



**STUDENT VOICES  
ON CONSENT AND  
SEXUAL VIOLENCE**

**A MANIFESTO FOR ACTION**

**"WE WANT TO CREATE A SAFE, UNDERSTANDING ENVIRONMENT FOR STUDENTS DURING THE MOST IMPORTANT YEARS OF THEIR YOUNG LIVES."**

**CAITLIN, STUDENT COMMISSIONER,  
BSIX SIXTH FORM COLLEGE**

**LEADERS  
UNLOCKED**



# INTRO

Against the backdrop of the #MeToo movement and a recent series of high-profile rape and misogynist murder cases in the UK, the extent of sexual violence in our society is becoming clearer. In June 2021, police recorded a record number of rape offences in England and Wales.<sup>1</sup> That same month, Ofsted published a review which found that **harmful sexual behaviours are common in our schools and colleges**. Yet the review also reported that schools and their safeguarding partners 'did not fully understand the extent and significance of sexual harassment in schools or the local area'.<sup>2</sup> Decision makers need to hear from the students themselves, because their unique and vital insights will shed most light on the issue.

Led by **16 Student Commissioners**, our **Student Commission model has enabled us to harness the views** and perspectives of over **680 students aged 16-25 years old in London**. This manifesto brings together the Student Commission's research, platforming students' collective voice and producing **seven key recommendations**. We offer these insights so that decision-makers can gain a deeper understanding of the impact of sexual violence on a new generation of young adults and find out what part they can play to **promote consent and de-normalise sexual violence**.

# ABOUT THE PROJECT

The Student Commission on Consent and Sexual Violence is a partnership between **Leaders Unlocked and three colleges in two London Boroughs – Hackney and Waltham Forest**. The colleges involved are BSix Sixth Form College, Leyton Sixth Form College and New City College – Hackney. Together, we are **pioneering a new approach** to tackling the serious issue of sexual violence in education institutions and local communities. The Student Commission supports colleges and local communities to work with students to effectively change the culture around consent and sexual violence.

Using innovative **co-creation methods** and peer-to-peer engagement, the project moves beyond traditional top-down models, instead **engaging students directly in solutions** that challenge 'rape culture'. So far, the project has brought together students from across seven London Boroughs, giving them the opportunity to be part of the Student Commission – **a collective of young people** who want to make a change to their colleges and wider communities.

Leaders Unlocked supported the Student Commission to design and undertake peer research and analyse and interpret the results. The Student Commission then put together a guide for colleges, to help them create an effective sexual harassment policy (See Appendix 1).

The Student Commission also worked with professionals to create '**Shatter the Silence**', an animation which depicts examples of some common types of sexual violence that young people of all genders and sexualities may experience. Alongside the animation, the Student Commission developed a 60-minute workshop with supporting materials and trained staff to deliver this to the wider student body in their colleges.

*"Great animation and well done to the Student Commissioners for this work! The recommendations are so important. We would love to keep in touch with the Student Commissioners!"*  
**Dalvinder, Coventry Rape and Sexual Abuse Centre**

<sup>1</sup><https://www.theguardian.com/society/2021/nov/04/highest-ever-number-of-rapes-recorded-in-england-and-wales>

<sup>2</sup><https://educationhub.blog.gov.uk/2022/04/08/a-year-on-from-the-launch-of-the-ofsted-review-into-sexual-abuse-in-schools-and-colleges/>

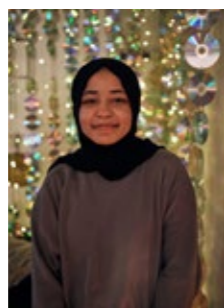
## OUR APPROACH

Through their research and reflecting on their own experiences, the Student Commission found that issues around consent and sexual violence in education institutions mirror deep rooted problems in our wider society.

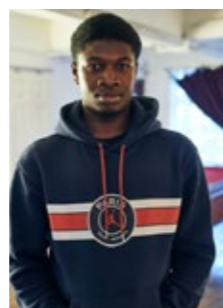
A very special thanks goes to the Student Commissioners and Peer Facilitators who have offered their time and talents to making this project a great success.



