

62% of university students in Spain have experienced gender violence

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62% of university students in Spain have experienced gender violence . Credit: Plataforma SINC

The first research on violence against women at Spanish universities reveals that 62 percent of the student body know or have experienced situations of gender violence in the university community. The study also

suggests that such violence often goes unreported and that there is a lack of knowledge to identify these situations.

Four researchers from the universities of Barcelona, Girona and Rovira i Virgili have published the study. 25 percent of attacks identified as violence against women were perpetrated by faculty. Despite these figures, 91 percent of cases of attacks at Spanish universities go unreported.

As Patricia Melgar from the University of Girona, co-author of the study published in the journal *Violence Against Women*, tells SINC: "The law of silence on this topic at universities in Spain has been more rigid than in other social contexts. From the beginning of this research project, a we were fiercely persecuted, with anonymous accusations and even death threats."

The researcher explains that, "until now, the few [victims](#) who had dared to try to report a case had been destroyed one by one both professionally and psychologically."

The study is based on data collected from a sample of 1,083 [students](#) at universities in Andalusia, Castile and León, Catalonia, Valencia, Murcia and the Basque Country. Participants were selected using a multi-stage sampling technique. An important aspect arising from the analysis of the data is that the large majority of university students do not identify or acknowledge violent situations.

In most cases acknowledged by the students interviewed, the victim was a female student (92 percent). The perpetrators were mostly male (84 percent) and students (65 percent). 25 percent of people who witnessed violence against women stated that the perpetrator was a faculty member. Only in 16 percent of cases of violence was the perpetrator unknown to the victim.

Control and humiliation are also forms of violence

The research participants saw male violence as that which involves a physical or sexual attack against women, but not other behaviour that involves control, domination and humiliation.

For example, the study points out that 23 percent of students did not consider violence cases in which women's partners prevented them from talking to other people. Another fact: 26 percent thought that unpleasant comments on women's physical appearance has nothing to do with violence.

This difficulty in identifying gender violence was obvious at all various stages of the study. When students were asked whether they had suffered or knew about cases of this kind, only 13 percent responded affirmatively. However, when they were provided with a list of situations which included physical or psychological attacks, non-consensual kisses or contact, stalking, or comments with humiliating sexual connotations, this percentage of affirmative responses rose to 62 percent.

Analysis of the results by gender also showed that women were more often able to identify situations of gender violence than men.

Many students believed that women who suffer gender violence have low educational levels, elderly, are financially dependent on their husbands, "when in reality, it affects women of any level of education, age or work status," Melgar adds.

How do we put a stop to the problem? "Research and prevention of gender-based violence in our country has frequently ignored evidence from science and international feminism. This is why serious mistakes have been made, such as focusing only on couples and ex-couples,

ignoring the fact that it also happens in sporadic relations," the researcher continues.

For the experts, this mistake has not only led to a lack of acknowledgement as gender-based violence of murders committed, for example, when leaving a nightclub. "But it has also focused many prevention programs around attacking romantic relationships and ideal love rather than warning against all kinds of relations – stable or sporadic – with violent men."

According to the scientists, despite the important progress that has already been made, there is still very little active solidarity with victims. "This isolation is driven by severe second-order sexual harassment, such as attacks and slander against those of us who support victims," Melgar reports.

91 percent of victims do not report violence

In terms of victims' reactions to situations of gender violence, 91 percent did not report the situation, but of these students, 66 percent did tell someone. One of the likely reasons is that victims of gender violence do not identify as such.

In the survey, 92 percent of students stated that they did not know whether there was a service for victims at the university. However, 85 percent of students believed that universities should offer services to people who undergo any kind of [gender violence](#).

Of those who did dare to report the situation at the university, 27 percent did not feel supported by the institution and 69 percent of those surveyed felt unsure as to whether victims would receive adequate support.

"Policies and actions developed by Spanish universities need to be

grounded in two goals: intransigence regarding any kind of violence against [women](#), and bystander intervention, support, and solidarity with the victims and with the people supporting the victims," Melgar concludes.

More information: R. Valls et al. Breaking the Silence at Spanish Universities: Findings From the First Study of Violence Against Women on Campuses in Spain, *Violence Against Women* (2016). [DOI: 10.1177/1077801215627511](#)

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