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Violence against Women Students in the UK: time to take action

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Sexual and gendered violence in the education sector is a worldwide concern, but in the UK it has been marginalised in research and policy. In this paper we present findings from the National Union of Students' study Hidden Marks, the first nationwide survey of women students' experiences of violence. This research established high levels of prevalence, with 1 in 4 respondents being subject to unwanted sexual behaviour during their studies. We analyse why the issue of violence against women students has remained low profile in this country, whereas in the US, where victimisation rates are similar, it has had a high profile since the 1980s and interventions to tackle it have received a significant amount of federal support. We urge UK policymakers, universities, students' unions and academics to address the problem, and make suggestions about initial actions to take.

Keywords

Violence, Women, Surveys, Higher Education, Western Europe, Sociology, Policy Studies

Introduction

Sexual and gendered violence in the education sector is a worldwide concern, affecting schools, colleges and universities in 'developed' and 'developing' nations alike (Mirsky 2003). However, following a short period of interest in the late 1990s (Fisher and Wilkes 2003), there has been very little attention paid to the victimisation of women students in the UK. Key policy documents relating to violence against women, produced by both the 1997-2010

New Labour administration and the Conservative/Liberal coalition elected as its successor, have incorporated no specific reference to students in either Further or Higher Education (HM Government 2007, 2009, 2010; Women's National Commission, 2009). This is despite the fact that younger people in the UK are more likely to experience all forms of inter-personal violence (Walby & Allen 2004), and young women aged 16 to 24 – a group into which many students fall – are commonly identified as high risk for sexual victimisation (Myhill & Allen 2002).

In contrast, researchers and policymakers in the US, a country comparable to the UK in its youth culture and student communities, have situated sexual and gendered violence as a major problem since the 1980s (Fisher and Sloan 2011). Prevalence studies have estimated the proportion of college women experiencing rape and attempted rape at anywhere between 14 and 27.5 percent (Fisher, Cullen, & Turner 2000, 2002; Humphrey and Kahn 2000; Schubot 2001; Payne and Fogerty 2007; Fisher, Daigle and Cullen 2010). Up to 40 percent of college women have been stalked (Fisher et al 2010), and up to 92 percent have experienced sexual harassment (Belknap and Erez 2007).

Studies of US campus violence are often psychological and individualistic, focused on motivations of male perpetrators, acceptance of 'rape myths' and post-traumatic stress. However, there are other factors, such as the campus environment and broader social and cultural setting, to be taken into account. Adams-Curtis and Forbes (2004) situate sexual and gendered violence within the context of attitudes towards women and sex, concepts of masculinity and femininity, sexual promiscuity, communication styles, peer group norms and alcohol. These factors reflect a wider sexualisation of youth culture, identified in both the US and UK and linked to consumer capitalism, changes in gender roles and the backlash against feminism. Levy (2006), Whelehan (2000) and Walter (2010) all suggest that feminist sexual liberation has been bypassed in favour of performance-oriented 'empowerment' in which young women's sexual identities are formed through consumption in the service of fashion and beauty-focused body projects, but remain largely responsive to prevailing constructions of male desire. This is increasingly shaped by pornography, a ubiquitous and rapidly mainstreaming industry in which progressively more extreme acts are normalised. Changes in the sexual expectations of young men and the continued alienation of young women from

their own sexualities create the conditions for widespread miscommunication and coercion, and at worst, sexual violence and abuse.

There is also a structural level to consider: in the context of the backlash and recent scapegoating of high-achieving women in relation to the 'crisis of masculinity', sexual and gendered violence in educational environments can be seen as a means of policing territory and preserving inequity. Sexual harassment and violence have been identified as significant barriers to women's educational achievement. Many victimised students in the US avoid popular haunts, drop classes or activities, or even withdraw from their courses (Hill and Silva 2005). Abused college women have also been found to exhibit clinical levels of post-traumatic stress disorder, increased smoking, alcohol, and illegal drug use, limitations on physical activities, difficulties with performing work, and cognitive impairment (Danis 2006). Universities are often viewed as environments where structures of discrimination apparent in wider society are challenged and subverted, and havens for diverse and cosmopolitan communities. However, despite (or perhaps because of) the importance of university education to women's equality, women students are made to feel unwelcome via harassment and violence, often perpetrated by male fellow students.