Naylah



Fatima



Oliver



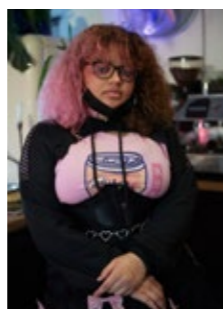
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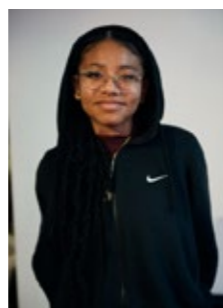
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Michelle



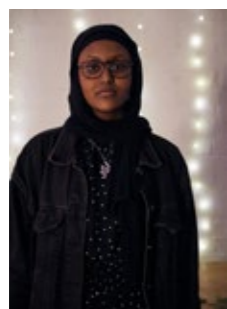
Carlos



Nhi



Alisa



Hanan

**“RAPE CULTURE AND MALE VIOLENCE PERMEATE SOCIETY SO DEEPLY IT'S IMPOSSIBLE TO TRULY ROOT IT OUT. YOU LEARN TO LIVE WITH IT.”**

The Student Commission identified the following root causes of sexual violence:

- Exposure to sexual violence in **mainstream culture, including social media.**
- Exposure to **inherited misogyny** and sexist views in families and cultures.
- **Double standards** for male and female behaviour.
- Inadequate education and a **lack of positive role models.**
- Apparent **lack of consequences** for sexual violence.
- **Lack of initiatives** to de-normalise sexual violence in mainstream culture.
- **Peer pressure, toxic masculinity** and **lack of mental health support.**

In this manifesto, the term sexual violence describes any sexual act or activity that takes place without consent from all people involved.

In our view, solutions that focus on what potential victims (mostly women and girls) can do to stay safe from sexual predators, play into a culture that normalises sexual violence. We aren't prepared to do that. Instead, our recommendations take a holistic approach, seeking to combat the root causes of sexual violence, by addressing **systemic failings.**

There are **multiple stakeholders** in young people's lives, including their schools and colleges, family and friends, local community leaders, support services, police and the Government. To see real impact, all these stakeholders need to get involved, partner with each other and provide resources to combat 'rape culture'. With this support, we can change the cultural norms around sexual violence and protect more young people from becoming victims or perpetrators.

*“Thank you everyone - looking forward to using the resources to get local schools and colleges on board!”*  
**Andrea, SERICC (Rape and Sexual Abuse Specialist Service)**

# RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

## DEVELOPED BY THE STUDENT COMMISSION

1. Increase and improve Relationships, Sex and Health Education (RSHE), starting with education on consent and safety from early in primary school.
2. Normalise conversations about consent and show zero-tolerance for sexual violence in education institutions. This will create a culture of respect and equality.
3. Build staff confidence to tackle sexual violence. As positive role models, school and college staff can challenge views that misogyny is natural, normal, or unchangeable.
4. Increase students' confidence in reporting processes and safeguarding. This will tackle the taboo around reporting incidents.
5. Give students a voice to inform policy, procedures and training. Student involvement will combat young people's feelings of powerlessness.
6. Get local support services, community leaders, police and other authorities involved with the young adults in their communities, to better support and learn from them.
7. Make education institutions safe havens, where young people's mental health and wellbeing is as important as their education.



## RECOMMENDATION 1: BETTER EDUCATION, FROM A YOUNG AGE

More RSHE provision, starting early on and running throughout school and college, will help children and young people stay safe, learn about consent, and resist an inherited 'rape culture'. Both in real life and online, children are exposed to toxic masculinity, sexism and violence in mainstream culture

from a young age.<sup>3</sup> Schools and colleges need to do more to combat these influences and to challenge beliefs that sexual violence is normal and inevitable. This will improve school and college staff confidence in their ability to teach young people about sexual violence.

### WHEN SHOULD CHILDREN START TO RECEIVE RSHE?

#### FROM 5 YEARS OLD:

"AT AGE 5, CHILDREN START TO HAVE AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE WORLD AROUND THEM. SO HAVING A BASIC IDEA OF RSHE SHOULD START AT A YOUNG AGE, SO THEY KNOW WHAT TO DO IN CASE OF A SITUATION OF POSSIBLE SEXUAL VIOLENCE AGAINST THEM."

#### FROM 8 YEARS OLD:

"THIS IS WHEN MOST CHILDREN ARE INTRODUCED TO SOCIAL MEDIA AND THE RISK INCREASES OF PREDATORS BEING ABLE TO CONTACT THE CHILDREN. IT ALSO GIVES CHILDREN A CHANCE TO LEARN THE SIGNS OF ABUSE."

