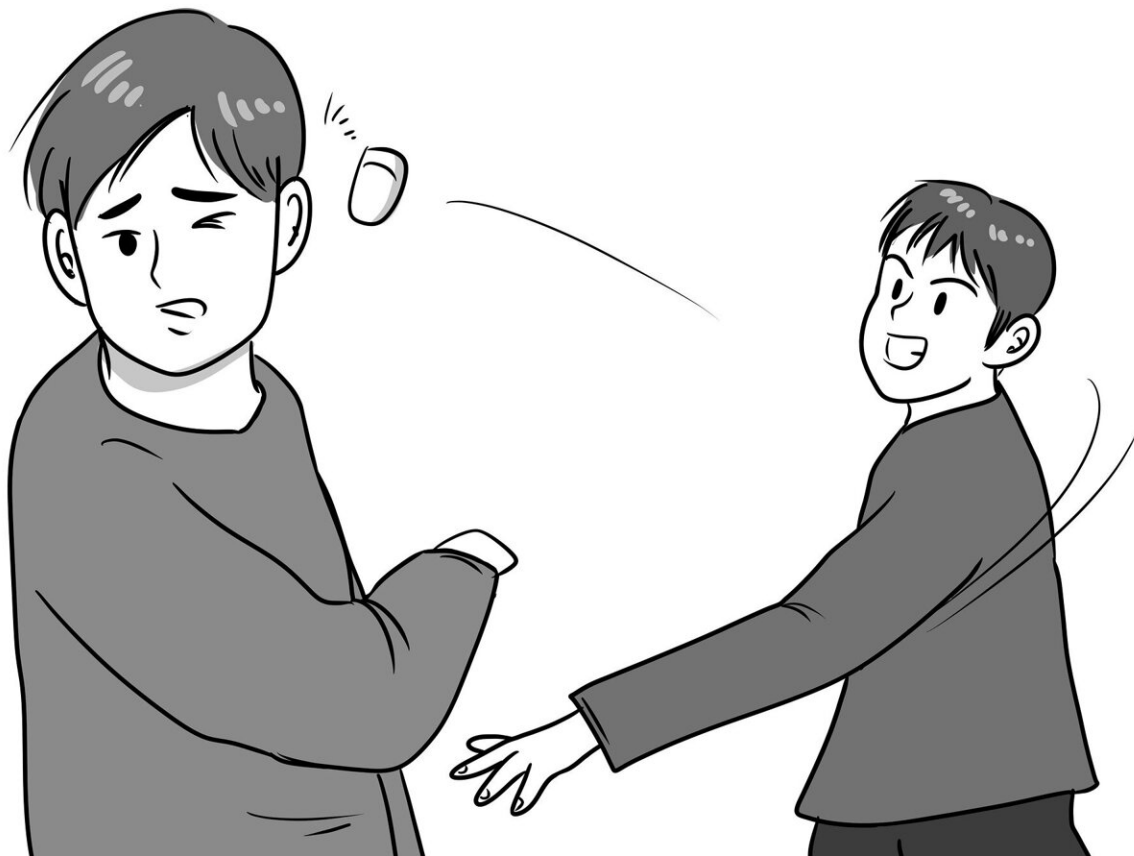


How can universities better understand students' experiences of violence and victimization?

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Researchers from City, University of London, in collaboration with the University of Surrey, De Montfort University, Universities UK (UUK) and the National Centre (NatCen) for Social Research have conducted the first pilot study into students' experiences of all forms of violence and victimization at UK universities.

The Violence at University project, led by Dr. Carrie-Anne Myers, Reader in the Department of Sociology and Criminology at City, aimed to investigate whether an effective tool could be developed for tracking when, where and how incidents take place.

Tackling violence and harassment has been high on universities' agenda for several years. Hate crime has a considerable impact on [young people](#) in particular, with potential long-lasting damage to self-esteem and emotional health as well as a fall in student attainment. In 2016, UUK launched a strategic framework titled 'Changing the Culture' to support universities in responding to and preventing violence and crime affecting [university students](#).

The [pilot project](#) worked with university students to create a questionnaire that could measure the incidence of violence in all forms on university campuses and beyond. A resulting survey explored demographics of respondents, as well as their experiences of sexual, identity-based, and broader forms of violence, and both the reporting and barriers to reporting it.

Key findings from the initial survey included:

- The survey attracted 263 responses which detailed encounters of sexual, identity-based and broader incidents of violence that had either happened, were happening or repeatedly took place, either on campus or elsewhere.
- The survey uncovered a mix of responses to whether or not these

incidents had been reported, with 47 percent saying they had and 46 percent saying they had not.

- Respondents named a range of support mechanisms they had sought, including friends and fellow students, student representatives, professional and/or teaching staff and tutors.
- When asked about barriers to reporting violence, students cited emotional factors (feeling embarrassed or ashamed, or traumatized), practical reasons (not knowing who to talk to, not wanting the hassle), social reasons (fear of being treated differently by peers), trust, and fear of perpetrators finding out.

The project ran from November 2020 to December 2021, with the survey live for students from across the research universities and beyond between February and September 2021. The survey contained 35 questions that allowed respondents to answer anonymously with a combination of quantitative and qualitative responses.

Dr. Myers said the results of the pilot questionnaire show the usefulness of using [survey data](#) to tackle violence at university and make students aware of the support available to them. "A key gap in our understanding of violence in universities relates to the collection of data," she said.

"Most data collected on crime only incorporates household responses which generally excludes the student population that might live in halls of residence. There is not a lot of information about how students are affected by violence."

"By working alongside students to produce a pilot survey, we show that violence is measurable within a university context."

Although demonstrating clear feasibility, the Violence at University project report makes the following recommendations to improve future iterations of the survey:

- Using a more targeted sample rather than a self-selected one to include voices that were absent from the pilot approach—including males—to remove selection bias.
- A need to focus on well-being to trigger discussions on the experience of violence, with a reordering of questions to ease participants into these discussions rather than potentially off-putting phrases early on.
- Closer investigation of online vs. offline incidents.
- Experiences of violence and well-being needs of students prior to attending university.
- Greater consideration of classism and the feeling of discrimination from students based on their backgrounds, especially in light of many universities' widening participation agendas.

Dr. Myers added that with small changes to the initial survey design, universities could use it as a practical tool to prevent incidents and protect students.

"Our initial results show that many are reluctant to report violence and harassment, whether through fear of doing so or not being aware of appropriate channels."

"However, this was only intended as a feasibility study. A larger-scale prevalence survey could benchmark and monitor ongoing experiences of [violence](#) and the consequences it has on well-being and attainment."

"It would also help their institutions identify issues, target deterrents and provide relevant and adequate support streams."

More information: Report: [www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/what- ... new-survey-available](http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/what-...new-survey-available)

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