Given the high prevalence of student victimisation in the US and the severity of its consequences, it is perhaps surprising that the issue has remained marginal in the UK. This seems especially notable given the fact that violence against women in general has been prominent in UK feminist discourse and activism since the 1970s and became more central to criminal justice policy under the New Labour administration in the 2000s (Phipps 2010). This article therefore attempts to prompt much-needed debate on the subject of gendered and sexual violence in UK colleges and universities. First of all, selected findings are presented from the first national study, entitled *Hidden Marks* and conducted by researchers at the National Union of Students (NUS) between 2009 and 2010.[1] This groundbreaking work established that women students in the UK are victimised at levels comparable to their peers in the US, although more research is needed in order to understand fully how this occurs in our own country. Following discussion of *Hidden Marks*, we analyse why the issue of violence against women students has been comparatively

[1] N.B. Findings can be accessed in full on the web at http://hiddenmarks.org.uk/2010.

neglected in the UK. There are a variety of reasons for this, including the particular character of academic and activist feminism in the US and differences in political climates and structures between the two countries, which have meant that in the US legislative initiatives and most importantly funding frameworks have developed. We explore these US policy responses and make recommendations for next steps in the UK setting.

Methodology

The *Hidden Marks* study was carried out using an anonymous questionnaire, a particularly suitable method for bringing social issues to light (Reinharz, 1992) and widely used in sexual violence research due to the desire for anonymity of many survivors (Schwartz & Leggett, 1999). Between November 2009 and January 2010, the NUS asked women students in both Further and Higher Education (studying at Higher Education Institutions, further education colleges, in work-based learning, at Sixth Form colleges and with adult learning providers) to complete the questionnaire online.[2] It was distributed via a range of different methods including institutional and students' union e-mails, on the NUS website and Facebook groups, and to NUS Extra cardholders. Additionally, targeted advertising was purchased on Facebook and appeared during the Christmas vacation. Flyers promoting the survey were produced and handed out at various national student and women's events.

Questions focused on perceptions of safety and experiences of harassment, abuse and violence occurring during the period of study.[3] Attempts were made to include women from a variety of ethnic groups and with diverse sexual identities, as well as transwomen and disabled women[4], but in the absence of an effective measure for social class, this variable was not included. Questions were carefully worded, due to the sensitive nature of the subject and potential confusion over definitions of sexual acts and crimes (see for example Fisher and Cullen 2000; Hamby and Koss 2003). A number of strategies were employed, such as using graphic language for certain questions (Fisher et al 2000), asking questions about

[2] This method by definition excluded those who did not have access to an Internet connection.

[3] Respondents were not asked about incidents prior to commencing their studies, as the intent was to take a snapshot of violence experienced during student life: however, we recognise that previous occurrences are a factor shaping repeat victimisation and reaction to trauma (Fisher et al 2000, Krebs et al 2007). This also meant that respondents all potentially had a different timeframe reference.

[4] In order to do this targeted publicity for the survey was circulated amongst online networks of LGBTQ, BME and disabled student women.

unwanted sexual experiences which students might be unwilling to define within a framework of violence, and using different techniques in relation to the same incident to test the reliability of the data.[5] Many questions were modelled on existing successful surveys such as the British Crime Survey, the Sexual Experiences Survey (Koss and Oros 1982; Koss and Gidycz 1985), and most importantly the National College Women Sexual Victimisation Study (Fisher et al 2000). Most questions were multiple choice, although open text boxes were included at regular intervals in an attempt to minimise the limitations of highly structured quantitative questionnaires (Fisher and Cullen 2000). Details of appropriate support websites and telephone services were listed throughout the survey where relevant, and introductory texts provided warnings about topics to be covered in each section.[6] A draft questionnaire was sent to a number of organisations for feedback including Rape Crisis, Refuge, Women's Aid and Amnesty International UK. As a result of this consultation, numerous changes were made to the survey instrument: alterations to question wording and order and the introduction of additional questions, for example around awareness of violence against women issues. Following this, the survey was piloted with students and their feedback prompted changes to the survey design.

2058 valid responses were received.[7] Demographic information about the sample is presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Details of survey sample

[5] Graphic language describing particular sexual acts was used to avoid ambiguity: participants were asked to indicate which acts they had experienced from a range of descriptive options. This avoided issues with different interpretations of ambiguous terms such as 'rape' by research participants and researchers. However, attempts were made to shape this graphic language according to legal terms such as 'rape', 'attempted rape' and 'assault by penetration', in order to facilitate analysis.

[6] This supplemented the information provided at the beginning of the survey: given the sensitive nature of the questions being asked, researchers felt that additional safeguards such as this should be put in place to avoid triggering painful emotions in respondents who might not wish to complete the whole survey.