"I THINK YOUNG PEOPLE NEED THIS INFORMATION EARLY – IT'S IMPORTANT THAT THEY HAVE GOOD CONVERSATIONS AND UNDERSTANDING BEFORE THEY ENGAGE IN SEXUAL ACTIVITY."

#### FROM 10 YEARS OLD:

"BECAUSE IT NEEDS TO BE TAUGHT WHEN CHILDREN ARE OLD ENOUGH TO UNDERSTAND BUT STILL FORMING THEIR PERCEPTION OF THE WORLD."

### WHAT DID SCHOOL TEACH YOU ABOUT SEXUAL VIOLENCE?

"I THINK THE EDUCATION SYSTEM FAILS TO TEACH US ABOUT THIS. I LEARNT NOTHING ABOUT SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN SCHOOL, I ONLY LEARNT FROM BEING ONLINE AND OTHER GIRLS."

"I THINK THAT IT NEEDS TO BE MADE AWARE MORE. I DON'T HEAR MUCH ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF CONSENT. BOTH GIRLS AND BOYS NEED TO BE TAUGHT AT A YOUNG AGE TO PREVENT ANYTHING LIKE THE EXAMPLES OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE LISTED ABOVE."

"I JUST WISH YOUNG BOYS WERE TAUGHT FROM A YOUNG AGE THAT THEY CANNOT DO THESE THINGS."

### The Student Commission found that:

- Most students think RSHE should start in primary school/before students begin puberty.
- Many students believe that age appropriate RSHE needs to start early in primary school, because children are vulnerable to abuse (through social media and in real life) from their early years.
- Young boys in particular, need better education about sexual violence, as acts of sexual harassment and sexist 'banter' in schools and colleges are most often committed by boys.

### To help young people understand consent and to combat sexual violence:

- Primary schools should teach children about the concepts of consent, boundaries and appropriate behaviour as early as possible.
- All students should receive ongoing, age appropriate RSHE throughout primary, secondary and college education.
- In consultation with young adults, Public Health England, the Department for Education and PSHE Association should review the RSHE curriculum, support and resources they provide.

41% of respondents didn't feel they had gained an understanding of the types of sexual violence from school or college.

We asked college students how old they were when they started receiving RSHE. 27% of students who answered, told us that they had not yet received any RSHE.

More students told us they'd found out about the different types of sexual violence from social media (62%) than RSHE (47%).

<sup>3</sup>Most children own a mobile phone by the time they are seven, and almost all (90%) have their own device by 11 years old: <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2020/jan/30/most-children-own-mobile-phone-by-age-of-seven-study-finds>

## RECOMMENDATION 2: A CULTURE OF RESPECT AND EQUALITY

Create and enforce a zero-tolerance approach to sexual violence of any kind, including verbal abuse. Students told us that catcalling, up-skirting and other acts of sexual harassment from boys are every day occurrences at schools and colleges, and often go unpunished. Schools and colleges

need to tackle sexually aggressive behaviour. This will combat a social double standard that accepts and even encourages harmful behaviour from boys and men, while holding victims responsible for protecting themselves from harm.

### The Student Commission found that:

- Sexual harassment, including catcalling, cyber-flashing and sexist 'banter' by boys is common place at schools and colleges.
- Often, sexually aggressive behaviour is considered 'normal', and when it happens in schools and colleges, it can go unpunished.
- When schools and colleges have visible security and staff who are responsible for responding to sexual harassment reports, students feel safer.

### To create an environment of respect and equality, education institutions should:

- Institute a zero-tolerance policy to all forms of sexual violence.
- Advertise their zero-tolerance policy, and promote messaging about consent, through visible poster campaigns, videos on screens throughout the institution and regular assemblies and classroom discussions.
- Set clear expectations for staff – they must call out any and every instance of sexual harassment that comes to their attention, and institutions must hold them accountable if they don't.

Under half of respondents (41%) believed students were safe from sexual violence at their school or college.

Around 90% of the girls interviewed for Ofsted's report into sexual violence said that 'sexist name calling and being sent unwanted explicit pictures or videos happened "a lot" or "sometimes"'.

### FOR MANY YOUNG PEOPLE, SEXUAL VIOLENCE IS A PART OF DAILY LIFE

"PEOPLE ARE NOT EDUCATED ENOUGH AND BOYS NORMALISE IT."

