencing shock or high levels of distress	144	17.63

(817 Answered, 549 Skipped)

Another disturbing finding (see Table 44) is that nearly three quarters (72%) of the minority of women students who did report the incident(s) to the university or police were unsatisfied with the outcome.

Table 44: If you did report the incident to the police or your university, were you satisfied with how it was dealt with and responded to?

	Responses	%
Yes	29	28.43
No	73	71.57

(102 Answered, 1,264 Skipped)

Please give some details about why you were satisfied or unsatisfied ?

A few respondents were satisfied with how the police and/or university dealt with the incident.

"Listened. Empathetic. Supportive. Referrals and helpful coping suggestions." (La Trobe University, 38 year old)

"The counsellor that I spoke to was wonderful and made me feel safe and okay." (QUT, 21 year old)

"I was satisfied because I was allowed to speak to a female police officer and she believed me and took me seriously. She gave me all the options I had to take it further or leave it be." (University of Technology, Sydney, 21 year old)

"After being spoken to about his repeatedly offensive and inappropriate comments, he was asked by the department head not to return. He didn't." (University of WA, 20 year old)

However, the overwhelming majority of comments were negative about how the incident was dealt with and the outcome:

"Was ignored, told I was simply drunk and it wasn't worth investigating" (University of NSW, 20 year old)

"The university counselling service provided me excellent support, the police, however, were less helpful. This was not through any fault of their own, they were bound by the law, and the circumstance under which my assault occurred were too ambiguous for them to be able to do anything." (University of NSW, 22 year old)

"Get punched, university doesn't discipline the student. Said matter had to be dealt with by police. Gone to police before for assault, they were shit - took years to go to court, the guy hired a QC, I got interrogated on the stand, it was humiliating, he got to sit back and watch the whole thing, he got off, never going to the cops/courts again." (QUT, 26 year old)

"Reporting my rape to the university was a worse experience than actually being raped. People I didn't know well found out about it and gossiped about it and expressed their opinions about how we were both at fault. The university fucked up the investigation by not informing me of what they were doing and by not asking me about how I wanted it to be dealt with. The only power you still have after being raped is in who you tell. But the university took that away from me too. And I am still burdened with the repercussions of how they handled the situation 10 months later." (University of Melbourne, 19 year old)

"Police said to me "maybe it was just one of those nights" when they didn't find enough security camera footage. They dropped it after that." (Australian National University, 19 year old)

"It was okay for about 1 week but then they slacked off. I felt unsupported because of the relationship the department at uni had with the place I was doing placement." (Victoria University, 25 year old)

"I was in the library about two weeks ago in the silent study section when I realised a male stranger was standing behind me with his penis out and masturbating. I was very disturbed and in a bit of shock. I called security about 8 minutes after the incident (after the guy had left) and they told me that I should've called earlier. Nothing was done." (University of Tasmania, 26 year old)

"Case was dropped due to lack of evidence, I was kept in the dark throughout the entire investigation, there was no follow through of support services, detectives were all male, brusque, and insensitive. Additionally, I applied for special consideration through the uni when this occurred in order to drop a class, the committee told me that they could not grant the special consideration without a health professional report despite having numerous accounts detailing the severity and overly detailed information of the case from my detective. After nearly 7 months of fighting, they finally granted me the special consideration without the HPR." (University of Melbourne, 23 year old)

"I know that my rapist has since become a member of staff but I can't do anything about it" (University of Sydney, 24 year old)

"I feel unsafe at university a lot of the time now because a person who sexually assaulted me showed up on campus to meet up with people in my friendship group and there was absolutely nothing I could do about it. It made me not want to go to university again, it isn't fair." (University of Melbourne, 23 year old)

"I have reported minor incidents (leering, jokes, a wide range of non-physical sexual harassment) to staff but to no avail. They say it's 'just the culture' and that I should 'get used to it'" (University of Melbourne, 24 year old)

Would you like to make any additional comments about any of the issues covered in this survey ?

At the close of the survey we included a section on additional comments on issues raised in this survey. Several respondents put forward suggestions on how to improve the design of the survey for future use:

"I think a section on being drugged at university events etc. should be included as I know a number of woman who have had experiences where they think they've had their drinks spiked." (University of NSW, 19 year old)

"Need more options for numerous instances. This happens a lot, feeling generally unsafe, especially leaving library at night, won't use the computer labs at night as usually only males there. Not safe for women to go there at night." (University of New England, 27 year old)

"Thank you for gathering this information and making a difference." (QUT, 21 year old)

"Could you separate incidents. I have experienced who different instances of assault and I reacted differently to both." University of Technology, Sydney, 27 year old)

"Questions on the first page need to take into account the amount of single mothers now studying in tertiary education." (University of Newcastle, 25 year old)

"Would have been great if you could have avoided using "Queer" as a thing - I took it to mean LGBT+, but it could have also been referring to a specific identity. It also would be great if you could have had specific sexual orientation options, as there is evidence that rates of assault do vary between lesbians, bisexual women etc. Similarly I wonder about just putting "I'm trans" as its own option - the majority of trans women I have heard on the topic prefer "trans women" as a whole thing, so there's no implication that you're saying that trans women aren't "real" women. I'm also aware there are people who identify as trans who aren't part of the binary, but again that section just came off as a bit ambiguous as to what information was being asked, and made the "I'm Queer" option even more confusing." (University of WA, 19 year old)