[7] Partial responses were accepted, and as a result percentages given later in the paper refer to the base for the particular question.

Broad classification					
UK students			International students		
88 %			12 %		
Country of study					
England	Wales		Scotland	Northern Ireland	
85 %	10 %		5 %	0.2 %	
Mode of study					
Full time			Part time		
94 %			6 %		
Type of institution					
HEIs	Sixthform colleges		FE colleges	Other	
93 %	4 %		3 %	< 1%	
Level of study					
Undergraduate		Postgraduate		Lower levels[1]	
69 %		22 %		9 %	
Age					
Under 25		26 – 50		Over 50	
86 %		14%		< 1%	
Ethnic background					
White British	White other	Asian	Black	Chinese	Mixed
71 %	11 %	5 %	2 %	2 %	2 %
Disability status					
Able bodied		Long-term condition/impairment		Disabled	
82 %		11 %		7 %	
Sexual/gender orientation					
Heterosexual		Bisexual	Lesbian	TS/TG	
80 %		11 %	5 %	2 %	
Residence					
Shared house/flat	Halls or student accommodation	Home with parents/family	With partner	Alone	With children as single parent

[1] For instance for GCSEs or A-Levels, or a range of vocational qualifications.

The quantitative and qualitative data explored in this paper pertain to responses to three questions about sexual victimisation in the *Hidden Marks* survey.[8] For ease of reference the questions shall be described as A, B and C. In **Question A**, respondents were asked whether they had had sexual intercourse when they did not want to, or when they were, or felt, unable to say no. The aim of this question was to maximise disclosure rates of unwanted sexual encounters, whether or not respondents wished to define these as rape or sexual assault or in terms suggesting force or victimhood. In **Question B**, respondents were invited to indicate whether they had experienced any from a list of behaviours, and if they had, were asked to select the incident they considered most serious and answer further questions about it. These options were carefully worded using a combination of legal definitions and specific behaviours, modelled closely on the National College Women Sexual Victimisation Study.[9] The follow-up questions invited respondents to provide information about when and where incidents took place, characteristics of the perpetrator, the experience of reporting, and the impact of the incident. In this article, incidents described via this question are grouped into two categories. 'Serious sexual assault' describes rape, attempted rape, and assault by penetration.[10] 'Physical sexual harassment' or 'less serious sexual assault' refers to unwanted sexual contact such as touching, molesting (including through clothes), or unwanted kissing. It is worth noting that no distinction was made between assaults achieved by force and those resulting from coercion: rather, respondents were asked whether the incident had occurred when they had not consented, with the legal definition of consent provided for guidance.[11] In **Question C**, students were asked whether they had been subject to visual/verbal sexual harassment in a range of institutional contexts including learning environments, students' unions and campus buildings.

[8] The quantitative data were analysed using SPSS, and the qualitative data were coded by hand (only qualitative statements provided in response to the three questions described above were coded).

[9] Respondents were also able to select 'other', and describe an incident in their own words if it was not reflected in the categories. A small number of incidents classified as such by respondents were reclassified by researchers when they fitted clearly into the categories offered.

[10] In UK law rape is defined as non-consensual penetration of the vagina, anus or mouth with a penis. Assault by penetration is a separate legal offence in the UK, and describes penetration with other body parts or objects to the vagina or anus. These definitions formed the basis of the wording.

[11] The legal definition of consent was provided as follows: 'agreeing by choice and having the freedom and capacity to make that choice' (Sexual Offences Act 2003, section 74).

Findings

The *Hidden Marks* data suggest that British women students, like their peers in the US, may have a heightened risk of sexual victimisation compared with other groups in the population. In response to question A, 8 per cent of respondents said that during their current period of study they had had sexual intercourse when they did not want to, or when they were, or felt, unable to say no. One in 4 survey respondents (25 percent) had been on the receiving end of unwanted sexual behaviour as defined in the options in question B. This compares with the contemporaneous British Crime Survey 2008/09, which found that 19.5 percent of women in the UK had experienced sexual assault or attempted sexual assault, *since the age of 16* (our italics).

In response to question B, just over 7 percent of students reported being subject to a serious sexual assault: 5 percent had experienced rape,[12] 2 percent attempted rape, and less than 1 percent assault by penetration.[13] Most commonly these incidents occurred in the respondent's home or the home of someone close to them (76 percent of cases) and in 84 percent of cases were perpetrated by somebody known to the victim. Perpetrators were split between those known to the victim in an intimate or domestic way (current or ex-partners and spouses, dates or dating partners, or family members), and those known to the victim in a non-intimate way (acquaintances, friends, neighbours, co-workers, colleagues). Sixty percent of perpetrators were students, 70 percent of these at the respondent's institution. These findings are consistent with US research which suggests that a majority of victims are attacked in private by someone they know (Fisher et al 2000), and bring to mind recent UK research on the high prevalence of violence in young women's intimate relationships (Barter et al 2009).