"MANY SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND VIOLENCE INCIDENTS GO UNNOTICED SIMPLY BECAUSE THE THINGS MOST OF US FACE IS SO NORMALISED. I DIDN'T KNOW UNTIL SOCIAL MEDIA WHAT WAS RIGHT AND WHAT WAS WRONG. I REALISED JUST HOW MUCH A LOT OF GIRLS AND BOYS GO THROUGH WHILE AT SCHOOL OR COLLEGE WITHOUT REALISING THAT ITS WRONG."

"THE AMOUNT OF CASES THAT HAVE RISEN IN THE PAST YEAR IS SCARY, NUDES ARE AIRDROPPED RANDOMLY IN THE LIBRARY AND CAFETERIAS AND THIS SPARKS FIGHTS AMONG STUDENTS."

"I THINK THAT A LOT OF UNWANTED SEXUAL VIOLENCE IS BLAMED ON THE GIRL. IN MY UPBRINGING I WAS ALWAYS TOLD TO COVER UP IN FRONT OF MALE FAMILY MEMBERS (I DON'T THINK THEY POSE ANY THREAT TO ME AT ALL). THERE WAS A LOT ABOUT HOW I SHOULD PREVENT IT. I ONCE GOT A RAPE ALARM AS PART OF MY CHRISTMAS PRESENT, FROM AN AUNT, THINGS LIKE THAT."



### DOES YOUR INSTITUTION KEEP STUDENTS SAFE FROM SEXUAL VIOLENCE?

"THERE ARE A LOT OF MEASURES TAKEN TO PREVENT SEXUAL VIOLENCE WITHIN THE SCHOOL PREMISES, BUT SEXUAL VIOLENCE IS OFTEN NOT DONE OUT IN THE OPEN. IT'S MOSTLY DISCREET AND KEPT QUIET WITH THREATS AND BLACKMAILING. THERE'S PLENTY THAT TAKES PLACE, EVEN IF STAFF SEEM TO BE KEEPING WATCH."

"OFTEN STUDENTS FEEL UNCOMFORTABLE REPORTING FORMS OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE TO MEMBERS OF STAFF, AND THE CULTURE AROUND HARASSMENT IS RAMPANT AND HARMFUL, WITH NO REAL ACTION TAKEN TOWARDS A SOLUTION."

"IN COLLEGE, A GIRL SENT A MESSAGE TO THIS GROUP I'M PART OF WARNING US THAT BOYS IN THE STEM BUILDING WERE DARING EACH OTHER TO ASSAULT GIRLS, AND THEY WERE. I HAD TO GO TO THE STEM BUILDING TO PARTICIPATE IN SOMETHING AND I WAS QUITE NERVOUS TO GO BECAUSE OF THESE ASSAULTS, LUCKILY I WASN'T ASSAULTED BUT I WAS CATCALLED."

"I DON'T THINK YOU CAN EVER BE TRULY SAFE FROM SEXUAL VIOLENCE NO MATTER THE ENVIRONMENT. A LOT OF THE TIME IT'S TREATED LIKE A JOKE AND THE PHRASE "I DIDN'T CONSENT" IS THROWN AROUND SO MUCH IT'S LOST ITS POWERFUL MEANING."

## RECOMMENDATION 3: BUILD STAFF CONFIDENCE TO CHALLENGE SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Increase staff confidence to call out sexism and combat sexual violence. Many respondents described teachers ignoring sexual harassment, sometimes because it was presented as 'banter' or jokes. When staff fail to step in, they act as negative role models. They reinforce cultural norms that

teach women to expect and 'submit' to this behaviour from men. This makes it harder for boys to stand up to the peer pressure to join in. It also means victims are less likely to trust staff and seek support from them.

### The Student Commission found that:

- Some students do not think that all staff are willing or able to tackle sexual violence when it takes place on their watch.
- Some students rely on support and information from their peers to stay safe from sexual harassment at school and college, rather than staff.

### To build staff confidence to tackle sexual violence:

- The Department for Education should provide more and better training resources that improve staff confidence to intervene and stop sexual harassment.
- Education institutions should provide regular training so that all staff are confident to discuss issues of consent and effectively tackle sexual violence they see or hear about.
- Local organisations with expertise in sexual and gender-based violence should be invited to staff training sessions, to keep them up to date with relevant trends in behaviour, including online risks.