Respondents also raised the need for greater education of men and women about sexual harassment and sexual assault issues and the need to speak up about these issues:

"I think it's a real problem in today's society that we aren't properly educated about what is considered sexual assault and what to do if you have been sexual assaulted. If educational interventions are widely available and more accessible, people will become more aware of these issues and be more inclined to speak up about them.?" (Macquarie University, 20 year old)

"Several of my friends have been raped or sexually assaulted by men at student organisations or parties held by clubs and societies and it's not ok. There needs to be mandatory sexual assault talks teaching men (and women) what consent is at the start of the university year. Attendance at a talk should be compulsory." (University of Melbourne, 20 year old)

Recommendations

1. The Federal Government should increase the level of base payments for Youth Allowance, Austudy and Abstudy, inclusive of rental assistance, to at least 100% of the Henderson poverty line. The Federal Government should increase funding and accessibility of disability support payments.
2. University and student organisation orientation programs and campus diaries should be adjusted to give greater prominence to information about on-campus childcare, financial grants and emergency loan services.
3. University and student organisation websites should have clear, easily accessible and up-to-date information on student support services for women. Contact details, emails and phone numbers should be correct and current.
4. All student representative organisations should have a Women's Officer position. Student organisations should ensure that there is training, so the incumbent can refer women to relevant on-campus and off-campus services.
5. University and student organisation orientation programs and campus diaries should be adjusted to give greater prominence to information about the Women's Officer position.
6. Student organisations should run campaigns encouraging students to join their trade unions, and run a targeted campaign to highlight the importance of women being unionised.
7. Student organisations should run anti-sexist campaigns that challenge sex and gender stereotypes and demand improved conditions for women.
8. Student organisations should develop guidelines for clubs and societies around organising and running safe and accessible events. Regular training on running safe events should be provided by student organisations.
9. Universities and colleges should consider consent and respectful relationship training for students and campus residents. This should be conducted by a sexual violence specialist who is equipped to provide sound and factual advice.
10. Universities should install more information and infrastructure including maps, emergency phones and a smartphone apps to ensure students, staff and visitors are well informed and able to get in touch with campus services.
11. Policies regarding the university's position on harassment and assault should be readily available and easy to understand. They also need to be attached to meaningful outcomes such as ensuring the welfare of the people involved and aiming to reduce the number of incidences through an emphasis on rehabilitation or education.
12. Universities should create or clarify reporting procedures for incidents of assault and harassment as a matter of priority. These should be widely publicised as part of student orientation and should be easy accessible from the university website. Information about how to obtain support in the reporting process should also be readily available.
13. University health and counselling services should be adequately trained in dealing with cases of sexual assault and/or harassment, or have an adequate referral process to a service that is convenient and affordable.
14. Where a university has a counseling service, that counselors are adequately trained in dealing with sexual assault and/ or harassment and are not overwhelmed or under-resourced. Where a university does not have these services, that it consider investing in them or have a widely publicised referral service that can direct students to external services. These services should be free.
15. All residential colleges and halls, whether private or owned by the university, should be made to adhere to the university's broader policy on harassment and sexual assault and required to report to the university the number of incidents reported under their care and how these incidents were dealt with once reported.

Appendix One: Survey Respondents Profile

Do you identify as a woman studying at university ?

	Responses	%
I identify as a woman	1,319	96.56
I identify as trans	24	1.76
I identify as genderqueer	43	3.07
I identify as intersex	2	0.15
Others	21	1.54

(1,366 Answered, 0 Skipped)

Do you identify as a woman studying at university ?

	Responses	%
Australian Catholic University	5	0.37
Australian national University	35	2.56
Central Queensland University	1	0.07
Charles Sturt University	4	0.29
Curtin University	2	1.54
Deakin University	12	0.88
Edith Cowan University	8	0.59
Federation University	5	0.37
Flinders University	26	1.90
Griffith University	6	0.44
James Cook University	4	0.29
La Trobe University	61	4.47
Macquarie University	10	0.73
Monash University	107	7.83
Murdoch University	15	1.10
Queensland University of Technology	12	0.88
RMIT University	16	1.17
Swinburne University of Technology	3	0.22
University of Adelaide	23	1.68
University of Canberra	4	0.29
University of Melbourne	278	20.35
University of New England	8	0.59
University of NSW	274	20.06
University of Newcastle	39	2.86
University of Notre Dame	1	0.07
University of Queensland	42	3.07
University of South Australia	11	3.07
University of Sydney	63	4.61
University of Tasmania	139	10.18
University of Technology Sydney	31	2.27
University of Western Australia	5	6.15
University of Western Sydney	5	0.37
University of Wollongong	5	0.37
Victoria University	8	0.59

(1,366 Answered, 0 Skipped)

Do you identify as any of the following?

	Responses	%
International student	95	13.09
Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander	24	3.31
Queer	359	49.45
Gender Diverse	69	9.50
Culturally and Linguistically Diverse	211	29.06
Low socioeconomic status	255	35.12

(726 Answered, 640 Skipped)

What is the highest level of education completed by a parent or guardian?

	Responses	%
Primary School	4	0.29
Year 8	6	0.44
Year 9	11	0.89
Year 10	53	3.89
Year 11	35	2.57
Year 12	144	10.56
TAFE or technical college	195	14.31
University degree (Bachelor)	439	32.21
University degree (postgraduate, masters ,PhD)	458	33.60
Other	18	1.32

(1,363 Answered, 3 Skipped)