Also echoing US studies, students who had been subject to serious sexual assault reported severe consequences. Most commonly, these incidents impacted on relationships (63

[12] Of the group answering affirmatively to question A, 56 percent went on to report an experience of rape in question B, with 44 percent of this group choosing not to. 8 percent of this group did not report anything at all when presented with the list of options. There are a number of different reasons why women may not define an unwanted instance of sexual intercourse as rape, and previous surveys have shown equal reluctance amongst women to do so (Fisher 2000).

[13] In question B respondents could only select one option from the list and were asked to select the one that they considered to be most serious, so these figures are unlikely to represent the total numbers of such incidents.

percent of cases), and mental health and wellbeing (49 percent of cases). Twelve percent of respondents reported adverse effects on their physical health, 8 per cent stated that there had been an impact on their finances, and 7 percent felt their paid work had suffered. The following quote from a student who had experienced an extremely serious assault during her year abroad illustrates the intensity of some of these consequences.

> *It is playing a massive part in my life. I won't go out alone after dark anymore, which, as a part-time student, is seriously affecting my studies and personal and social choices. It is also affecting me financially as I will take any possible precautions so as not to be alone in my local area in the dark. I'm taking anti-anxiety medication for the first time because of it and I feel like it's slowly destroying me.*

Twenty five percent of respondents indicated that their studies had been affected by their experience. Of this group, 19 percent specified that their attendance had suffered, and similar numbers reported effects on their grades. Thirteen percent of victims of serious sexual assault had considered leaving their course.

Ten percent of respondents who had experienced a serious sexual assault reported it to the police, 6 percent consulted a doctor and 4 percent made a report at their institution. Approximately 50 percent stated that they did not report the incident because they felt ashamed or embarrassed, 43 percent were worried they would be blamed, and more than one third were concerned they would not be believed. This reflects the negative impact of rape-supportive and victim-blaming attitudes, still extant and displayed in a number of recent opinion polls and surveys (for example Amnesty and NUS Wales 2008, Opinion Panel Research 2009, Stern 2010). These are particularly relevant since they often allude to behaviour seen to be more common amongst young people, such as excessive drinking or risk-taking. The following survey quote, from a student with several friends who had experienced sexual assault, illustrates the climate which shapes non-reporting.

> *The police and the University authorities never took these crimes seriously, and reports were never filed. There seems to be a common belief that female students drink too much, and either deserve what happens to them or exaggerate because they feel bad in the morning.*

In addition, some survey respondents had had sexual encounters they did not actively consent to but did not define as coercive.[14]

> *I consented to penetrative sex but halfway through I realised I felt uncomfortable and wanted to stop. But I felt unable to say something and just let it continue even though it was painful. I felt obligated to carry on.*

The *Hidden Marks* survey also revealed an extremely high incidence of physical sexual harassment experienced by women students in public entertainment spaces such as pubs and clubs. Sixteen percent of respondents to question B reported that they had been subject to unwanted sexual contact on at least one occasion, with nearly four in five (79 percent) of these incidents occurring in a public place, most commonly a bar or nightclub. This kind of behaviour tended to be perpetrated by strangers or non-intimate acquaintances (in 75 percent of cases). This is particularly interesting in light of the fact that political and media attention tends now to focus on violence within intimate relationships: while our findings confirm this is a common setting for serious sexual assaults, they suggest otherwise in relation to sexual harassment.

Sexual harassment had less serious consequences for respondents, although some expressed anger and frustration about the regularity and acceptability of this kind of behaviour. Perhaps the most significant finding here was the number of respondents who seemed to accept it as inevitable. As one student stated:

> *Almost every time me and my friends go out to a club you can guarantee that one of us will have some kind of violence or unwanted attention forced on us by drunk men.*

Another wrote:

> *It happens so frequently to girls in bars and clubs, most of which are too drunk to notice, it is only when you go out and don't drink that you become aware of what goes on.*

Perhaps partly as a result of this sexual harassment went largely unreported, with a mere 2 percent of victims having consulted the police or someone at their institution.

[14] See also footnote 12.