**68% of respondents believed that the type of sexual violence students at their school or college were most at risk of sexual harassment. 35% felt that students were most at risk of indecent exposure (including cyber-flashing). 26% felt at risk of up-skirting.<sup>4</sup>**

<sup>4</sup> We asked students: What type of sexual violence do you believe students are most at risk from inside your school or college? Please select all that apply.



### WHAT DOES A CULTURE OF SILENCE SOUND LIKE?

"NOT MANY PEOPLE TALK ABOUT [IT], WHICH MAKES ME BELIEVE THEY FEEL SAFE, BUT THEY COULD BE HIDING ANY SEXUAL VIOLENCE THAT HAPPENED IN SCHOOL."

"THE SAFEGUARDING TEAM IS ALWAYS THERE FOR PEOPLE HOWEVER I DON'T KNOW IF PEOPLE ARE ALWAYS COMFORTABLE ENOUGH TO TALK ABOUT WHAT THEY HAVE BEEN THROUGH."

"IT IS UNSPOKEN AND NOT MANY PEOPLE WILL ADMIT TO IT HAPPENING SO IT WILL GO UNNOTICED."

"NO ONE FEELS COMFORTABLE ENOUGH TO TALK ABOUT THINGS LIKE THIS."

"I BELIEVE THAT STUDENTS ARE SAFE TO SOME DEGREE AS THERE ARE CAMERAS AROUND AND THE SECURITY TEAM PATROL. HOWEVER, IF SEXUAL ABUSE DOES TAKE PLACE IN COLLEGE MOST PEOPLE WON'T BE COMFORTABLE ENOUGH TO REPORT IT."

## RECOMMENDATION 4: TACKLE THE TABOO

A visible safeguarding team, transparent process and more healthy discussions about sexual violence will encourage more students to report. Many students don't know what happens next when something gets reported. Some aren't sure they can trust their school

or college to handle it well. Others don't feel safe to report, or worry it will make things worse for the victim. On top of that, sexual violence isn't generally talked about, so it can feel uncomfortable to speak up. All these fears lead to silence.

### The Student Commission found that:

- There is a taboo among staff and students around discussing sexual violence, and students are not confident to speak up about their experiences.
- Some students describe an atmosphere of silence, where reporting incidents is not actively encouraged, and they have limited knowledge of what happens once an incident is reported.

### To tackle the taboo and encourage more reporting, education institutions should:

- Involve students in regular discussions about the causes and consequences of sexual violence – in RSHE and the wider curriculum, as well as tutorials, events and campaigns (e.g. 'If you see something, say something').
- Ensure safeguarding leads are visible around the institution and are introduced to every student at induction – in particular at college, where staff-student relationships may not be as strong as at school.
- Have transparent policies and clear, accessible reporting processes, so that students feel encouraged and safe to report incidents they experience, witness or hear about. See Appendix 1 for the Student Commission's Successful Policy Guide.

17% of respondents said they wouldn't report an incident of sexual violence they witnessed or heard about taking place in their school or college.





### **WHY SHOULD STUDENTS REPORT INCIDENTS THEY WITNESS OR HEAR ABOUT?**

**"BECAUSE EVERYONE DESERVES A VOICE EVEN IF THEY CAN'T SPEAK FOR THEMSELVES."**

**"BECAUSE IT IS MY MORAL RESPONSIBILITY."**

**"I WOULD REPORT IT TO PREVENT IT FROM HAPPENING AGAIN."**

**"NO ONE SHOULD HAVE TO FEEL UNSAFE, ESPECIALLY IN AN ENVIRONMENT WHERE THEY'VE BEEN GIVEN THE PROMISE OF PROTECTION AND SAFETY. IF THERE'S ANY CASE WHERE SOMEONE IS GETTING ABUSED, HARASSED, ASSAULTED, OR ANY OTHER UNFAIRNESS DONE TO THEM, I STRONGLY BELIEVE IT SHOULD BE REPORTED."**

### **WHY DON'T STUDENTS REPORT INCIDENTS?**

**"PEOPLE HAVE TEACHERS TO TALK TO, BUT SOME MIGHT BE TOO SCARED TO TELL A TEACHER."**

**"SOME STUDENTS ARE UNABLE TO SPEAK UP ON THEIR EXPERIENCES. SOME STUDENTS ARE REPORTED BUT NOT DEALT WITH."**

**"IT'S NOT MY BUSINESS AND I DON'T KNOW HOW TO HELP."**

## **RECOMMENDATION 5: INVOLVE STUDENTS TO CREATE TRUSTED PROCESSES**

Young people need to feel that they are at the centre of procedures that are designed to keep them safe. By involving students in creating, promoting and reviewing policies and procedures around sexual violence, schools and colleges can give them a sense

of agency, optimism and trust in the reporting process. Co-produced procedures will feel authentic, and the students involved can act as positive role models. This will combat the powerlessness that students told us they feel about sexual violence.

