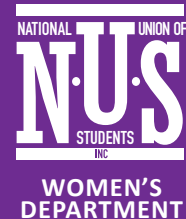


# SAFE UNIVERSITIES BLUEPRINT



## Talk About It Survey Results & Recommendations



Report written and compiled by Courtney Sloane with assistance from Keelia Fitzpatrick

# Foreword

Violence against women is a huge problem nationwide with 1 in 3 women experiencing physical violence in their lifetime and 1 in 5 experiencing sexual violence. It is also an issue that is the subject of much government and non-government policy with the National Action Plan to End Violence Against Women released earlier this year being just one of the many initiatives put forward to tackle this issue.

Reports of violence against women had been received by the National Union of Student for a series of years in a way that was not easily measured. Following a series of incidents at residential colleges in New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory, many media outlets began contacting NUS for data and statistics on the issue, however none was available. This prompted the Women's Department at NUS to develop the Talk About It survey.

This survey, the only of its kind, questioned over 1500 women on their perceptions of safety, their experiences of sexual harassment and assault, and their experiences of how it was dealt with once it was reported.

It was important to me to ensure the recommendations from this survey were not just a product of NUS policy but were also a reflection of broader consensus building on this issue. In this way, the recommendations have become a 'Safe Universities Blueprint' combining Australian best-practice, international initiatives and suggestions put forward by the women's, tertiary and youth sectors.

This Blueprint is targeted at both universities (including their residential colleges) and students. It is important that students play a part in this process to ensure that an issue that overwhelmingly affects them is dealt with in a manner that best addresses their needs. However, the Blueprint also recognizes the responsibility universities have in ensuring the safety of their students whilst studying at university.

It is my hope that this survey and its report will begin a constructive dialogue in which students and universities can work together to attempt to solve this issue and move forward in ending the negative effects it has on women at university. I would like to acknowledge the work of 2010 Women's Officer, Keelia Fitzpatrick in launching the survey, and NUS UK for their advice and support in putting it together. I would also thank Universities Australia, White Ribbon Australia and the Equal Rights Alliance for their support on this issue.

**Courtney Sloane**  
National Women's Officer  
National Union of Students



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# Endorsements

Universities Australia is pleased to endorse the recommendations contained in the National Union of Students (NUS) Talk About It survey report. Universities Australia takes student safety very seriously and urges all Australian education providers to consider the NUS report as a way of complementing and extending our efforts to improve the student experience.

The recommendations are designed to ensure women can study in a safe university environment by improving university policies on information and services, reporting mechanisms, awareness, infrastructure and training. As such, they are consistent with, and complementary to Universities Australia’s recently released Good Practice Guidelines for Enhancing Student Safety which guide, support and recognise good practice, both on and off Australian university campuses. These Guidelines include a Ten Point Action Plan for Student Safety, and an update of members’ progress against the Plan which demonstrates an active commitment to implementation across the sector.

Universities Australia continues to advocate for a policy environment that supports student safety and wellbeing on and beyond campuses, such as improved accommodation conditions, employment and student support services, and transport concessions. The right policy settings combined with initiatives to address specific safety issues, such as the needs of women on campus, are crucial to ensuring that our students have the positive and rewarding experience that is so central to the educational purpose and responsibility of Australia’s universities.

## Glenn Withers Universities Australia

Equality Rights Alliance is a network of non government, not for profit organisations and social enterprises coming together to advocate for women’s rights and gender equality. With 54 members, Equality Rights Alliance is Australia’s largest organisational network of women’s advocates. Equality Rights Alliance maintains a focus on gender equality, women’s leadership and women’s diversity, including bringing young women’s voices to policy and decision making.

Equality Rights Alliance congratulates the National Union of Students for its work in highlighting the problem of violence against women on university campuses. The results of the NUS’s comprehensive survey are disturbing – women are experiencing violence, in a range of forms, yet there is a very low level of incidents being reported. They are feeling unsafe at night on university’s campuses, and they report being unaware of available services. The recommendations of this report are comprehensive, practical and focused, and we commend them to all universities to implement, and make steps towards combating violence against women on university campuses.