In terms of verbal and visual sexual harassment, figures reported in the *Hidden Marks* survey were consistent with US studies (such as Fisher, Cullen and Turner 2000). Six percent of respondents had been flashed at in and around their institution, 5 percent had been shown pornography, 2 percent had had naked or semi-naked images of them circulated and 1 percent had been filmed naked or semi-naked, without their consent. Approximately 66 percent of respondents had been subject to verbal sexual harassment on campus, with a total of 3833 incidents being reported by 1210 respondents in this category. The most common behaviour was wolf whistling, catcalling or noises with a sexual overtone (experienced by 50 percent) and unwanted sexual comments and sexual noises that made the respondent feel uncomfortable (experienced by 43 percent). Thirty one percent had faced unwanted questions about their sex/romantic life and 18 percent had been asked unwanted questions about their sexuality.

Whether women reported less or more serious incidents, certain characteristics were common: reporting levels were very low, a student's year of study was a factor (with victimisation significantly more likely to have taken place in the first or second), perpetrators were most likely to be students, and women were unsure whether what had happened was a crime or serious enough to report. Alcohol was a factor in 70 percent of cases.[15] The relationship between alcohol and sexual assault is well established, with US studies of college women suggesting that between 63 percent and 74 percent of perpetrators use alcohol, whilst the figures for victims are between 20 percent and 55 percent (Krebs et al 2007). Alcohol use and misuse plays a significant role in UK university contexts, with 92.5 percent of students being classified as 'binge drinkers' according to Office for National Statistics criteria in a recent study (Morton and Tighe 2011). Comments provided by our respondents suggest that where alcohol had been involved in assaults it discouraged women from reporting, and caused them to play down their experience and the perpetrator's intentions. For instance, one respondent characterised her attacker as 'just drunk and trying it on', while another reported that 'we were both drunk so I didn't know if he meant to take advantage.'

[15] This figure differs from the one given in the *Hidden Marks* report due to the fact that the report focuses on perpetrator use, whereas here we are reporting on use of alcohol by either the perpetrator or the victim.

US/UK comparisons: analysing the policy context

Due to differences in collection methods, population size and question design, it is difficult to draw direct comparisons between our data and that collected in the US. Nonetheless the *Hidden Marks* survey suggests that sexual victimisation of women students in the UK is at least as prevalent and shares some of the same characteristics. It is therefore puzzling that the issue has not achieved the same high profile in the UK. We have uncovered a number of reasons why: there has been a productive confluence of research and activism in the US, set in a responsive political climate, and most importantly a legislative structure which has both mandated the collection of information and made funding available.

In both the UK and the US, the second-wave women's movement should be credited with putting the issue of violence against women on the agenda. However, in the US the consciousness-raising and organising of the movement's radical arm was accompanied by strong liberal-feminist lobbying which tallied with the dominant law-and-order political mentality (Bevacqua 2000). A number of legislative victories were achieved, albeit in the context of the penal systems of the neoliberal state (Bumiller 2008).[16] The National Organization for Women (NOW) played a significant role: from 1973 the organisation's Task Force on Rape was involved in founding Rape Crisis centres and helplines across the country, and agitating for the redefinition of rape as a crime of violence rather than sex (National Organization for Women 1998). NOW was also instrumental in the passage of the Violence Against Women Act in 1994 (National Organization for Women 2009), an important legislative development (see below). While the legislative victories achieved by the women's movement in the UK should not be downplayed, in comparison this movement was relatively decentralised and non-hierarchical: this undoubtedly had strengths but meant that feminists at times lacked a unified voice in policy (Redfern and Aune 2010). Perhaps also due to the vast difference in size and population between the two countries, the UK movement did not develop such large-scale political machinery.

[16] This trend reached the UK a little later, evidenced by the widespread adoption of violence against women strategies by government departments and agencies during the New Labour administration, similarly positioned within criminal justice agendas (Phipps 2010).