### **The Student Commission found that:**

- Most students feel that reporting is the right thing to do, but some students wouldn't report an incident because they don't trust the process and/or don't expect the perpetrator to face any consequences.
- Students are more likely to report an incident to someone they trust than any other member of staff.
- Many students want the option to report incidents anonymously, for their own safety.

### **Education institutions can create clear and trusted reporting processes by:**

- Co-producing procedures with students, so that these are rooted in students' real experiences, and feel authentic and practical. These procedures should include clear and serious consequences for all sexual violence, including less 'serious' acts such as 'banter', catcalling and groping.
- Promoting and explaining procedures via a team of safeguarding ambassadors, including staff and students. This will create positive role models. It will also build confidence in staff and in the reporting process.
- Offering many reporting routes, so that students can report anonymously (e.g. via a drop box or online form), or to any member of staff they feel able to speak to about the incident.



**WHAT'S YOUR EXPERIENCE OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN THE WIDER COMMUNITY?**

"WHEN GOING OUT OF MY HOUSE, I'VE EXPERIENCED COMMENTS, STARING, WHISTLING ETC. PROBABLY ON A DAILY BASIS. WHEN I'VE BEEN AT THE GYM, I'VE BEEN FILMED AS WELL."

"SEXUAL HARASSMENT IS QUITE COMMON AND THERE'S NOT A SINGLE WOMAN OR GIRL THAT I KNOW THAT HASN'T EXPERIENCED SOME SORT OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT."

"EVERY GIRL IN MY FAMILY HAS DEALT WITH IT. ALMOST EVERY WOMAN I KNOW AND SO MANY BOYS HAVE. IT'S SO UPSETTING THAT IT'S SO COMMON AND MORE NEEDS TO BE DONE."

## RECOMMENDATION 6: A WHOLE COMMUNITY APPROACH

Local community leaders, mental health and sexual violence support services, police and other authorities should regularly visit schools and colleges to speak to students. Many students told us that they feel more exposed to sexual violence in the wider community than at their school or college. Local communities should take more

responsibility for preventing sexual violence by or against young people in their area and online. They can do this by speaking to young people about the risks and resources in their community, but also by listening to their experiences – to learn about the impact of sexual violence on the next generation.

### The Student Commission found that:

- Many students feel frustrated and want to see more being done to tackle sexual violence both in schools and colleges as well as in the wider community.
- Overall, students feel safer from sexual violence at school and college than out in the wider community, where many believe it is inevitable.

### Involve students in wider community efforts to tackle sexual violence:

- Local support services and authorities should visit schools and colleges to speak directly to young people about sexual violence, both online and in the local area – discussing the risks, support available and what they are doing to tackle 'rape' culture.
- Local community leaders, support services and authorities should also come to schools and colleges to learn from students' experiences and understand their concerns.

### 18 students shared additional information about their own, personal experiences of sexual violence:

- Almost half (seven) told us they had personally experienced sexual violence in their school or college.
- Almost all (15) had experienced sexual violence in the wider community.
- Only one of these respondents felt safe from sexual violence in the wider community.



### **DOES SEXUAL VIOLENCE AFFECT MENTAL HEALTH?**

**"I'VE HAD SOMEONE CLOSE TO ME NEARLY IN A SITUATION WHERE THEY HAVE BEEN RAPED, AND THAT STILL SCARS THEM TO THIS DAY."**

**"I GOT SEXUALLY ASSAULTED IN A NIGHTCLUB, STILL FEEL PARANOID WALKING AROUND IN PUBLIC."**

**"I HAVE BEEN INTRUSIVELY STARED AT BEFORE MANY TIMES AND SOMETIMES EVEN FOLLOWED AND USUALLY IT'D MAKE ME FEEL OVERDRAMATIC OR STUPID TO BE SCARED AND THEN I GASLIGHT MYSELF INTO BELIEVING IT'S NOT REALLY A BIG DEAL. I THINK NEITHER MYSELF NOR ANYONE ELSE SHOULD BE THINKING ABOUT IT LIKE THAT. THERE SHOULD BE MORE AWARENESS ABOUT SEXUAL VIOLENCE."**