## Equality Rights Alliance



Violence against women is widespread, systemic and culturally entrenched. It is an issue which takes many forms – from physical and sexual violence to emotional and financial. No matter what form violence takes, it has serious and often devastating consequences for victims, their extended families and the community.

The findings from the National Union of Students' "Talk About It" survey, and subsequent recommendations, verify that Australian universities are not immune to the social and economic impacts of violence against women. All women deserve the right to feel safe and secure on university campuses and colleges; to learn freely without the threat of violence.

Furthermore, all women everywhere deserve to live a life free from violence. This is the fundamental premise of the White Ribbon Campaign – a movement which spans over 60 countries. The White Ribbon Campaign in Australia works to stop violence against women through engaging men and boys in primary prevention strategies; such as male leadership, awareness-raising and education. These strategies are designed to create inter-generational change in the way men and boys think and act towards women. In addition to prevention programs, White Ribbon has 1400 Ambassadors who are raising awareness of the issue and are working to create change through their networks and communities.

However, achieving inter-generational change is challenging and won't happen overnight. It requires a whole-of-community approach and relies on the power of the individual in driving this change.

The recommendations contained in this survey highlight the need for the university community to take a united approach in combating violence against women. This is an issue around which everyone, from Vice Chancellors to student representatives, can play a powerful leadership role. Universities are conduits for creativity, innovation and social change. They play a pivotal role in shaping Australia's future. By expanding the White Ribbon Campaign into universities, through establishing White Ribbon committees and appointing White Ribbon Ambassadors, Australia is another step closer to creating sustainable change around this issue.

White Ribbon looks forward to working with Australian universities in creating a future free from violence against women.

## White Ribbon Australia



# Executive Summary

## PERCEPTIONS OF SAFETY

During the day, 92% of respondents felt safe compared with just 24% at night.

## SEXUAL HARASSMENT

86% of respondents have experienced someone making sexual comments or noises.  
25% have had unwanted physical contact of a sexual nature.  
35% have had unwanted contact in the way of groping, touching etc.  
13% had experienced someone exposing their sexual organs to them without their permission.  
25% of these respondents experienced this behavior several times.  
73% of those who responded to this question did not know their attacker prior to the event.

## UNWANTED OBSESSIVE BEHAVIOR & STALKING

17% of the survey's respondents said that they had experienced stalker-like or obsessive behavior.  
57% said that the person responsible was an acquaintance or friend.  
15% said that the person responsible was a partner or ex-partner.  
6% said that the person responsible was an academic or non-teaching staff member at their university.  
27% said that they were unknown prior to the offence.

## EXPERIENCES OF PHYSICAL MISTREATMENT

9% of the survey's respondents said that they had been hit or physically mistreated.  
67% of respondents had experienced it in the form of being pushed, slapped, and shoved or having had their hair pulled.  
39% had experienced having something thrown at them.  
26% had been kicked, bitten, hit with a fist or something that could hurt them.  
12% had been choked, dragged, strangled or burnt.  
34% said the perpetrator was unknown to them prior to the incident  
29% said that they were an acquaintance or friend.  
31% said that they were a partner or ex-partner.

## EXPERIENCES OF SEXUAL ASSAULT

67% of respondents said that they had an unwanted sexual experience.

31% had sex when they were, or felt unable to consent.

36% had other unwanted sexual experienced.

17% had experienced rape.

12 % had experienced attempted rape.

11% had experienced assault by penetration.

56% of respondents said that their attacker was an acquaintance or friend.

22% said that they knew their attacker intimately

27% said they did not know their attacker prior to the incident.

## REPORTING & AWARENESS

Only 3% of respondents who had experienced assault or harassment had reported it to their university and only 2% reported it to the police.

A majority of students (68% of respondents) stated that they did not report the incident because they didn't think it was serious enough to report.

Of those who did report the incident to their university, more were unhappy with how it was dealt than were happy.