In terms of campus violence in particular, the growth of campus feminism and Women's Studies from the 1970s onwards played an important role in the US, with collaborations between activist faculty, student affairs staff and community service providers, and Women's Centers and committees which provided support to victims and lobbied institutions to take action (Fisher and Sloan 2011, personal communication). By 1977 there were 276 Women's Studies programmes in the US, a number which had increased to 525 by 1989. Although growth subsequently slowed, the number of programs continued to increase to a total of 650 in 2007, almost all of which offered an undergraduate curriculum (Reynolds et al 2007) and 75 percent of which were estimated to have resisted the shift to Gender Studies (data provided by the National Women's Studies Association). In addition, in 2010 483 campus Women's Centers were active (data provided by the National Women's Studies Association). In contrast, in the UK the 1990s and 2000s saw both a significant drop in Women's Studies programs at undergraduate level and a swing towards Gender Studies, sometimes perceived as a less activist discipline (Oxford 2008, data provided by the Feminist and Women's Studies Association UK and Ireland) and one in which postmodernism had begun to deconstruct victimhood itself (Brown 1995, Lamb 1999). At the time of writing, no undergraduate degrees in Women's Studies remained.[17] In students' unions the elected role of Women's Officer, which had been common as a paid sabbatical position in the 1980s, had largely been dropped in favour of equality and diversity roles: there were only six remaining sabbatical women officers (data provided by the NUS).

Other crucial factors in the US were the production of quantitative data and the culture of litigation. From the 1970s onwards, liberal feminists and others began to develop critiques of existing sources such as the FBI's Uniform Crime Reports and the Bureau of Justice Statistics' National Crime Survey, focusing on methodological flaws which they argued led to substantial under-reporting (Fisher and Cullen 2000). In the 1980s, such scholars constructed detailed and dedicated surveys for the measurement of sexual victimisation, combining legal terminology with behaviourally specific questions which encompassed a wide range of potentially victimising acts (see for example Koss and Oros 1982, Koss and Gidycz 1985, Koss,

[17] Although a number of postgraduate programmes in Women's Studies were still being offered, it is possible that these were not as effective at feeding activism due to the relatively short duration of a Master's degree (usually one year in the UK).

Gidycz and Wisniewski 1987, DeKeseredy and Kelly 1993). Many of these were piloted initially with convenience samples of university students (Fisher and Cullen 2000), thus establishing them as a high-risk group. A variety of national studies followed (Fisher and Cullen 2000), pursued by positive media attention in which journalists began to make Freedom of Information Act requests for campus crime data (Fisher et al 2002).[18] The 1980s also saw a number of civil suits filed by victims and their families, and several precedent-setting cases in which courts ruled that institutions had a legal duty to take reasonable steps to prevent foreseeable crime (Fisher et al 2002, 62; Fisher and Sloan 2011). This storm of media attention, legal wrangling and political lobbying peaked after Jeanne Clery, a student at Lehigh University in Pennsylvania, was raped and murdered by a fellow student in 1986. Security on Campus Inc., founded by Clery's parents, subsequently began a sustained program of lobbying the federal government to take action on campus safety (Fisher et al 2002, Gregory and Janosik 2002, Fisher and Sloan 2011).

All these factors created a sustained Congressional interest in campus crime (Fisher et al 2002) within the framework of violence against women legislation, and a structure of federal funding which, it could be argued, was decisive in building a knowledge base and supporting targeted interventions. In 1990, the Clery Act was passed (amended in 1998 and 2008): this mandated the collection and reporting of information on sexual violence and other crimes on or near college/university campuses, the production of annual security reports for prospective students and employees, the circulation of timely warnings about possible risks, and the development of sexual violence prevention policies.[19] In 1994, the Violence Against Women Act created an Office on Violence Against Women within the US Department of Justice, which among its other functions was responsible for a portfolio of grants (many congressionally funded) including a Domestic Violence, Dating Violence, Sexual Assault, and Stalking on Campus Program. In 2007, this office allocated $12,000,000 for campus activities,

[18] This was followed by a backlash in which conservative commentators argued that the supposed 'epidemic of rape' was an invention of feminists who had used unnecessarily broad definitions for political ends (see for example Gilbert 1991 & 1995, Roiphe 1993, Hoff Sommers 1995). However, this backlash, still ongoing (see for example Coulter 2009) and bolstered by postmodern ideas about the social construction of victimhood, had the unintended effect of keeping the profile of the issue high.

[19] This Act applied to all public and private colleges and universities in receipt of any federal funding, which includes institutional research grants, federal work-study assistance or other grants for students. Virtually every post-secondary institution in the US receives some form of federal assistance (Fisher et al 2002, Barry and Cell 2009).

and $15,000,000 was allocated for each of the fiscal years from 2008 – 2011 (US Code – Section 14045B). Monies were also available elsewhere: for example, the National Institute of Justice Violence Against Women Research and Evaluation Program, begun in 1993 and ongoing, awarded 264 grants between its inception and end-2009, funding a number of campus studies (National Institute of Justice 2010). The Centers for Disease Control Rape Prevention and Education Program, established by the 1994 Violence Against Women Act and at the time of writing resourced by Congress at around $42,000,000 per year, was another source of funding for campus-based activities (Campaign for Funding to End Domestic and Sexual Violence 2009, Centers for Disease Control 2009).[20]