**"SEXUAL VIOLENCE IS DEHUMANISING; IT STRIPS ALL YOUR DIGNITY AWAY."**

**"A STUDENT IN MY CLASS AT COLLEGE SHOWED ME A VIDEO (THAT I DIDN'T CONSENT TO) [...] WHICH LEFT ME IN DISTRESS AND SELF-WORRY. I WAS WORRIED ABOUT COMING FORWARD TO SAY THIS TO SOMEONE [...] I ALSO DIDN'T SAY IT AS I WAS AFRAID OF BEING DISLIKED BY MY CLASSMATES."**

## **RECOMMENDATION 7: MAKE EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS SAFE HAVENS**

In the age of social media, and the aftermath of the pandemic, we face a mental health crisis among young people. We need to take a holistic approach to young people's safety, with schools and colleges prioritising mental health and wellbeing. It is as important as education. The longer a young person experiences poor mental health,

the more negatively it affects their view of themselves and the world around them. Better mental health will improve young people's relationships and their resilience to peer pressure. It will also build their self-esteem.

### **The Student Commission found that:**

- Many students think their school or college doesn't understand what it's like to be exposed to as much sexual violence as they are, both in the real world and online.
- Some students' experience of sexual violence – as perpetrators, victims and witnesses – affects and is affected by their mental health.

### **To take a holistic approach to student safety, education institutions should:**

- Prioritise mental health and wellbeing, taking a proactive approach by providing one-to-one support to anyone whose behaviour indicates they may be struggling.
- Partner with local mental health services to provide more counselling and other support to students, so that every young person can access the support they need through their school or college.
- Regularly collaborate with students, asking for their input, so that the institution can better understand and support students' needs in all aspects of their lives – online, at school or college, and in the wider community.

**17% of respondents said they had personal experience of mental health issues.**

# APPENDIX

## APPENDIX 1: STUDENT COMMISSION'S GUIDE TO CREATING A SUCCESSFUL SEXUAL VIOLENCE POLICY



### A STUDENT-LED APPROACH TO POLICY

The Student Commission on Consent and Sexual Violence were tasked with co-producing guidance on what an effective policy could look like in education. This activity was designed to find out how young people feel about the policies in place to keep them safe and how they could be improved.

Based on lengthy discussions and brainstorming, below are the Student Commission on Consent and Sexual Violence's top tips and recommendations for creating an accessible, functional, student-led Sexual Violence & Harassment policy:

#### Our Top 3 Things to Remember

1. A policy in education should exist to keep young people safe, not just protect college reputation.
2. Clarity is key, using jargon and ambiguous statements only creates loopholes or a lack of understanding for students.
3. A policy that is informed by those who it is created for (the students) is more likely to be understood and adhered to.