More women than not were aware of the services available to them from their university with 26% aware of these services compared with 17% not.

## IMPACT

Of the respondents who had experienced assault, harassment and stalking, 70% said that it had affected their confidence, 67% said that it affected their mental health and 49% said that it had affected their personal relationships.



# Recommendations

## SERVICES

**Recommendation 1:** 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. Ideally, staff dealing with victims should be female

**Recommendation 2:** Free, after hours shuttle buses should be made available on or between all campuses and to nearby transport hubs such as a train or bus stations.

**Recommendation 3:** University security services should be able to provide escorts between points on campus after dark.

## INFORMATION

**Recommendation 4:** Often information regarding what constitutes assault or harassment, the university's position on it, and what to do about it once it occurs is spread across various university services and faculties. Universities should aim to have this information centralized, accessible and easy to find (such as on their website's student-portal front page). They should also liaise with their student organization(s) where they exist to ensure that this information is linked from the student union website.

**Recommendation 5:** Universities should liaise with their student organisation(s) where appropriate to ensure that new students arriving during orientation weeks are provided with this information in their induction packs. University specific information should be put together by the university and produced with the aim of distributing during o-weeks.

**Recommendation 6:** This information should include reporting channels outside the university such as the police, and contact information for services such as Rape Crisis Centres, Legal Aid and health services. Information specific to international students should also be included such as how their visas interact with the process, if at all.

**Recommendation 7:** All information regarding this issue needs to be kept up-to-date to reflect changes in the relevant legislation and changes in best practice.

## REPORTING

**Recommendation 8:** Universities should consider giving students the opportunity to report their incident anonymously. An option for this may be online reporting. Many victims do not wish to take their complaint further or are afraid of possible social repercussions. In this way, data on the number of occurrences can still be collected in a sensitive manner and used to inform future policy. Witnesses of sexual assault could also report it in this way.

**Recommendation 9:** These reports should be followed up by the university and actioned where appropriate in a sensitive manner.

**Recommendation 10:** Effort should be made to ensure that every point of contact, be it with counselors, security, academics or admin, is with a female staff member who has been trained in how to deal with assault and harassment.



**Recommendation 11:** These reports, as well as others made in person and through more conventional channels, should be used to provide campus based data sets on the rates of assault and/or harassment, and what the perceived causes are, in order to inform ongoing university policy and practice. Anonymous statistics should be made available to relevant areas within the university in order to improve transparency and demonstrate that the issue is being dealt with.

## CAMPAIGNS

**Recommendation 12:** University VCs could consider becoming White Ribbon Ambassadors in order to make it explicitly clear to the university community that this kind of behavior is not acceptable, and that the university is serious about tackling the problem.

**Recommendation 13:** Individual campuses could consider starting campus based White Ribbon Groups for students to get involved in. These are instrumental in challenging the attitudes of men towards women in regard to violence.

**Recommendation 14:** Student Unions/Associations should ensure that their women's representative is resourced effectively. Women's officers are often first contacts for women who have been assaulted and ensuring that they have the capacity to deal with assault and harassment (either through training, provision of resources, or provision/increase of honoraria to ensure greater capacity for face-to-face time on campus) will go a great way to ensuring victims are receiving the appropriate attention.

**Recommendation 15:** Student Unions/Associations should ensure the mainstreaming of this issue into their day-to-day business by running whole of union campaigns on the issue, discussing how best to promote services, regularly assessing the effectiveness of university and college policy and reviewing how the issue intersects with other positions such as the President, Queer Officers, Indigenous Officer, Welfare Officers and so on.

## POLICIES

**Recommendation 16:** Policies regarding the university's position on harassment, assault and violence should be easily 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.

Policies regarding assault and harassment on campus need to be attached to long-term goals including, but not limited to, the following:

1. Reducing the number of incidences on campus;
2. Ensuring that the victim involved is not further traumatized;
3. Ensuring that the perpetrator involved is equipped with information to ensure it does not happen again.