Finally, differences in institutional structures and cultures should be taken into account. At the time of writing 15 percent of US students were resident on campus as compared to less than 10 percent of university students in the UK (data provided by the National Center for Education Statistics and NUS): in real numbers, the difference between these two figures would be sizeable (around 2,700,000 in the US compared to around 48,000 in the UK).. US student culture could also be described as chiefly campus-based, with dedicated student services and social events focused largely on this setting and student clubs, sororities and fraternities enjoying a high profile (Astin 1993, Pascarella and Terenzini 2005). Misogyny among US student communities is perhaps more visible as it is more concentrated: for instance, fraternity activities receive a great deal of press coverage, most recently focused on chants of 'No Means Yes! Yes Means Anal!' by students pledging Delta Kappa Epsilon at Yale (Kimmel 2010). This can be contrasted with many UK universities which are spread throughout city centres rather than located in detached campus settings with their own social and cultural milieu. This, combined with the legislative context detailed above, has perhaps shaped the more stringent student safety framework for US colleges and universities. In the 2000s, the Office on Violence Against Women (OVW) commissioned the California Coalition Against Sexual Assault (CALCASA) to develop a set of standards to help colleges and universities respond to issues of violence against women. These encompassed

[20] In 2007/08 there were 18,248,128 students enrolled in degree-awarding institutions in the US, of whom 57 percent were female (data provided by the National Center for Education Statistics). Considering these large numbers it can be argued that the financial investment in violence against women students has not been huge, and it has also reduced in the context of the recent financial crisis (Campaign for Funding to End Domestic and Sexual Violence 2009). However, this still compares favourably with the almost complete lack of investment made in the UK.

minimum standards of training for campus security personnel and campus disciplinary and judicial boards, guidelines for establishing sexual violence prevention and education programmes, and principles for creating a coordinated community response to violence against women on campus (Office on Violence Against Women 2010). The potential achievement of standards such as this is supported by the existence of a strong student affairs sector in the US, considered in itself a profession which dates back to the 1930s (Hamrick, Evans and Schuh 2002). Without mobilising simplistic dichotomies around themes such as action and inertia, safety and danger, it is possible to state that on US campuses risks to students have been documented and attempts made to address them, while this is not yet standard practice in the UK.

Conclusions

Although the issue of violence against women students is not new on the international agenda, the *Hidden Marks* study was groundbreaking in identifying it as a major problem in the UK. This paper has attempted to further break new ground with an analysis of why the issue has historically remained low profile in this country, and will now go on to make suggestions about how it might be addressed. It may not be possible for us to develop responses similar to those implemented in the US, particularly within the confines of recent austerity budgets involving cuts to both Higher Education funding and women's services, but the issue should nevertheless be positioned within agendas for Higher Education and violence against women strategies. Indeed, the *Hidden Marks* study suggests that such agendas and strategies would be seriously remiss to exclude the issue of violence against women students as they have done in the past.

First and foremost, evidence needs to be gathered and incidents addressed. Given the fact that the majority of incidents reported in *Hidden Marks* were perpetrated by male students, it is imperative to establish institutional routes for reporting in order that these can be tackled. This is the very minimum implied by institutions' duty of care, and is especially important because many victims are reluctant to approach the police. In broader terms, institutional reporting should feed into the statistical collection which is necessary to create an impetus for institutional action: in the absence of baseline data for the whole sector, it is unlikely that any college or university will be the first to admit that its women students are

experiencing violence. It is doubtful, given the current political and economic context, that reforms similar to the Clery Act could be achieved. Nevertheless, statistical collection could perhaps be undertaken within the framework of existing data gathering by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (which currently has responsibility for UK universities) or the Higher Education Statistics Agency. Furthermore, and notwithstanding diminishing funding for research, a large-scale project collecting or collating statistics along with in-depth qualitative data on women students' experiences of violence would be a worthwhile investment in terms of our knowledge base and, more importantly, the safety of our student communities.