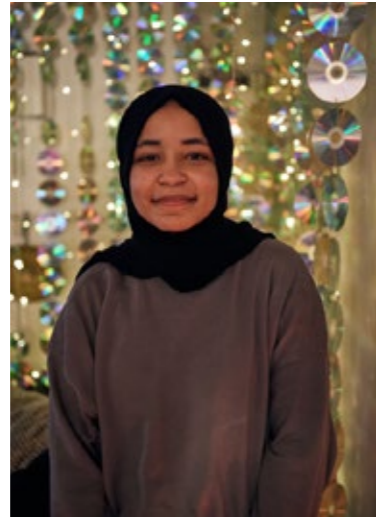
POLICY DO'S	POLICY DON'TS
<p><b>DO NOT OVEREMPHASISE</b> A sexual violence policy needs an approach that clearly outlines the various types of sexual violence.</p> <p><b>DO NOT BE TOO TECHNICAL, ACADEMIC, &amp; OVERSTATED</b> A policy should be easily accessible for students online. It should be clearly signposted on the institution's website and on student and staff portals.</p> <p><b>DO NOT APPEAL TO POLICE AND LEGAL SERVICES</b> Simply saying sexual violence will not be tolerated is not enough. Examples of instances and potential consequences should be available.</p> <p><b>DO NOT BE TOO SHORT &amp; CONCISE ONLY</b> One ready document is not suitable for everyone. The policy should be available in a better and more visual format for students e.g. images and flowcharts. An accompanying informational video covering the headlines would help too. The complete policy should still exist, but not be the only option.</p> <p><b>DO NOT WRITE THE POLICY AS A BULLET POINT</b> The policy should include step-by-step processes with the victim's potential emotions and how it will e.g. "These things might happen next."</p> <p><b>DO NOT WRITE THE POLICY AS A BULLET POINT</b> Involve students of the policy and its purpose at least every term. Policies should reflect the main takeaways e.g. how to report, and where to find the policy.</p>	<p><b>DO NOT OVEREMPHASISE</b> We don't need overemphasised language or explanations; we are young adults, and we just need to know about sexual violence, the consequences and how to get help.</p> <p><b>DO NOT BE TOO TECHNICAL</b> We understand there may be essential parts of an official policy that don't mean much to us, but the parts that matter should not be made difficult to understand for students and should be available separately or signposted well so we can skip the unnecessary parts.</p> <p><b>DO NOT BE TOO SHORT &amp; CONCISE ONLY</b> The language used is so important as if we feel that we are at all to blame for any sexual violence that happens to us, we are far less likely to want to tell you about it.</p> <p><b>DO NOT WRITE THE POLICY AS A BULLET POINT</b> We need to know what will happen if we report and we need to be involved at every stage. It is hard to disclose sexual violence from press as we fear the repercussions. Allowing us to maintain some control over the situation will help. This includes being honest about what needs to be done.</p> <p><b>DO NOT WRITE THE POLICY AS A BULLET POINT</b> Policies for and practice of anonymous reporting are legally encouraged as well as a general review of complaints processes. If we are made to feel as though we are causing trouble, or our reporting will result in a formal investigation, it can be off-putting.</p>

The Student Commission on Consent and Sexual Violence thank you for taking the time to read their suggestions for a student-led approach to policy writing. For more information on the Student Commission and their 2022 Manifesto for Action please contact [stov@lsc-leeds.ac.uk](mailto:stov@lsc-leeds.ac.uk)





Naylah



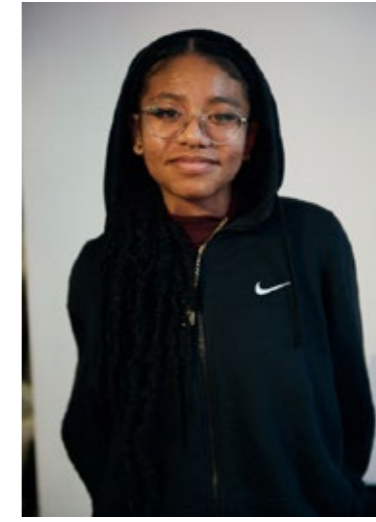
Fatima



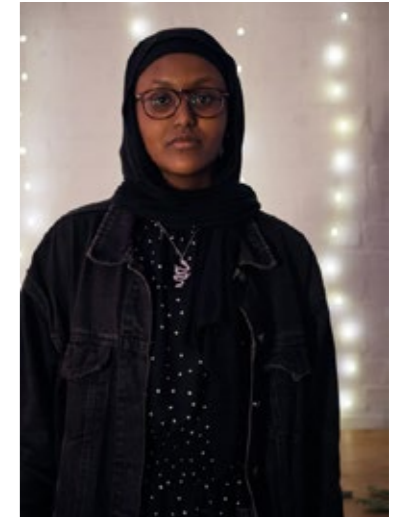
Oliver



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Hanan



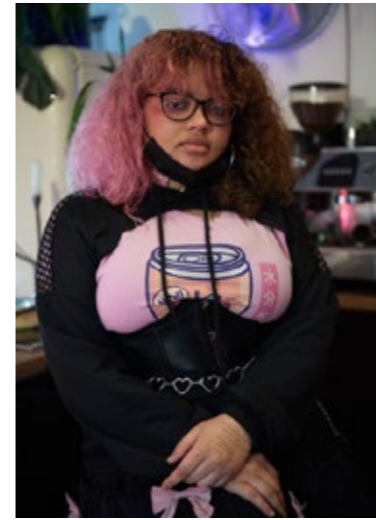
Michelle



Kedesha



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**and The Student Commission on Sexual Violence**

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