**Recommendation 17:** Policies dealing with harassment and assault should stand-alone and not be confused with 'grievance' or 'bullying' policies. The issue is a starkly different one with different influences, causes and outcomes and should be dealt with in a way that recognizes this.

**Recommendation 18:** Policies should avoid placing the onus on the victim or putting them in damaging situations throughout the reporting and handling process.

**Recommendation 19:** In dealing with complaints once they have been made, mediation should be an option but not the only one. Universities should aim to develop policies where there are suites of options for victims to choose from. This could be developed in consultation with counselors and students themselves.

**Recommendation 20:** All residential colleges and halls, whether private or owned by the university, should be made to adhere to the university’s broader policy on violence against women and required to report to the university the number of incidents reported under their care and how these incidents were dealt with once reported.

## INFRASTRUCTURE

**Recommendation 21:** Universities should ensure that lighting across campus is at a level that ensures that women in particular feel safe at night. This is not limited to ensuring that main paths or routes on campus are properly lit. This particularly applies to campuses that have large areas of bush land or gardens. Universities should aim to light direct routes between points on campus.

**Recommendation 22:** Universities should aim to ensure that all main transit routes on campus have phones installed to alert security of any danger.

**Recommendation 23:** Universities should aim to ensure that all major routes, landmarks and buildings on campus are monitored by video surveillance.

**Recommendation 24:** Universities should ensure that patrolled “safe spaces” are available, easy to find, well-lit and open 24 hours. These spaces should have clear, well-lit, safe access to late night public transport services or shuttle buses to bus or train stations.

**Recommendation 25:** Universities should ensure that accessible campus maps showing lit and patrolled routes are made available at several points on campus, particularly at entry points.

## TRAINING

**Recommendation 26:** All pastoral care teams (such as senior residents, resident associations, positions on student unions etc.) need to have comprehensive training provided through the university on dealing with assault and harassment when it is reported.

**Recommendation 27:** All staff employed by the university need to have training in what assault and harassment are, what the university’s policies on it are and what to do about it once it is reported.

**Recommendation 28:** Universities should consider developing a base level of assault and harassment training (such as something equivalent to an RSA certificate) for security guards to complete in order to gain employment to ensure a safety-training standard.

**Recommendation 29:** Universities should consider developing respectful relationships training targeted at students – particularly those living in close proximity to one another such as college students. Such training is aimed at breaking down attitudes towards women that inform the behaviors outlined in the survey. Such training acts as a preventative measure.

**Recommendation 30:** Recognising that girlfriends are often the first people female victims of sexual assault or harassment turn to for advice, universities should consider having training targeted at female students that better equips them with what to do and/or say should a friend come to them having experienced it. This first response can greatly influence the course of action (reporting, counselling, health care) the victim takes from that point on.



# Methodology

The National Union of Students research staff conducted a review of available material relating to the safety of university students in August 2010. This review aimed to gauge international approaches to:

- i) the collection of statistics about student safety;
- ii) the collection of statistics about violence against women; and
- iii) improving the safety of university students on campus.

Detailed consultation was carried out with the National Union of Students in the United Kingdom in early September 2010. The approaches to difficult subject matter and research methodology used in the NUS UK 2010 Report 'Hidden Marks: A study of women students' experiences of harassment, stalking, violence and sexual assault' were examined and discussed. The National Union of Students then examined and discussed ways of adopting relevant elements of this methodology and approach to the issue. Women student representatives at all public universities viewed the survey's draft content and provided feedback and adjustments prior to it being launched.

The survey was conducted exclusively online through the NUS website domain and using an online survey tool. The survey was promoted to students by student representative organisations and university administrations. The survey was accessible online between the 14th of September 2010 and the 20th March 2011. A total of 1549 survey responses were collected. Due to the sensitive nature of some of the survey's questions, responses to each question were optional and partial responses were accepted.



# Results

The average student filling out the survey was a female, later-year, domestic student aged 24.7 years. They lived in a private residence and did not identify as having a disability. 1549 students responded to the survey between September and December 2010 and January to March 2011.