Of course, any data gathering by government agencies, institutions or individual academics should pay attention to the strengths and weaknesses of the Clery framework. Many US colleges and universities have had difficulty complying with its complex requirements, or have chosen to prioritise public image over rigorous reporting (Gregory and Janosik 2002). Reporting is not uniform either between institutions or types of crime, and so-called 'minor' crimes such as stalking and harassment, as well as repeat victimisation, are not included (Sloan, et al 1997, Gregory and Janosik 2002). It is also difficult to separate increases in victimisation rates from increases in reporting (Gregory and Janosik 2002, p33, Barry and Cell 2009), although it is still believed that there is substantial under-reporting and the Clery framework also fails to address this (Sloan et al 1997). Finally, there is the risk that disseminating statistics will do little more than cause worry to students and parents (Fisher and Sloan 2011). Nevertheless, despite its flaws the Clery Act has been crucial in terms of increasing awareness, changing institutional behaviour and improving issues such as victim-blaming through putting date and acquaintance rape on the agenda in the US (Sloan, Fisher and Cullen 1997, Fisher et al 2002, Roe 2004, Fisher and Sloan 2011).

Alongside data-gathering there is a need to work towards preventing violence against women students, a goal often overshadowed by agendas focused on criminal justice (Phipps 2010). The *Hidden Marks* report recommended that institutions work with students' unions to execute 'zero tolerance' approaches to sexual harassment and develop intervention projects. Again, the current economic climate is not conductive to institutions implementing new initiatives: however, opportunities may be found in the incoming 2012 funding

framework for Higher Education. A number of institutions plan to increase their undergraduate fees to £9000 per year under this structure (Vasagar 2011), although it has been estimated that the average cost of educating an undergraduate for one year is £7000 (Browne 2010, 31). Any surplus funding could appropriately be used for satisfying institutions' duty of care, alongside mandated commitments to widening participation (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills 2011). Given their advantaged position, it would not be unreasonable to expect our most elite institutions to take a lead on the issue of student safety through collecting data and piloting good prevention practices.

In the US, there is no federal mandate to evaluate campus prevention projects, which means that there is insufficient evidence to assess their impact and effectiveness (Breitenbecher 2000, Fisher and Sloan 2011). Projects which have been independently evaluated report some attitudinal change (Morrison et al 2004), although there is little evidence of a reduction in victimisation (Daigle et al 2009). This has led some researchers to conclude that there is a need to focus on risk factors such as lifestyle and alcohol use alongside rape-supportive attitudes (Fisher et al 2010), a potentially controversial finding due to the historic relationship between risk management, victim-blaming and women's oppression. Projects focusing on risk factors have shown some success, as have alcohol and drug use education programmes for both men and women (Daigle et al 2009), and this should be noted. It may also be fruitful to focus on educating young people about positive and empowering sexual relationships rather than concentrating on rape-supportive attitudes in isolation (Phipps 2010). An example of this is the Consensual Project in Washington DC, which delivers workshops in schools and universities focused on meaningful consent as a basis for sexual interaction (The Consensual Project 2011). Additionally, and considering the lack of meta-analysis of prevention projects, it may be useful for interested college and university managers, faculty and student support staff to liaise directly with US colleagues: with the NUS, we are exploring ways to facilitate this.

The Conservative/Liberal coalition elected in 2010 has thus far largely continued the previous administration's approach to sexual violence (HM Government 2010), although there are signs that it may eventually develop a stronger focus on prevention in contrast to the New Labour framework which was disproportionately focused on criminal justice (Phipps

2010). However, our research suggests that students need to be among its priorities. The 2010 cross-government strategy on violence against women allocated £28 million of central funding up to 2014 for a variety of initiatives, and in 2011 an additional £10.5 million was earmarked specifically to fund Rape Crisis centres (Home Office 2010b, Ministry of Justice 2011).[21] Although this was undeniably positive, there was no indication that any of these funds would be invested in research on or services for students. At the local level there is also a need to target students, particularly those resident on campus and/or isolated from mainstream services. In 2010, area-based Independent Sexual Violence Advisors (ISVAs) and Sexual Assault Referral Centres (SARCs) received continued support (HM Government 2010). There are possibilities here: within guidance on working with *all* relevant local partners (Home Office 2010a, *our italics*), colleges and universities should not be forgotten.

In a recession it is important to be realistic, and we are aware that in our conclusions we are asking for an investment of time and resources on a number of levels. However, we believe the issue of sexual and gendered violence in UK colleges and universities is sufficiently serious and important to warrant this. Furthermore, if policymakers, universities, students' unions and academics are able to work together, it may be possible to begin to tackle it. In particular, the US example confirms that central government has a decisive role to play in supporting interventions and making them sustainable.

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[21] Attention has been paid to teenage relationship abuse and the sexualisation of children (Home Office 2010, Papadopoulos 2010), but this is focused on school rather than university students with no mention of date or acquaintance assault which, we have established, is a major risk for the latter group.

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