## PART A: PERCEPTIONS OF SAFETY

Safe learning environments are important for ensuring sound learning outcomes for students. Unfortunately, many respondents in this section, whilst able to identify with relatively high levels of safety during the day, were unable to identify in the same way for the night. This issue is particularly relevant on campuses that hold evening classes where students may be on campus after dark or when transport becomes less frequent.

The difference in the number of women feeling safe during the day compared with women feeling safe at night whilst on campus was stark. During the day, 92% of respondents felt safe compared with just 24% at night. These results were not restricted to particular campuses but the reasons cited for feeling unsafe were common. Common reasons why included poor lighting, late night classes, isolated places and the presence of large groups of men.

**“The lighting in some car parks is very dim and limited.”**

**“When classes held at night finish late, it is hard to stand at the bus stop and usually these places are isolated.”**

**“...[There are] language barriers sometimes...”**

**“[There is a] lack of people around after 5pm and no security personnel walking around.”**

**“Car parks are miles away from buildings”**

**“[There are] large groups of men loitering”**

Patterns were also noted in the buildings in and around which women noted that they felt unsafe. Ovals, bushy areas, car parks, computer labs and dark spaces in general were most often noted. The link observed was that these areas were usually poorly lit, isolated or not patrolled by security.

The survey also aimed to tease out the reasons why residential college environments may have felt unsafe to respondents. For those who noted any feeling that their safety was threatened, reasons included incidences of previous attacks at that particular college, strangers walking about the building and living arrangements in shared accommodation in which women were placed with groups of men or with people they did not know.

**“Sometimes intruders come into college, often unchallenged”**

**“Someone once tried to open my door”**

**“I had to share with three males and had no choice who I could share with...I felt outnumbered”**

## PART B: SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Harassment is an issue that is addressed in many university policies yet the focus is typically on the roles staff play. Despite many campus's attempts to develop comprehensive anti-harassment policies, there are still issues of student-to-student harassment that are not adequately addressed at many universities and a lack of clarity around what actually constitutes harassment in the first place.

In this section, respondents were able to answer 'yes' to more than one question and so percentages added up to more than 100%. This was in recognition that many women experience many different forms of harassment. This section also separated these different forms rather than grouping them under a single category of 'harassment' as it was suspected that some women might not have known whether or not they had experienced harassment. By separating each out, we were able to get a better reflection of the level of incidences at universities.

86% of respondents have experienced someone making sexual comments or noises.  
 25% have had unwanted physical contact of a sexual nature.  
 35% have had unwanted contact in the way of groping, touching etc.  
 13% had experienced someone exposing their sexual organs to them without their permission.

25% of these respondents experienced this behavior several times.  
 73% of those who responded to this question did not know their attacker prior to the event.

### **PART C: UNWANTED OBSESSIVE BEHAVIOR AND STALKING**

Obsessive behavior and stalking are intrusive behaviors that cause fear in the people experiencing them. This threat to feeling safe whilst at university affects wellbeing, which in turn affects learning outcomes.

This section questioned student's experiences of stalker-like behavior. This was defined as being repeatedly followed, watched, phoned, texted, written to, emailed, communicated through social network sites or in any other way that made the student feel afraid or concerned for their safety.

17% of the survey's respondents said that they had experienced stalker-like or obsessive behavior.

Of these respondents, 57% said that the person responsible was an acquaintance or friend. 15% said that the person responsible was a partner or ex-partner. 6% said that the person responsible was an academic or non-teaching staff member at their university. 27% said that they were unknown prior to the offence.

### **PART D: EXPERIENCES OF PHYSICAL MISTREATMENT**

Physical mistreatment is the sort of tangible violence against women that is most easily recognized and yet still remains as an issue at many campuses. It is here that intersectional issues are also quite prominent. Whilst violence against women is an issue for all women, it has varying effects on different groups of women. Anecdotally, we know that many international students fear repercussions for their visas upon reporting incidences of violence. We also know that levels of violence per capita are at least as high in female same-sex attracted communities and for young women than when the statistic is taken from society as a whole.

9% of the survey's respondents said that they had been hit or physically mistreated.

Most respondents (67%) in this section had experienced it in the form of being pushed, slapped, shoved or having had their hair pulled. 39% had experienced having something thrown at them. 26% had been kicked, bitten, hit with a fist or something that could hurt them. 12% had been choked, dragged, strangled or burnt.

34% said the perpetrator was unknown to them prior to the incident with 29% saying that they were an acquaintance or friend. 31% said that they were a partner or ex-partner.



## PART E: EXPERIENCES OF SEXUAL ASSAULT

Sexual assault or 'rape' are strongly affected by popular myths. Such a private and unspoken crime is prey to popular depictions of women in dark allies with strangers being violently assaulted. As such, many women who experience 'rape' do not identify with having done so and similarly, many perpetrators do not see themselves as 'rapists'. This does not mean that the experiences of these women are any less traumatic, or that a crime has not taken place, rather that the crime is not reported and victim's needs are not properly addressed.

Other issues include functions of trauma where victims downplay their experiences so as not to attract the social stigma and emotional baggage that comes with 'being raped'.

In this section, respondents were asked questions about their experiences of sexual assault. These questions gave various options for the same crime. This was done in order to capture responses from people who had technically experienced sexual assault or 'rape' but did not identify with having done so. Anecdotally, we know that some women do not know what constitutes sexual assault and so this question aimed to capture these women's experiences. Respondents were able to answer more than one (as some women may have experienced different forms of sexual assault during different occasions) so percentages added up to more than 100%.

67% of respondents in this section said that they had an unwanted sexual experience. 31% had sex when they were, or felt unable to consent. 36% had other unwanted sexual experiences. 17% had experienced rape. 12 % had experienced attempted rape. 11% had experienced assault by penetration.

56% of respondents said that their attacker was an acquaintance or friend. 22% said they knew them intimately and 27% said they did not know their attacker prior to the incident.

## PART F: REPORTING AND AWARENESS

Strong levels of reporting indicate the presence of an environment in which reporting is easy to do and is encouraged, that is to say, one in which victims feel safe and do not fear social repercussions for their complaint. Reporting is also integral to developing policies that properly target the issue and allow for organic and appropriate policy and service development.

The survey demonstrated that level of victims reporting is well below ideal. Reporting is crucial to ensuring the well being of those involved and to informing future policy around the issue. Of the respondents who had experienced the behavior outlined above, only 3% reported it to their university and only 2% reported it to the police.

Mistakenly, a majority of students (68% of respondents) stated that they did not report the incident because they didn't think it was serious enough to report. This could demonstrate either a lack of clarity on what constitutes assault, harassment or obsessive behavior, that victims had downplayed their experiences so as not to attract attention or social stigma, or that their first response (from friends or family for example) was one that wrongly led them to believe that the offence was not one worth reporting. It is important to note that this result was in no way because the offence was not in fact serious enough to report.



Of those who did report the incident to their university, more were unhappy with how it was dealt than were happy.

More women than not were aware of the services available to them from their university with 26% aware of these services compared with 17% not. Services victims reported to that were listed included but were not limited to: SRCs Unions and Guilds, the university women's rooms and officers and university counseling services.

However, for services outside the university, more respondents were unaware of available services. For those who were aware, the services listed by them included women's centres, CASA, WIRE, Helpline, YWCA, Rape Crisis Centres, Police, family planning services and GPs.

## PART G: IMPACT

The impact of assault and harassment on victims' mental health is well documented and holds true in these results. In this section, respondents were able to respond to more than one option. Of the respondents who had experienced assault, harassment and stalking, 70% said that it had affected their confidence, 67% said that it affected their mental health and 49% said that it had affected their personal relationships.

# Recommendations for Future Surveys

1. That NUS conduct this survey every 2 years so as to be able to monitor changes and improvements.
2. That the survey be amended to include a larger section that better teases out residential college issues.
3. That more universities participate in distributing the survey through their all-student networks.



**ACT NOW**  
**CREATE CHANGE**

**Women's Department**

