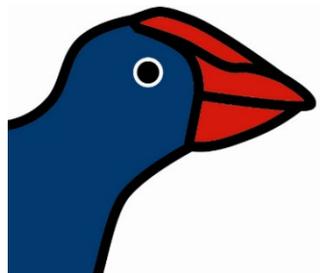




Survey of sexual harassment  
Christchurch Girls' High School  
*Te Kura o Hine Waiora*

June 2021

Dr Liz Gordon  
Pūkeko Research Ltd



## Acknowledgments

E ngā mana, ngā reo, ngā wāhine toa e ngā rangatahi. Tēnā koutou katoa.

Thanks to the parents, staff and students of Christchurch Girls High School who supported this research going ahead. Sexual harassment is difficult to discuss and stirs a lot of feelings among people, and you have all taken a leap of faith in committing to this study.

Particular thanks to Christine O'Neill, school Principal, for her commitment to making things better for the students. Thanks also to her senior staff and the Board of Trustees.

I want to thank my focus group of four students who introduced me to some of the issues and struggles around gender, identity and sexual harassment within the school community. Your determination to bring about change was inspiring.

The reporting and recommendations in this document represent my own findings and not those of the school. These are very complex issues and I am sure the school will be pursuing its journey for some time to come.

One aspect of the complexity in preparing this report is that some students in their responses made specific allegations of rape or behaviour which would otherwise constitute a criminal offence. To respect the participants, these words and descriptions have been retained, but this does not mean that the situations described have been investigated or prosecuted, as that is beyond the scope of this study.

Ngā mihi nui

Liz Gordon PhD LLB MRSNZ  
13 June 2021.

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## Executive summary

This is a report of a whole of school survey carried out in May 2021 for Christchurch Girls' High School. The research received formal ethical approval and operated an 'opt in' system for those under 15 (with parental consent) and an opt-out system for older students. The survey was sent to 1042 consented students and 725 participated, a response rate of 71.2%.

The survey included a definition of sexual harassment and 430 participants noted they had been harassed. Most stated it had occurred 2-5 times, but a quarter had been harassed more than ten times.

Harassment included verbal, space, written and physical or sexual contact. On average, those who had been harassed experienced 2.5 types of harassment.

Sexual harassment was most likely to take place outside school and around town, out socialising or on public transport. Online incidents were also common.

Men constitute 91% of the identified sexual harassers, including young men the same age as the students and older men. Most common events were cat-calling, body shaming and being rated on looks. Other forms were also frequent.

In 2021 to date, 381 participants report a very high 2677 incidents of sexual harassment, or seven per student who had experienced harassment. Most incidents were carried out by lone males, with one quarter by groups.

Students were asked to describe their 'worst' incident of sexual harassment. Over 20 students described being raped by individuals or groups. Many other incidents involved young males at social events, on the streets or on public transport. Egged on by friends, many comments were extreme and terrifying. Participants described many incidents of physical and sexual abuse. Almost the same number of events were caused by older males on the streets, either alone or in groups, often in cars. Older males also harassed students on public transport and in taxis and Ubers.

The worst incidents stirred up many feelings. Students were uncomfortable, nervous, degraded, upset, embarrassed and afraid, among other feelings. Only a tiny number, less than 10%, received any help or support. Most did not mention asking for help.

More than 60% of those who had experienced sexual harassment have changed aspects of their lives to try to ensure it does not happen again. The most common change is clothing, with students donning baggy clothing, jackets, shorts under skirts, trousers and other additional clothing to try to deflect attention.

Many have changed their routes home or become hyper-alert about who is on the streets. They avoid quiet streets and darkness. Many take multiple precautions.

A significant number have been harassed on school and town buses and work hard to change their routes, times, and bus habits. Many have stopped using buses at all.

Another strategy is to avoid boys, especially in groups. They might change direction, keep their heads down, pretend to talk on the phone and not go to particular places.

Other changes include no longer drinking alcohol, not going to parties, learning self-defence, never being alone and keeping their phone handy. Participants outlined a range of strategies to keep themselves safe. In most cases these work, but it does mean doing things differently but still living with the risk of harassment. Sometimes they lose friends as a result.

As a strategy, disclosure to others appears to be used very little, and fear prevents this increasing. While instituting personal changes can reduce exposure to sexual harassment, the overall threat does not reduce.

Those who have experienced sexual abuse seek safe spaces. They want to be able to talk openly about their experiences. Many think that harassment has been normalised as an expected part of the society.

Their main demand is to educate young men about the effects their abuse has on young women, how to stop being abusive and turn around their culture. In their own school, they want to receive active support, to know that wherever they seek help it will be available.

There is a need for education and discussion over what sexual harassment is. For example, is a little cat-calling just 'good fun', or the beginning of a pipeline of abuse? In particular, there is a need to break the code of silence that surrounds such discussions. They plead for more openness.

A key concern of this study is the very low level of reporting, including, apparently no reporting of individual or group assaults revealed in the study. The main barrier to

reporting is the tendency for the victims of sexual harassment to be ashamed or embarrassed, and often to blame themselves, or fear that others will blame them. These barriers lead to unprecedented hiding of potentially serious crimes, and the potential also for perpetrators to realise they have got away with it and do it again.

The participants feel very powerless when being sexually harassed, no matter what the context or the actual harassment. A strong goal of schools needs to be helping to empower all their students against this kind of attack. This means bolstering their self-esteem, their ability to respond and to stop and prevent attacks.

Students are making many demands for change within the school setting and provided many examples of what could be done.

Of the participants, 78% knew of other people who had been sexually harassed over the past three years, but only 42% of those were students at the school, in line with the earlier discussion about non-disclosure. The rest were friends outside school, family members and others. On average, each participant knew of 1.5 people who had been sexually harassed over three years.

The age ranges of participants were from 12 to 18, with the modal age being 16. 93% identified as female and around 74% as straight. Nearly three quarters of students were Pākehā New Zealand with the others being Māori, Chinese and from a wide range of other cultures. Sexuality and ethnicity were both mentioned several times as aggravating factors in sexual harassment.

The study concluded with a discussion of areas that needed attending to and questions that should be answered.

## Recommendations

That the school and board note the findings of this study, and in particular that there is significant, ongoing sexual harassment being experienced by the majority of students of all ages at the school.

All behaviour that calls out slurs to young women/ others is sexual harassment. In a society where there is supposed to be social equality, such behaviour is an unacceptable exercise of male power and needs to be viewed as such. It is never OK to sexually harass someone. This needs to be made clear in school and society.

The school should look to a whole-of-school strategy of safe disclosure of all sexual harassment. Students should be encouraged to report all incidents of sexual harassment and to do so safely.

The school needs to consider what can be done to ensure counselling and support services can encourage and support reporting and getting help with sexual harassment, whether it be relatively minor or very serious. The counselling service may be under-utilised at present for this purpose.

Some of the reported 'cat-calls' were, also, of particular concern because of the content. Shouting out content that specifically threatens sexual harm to schoolgirls may indicate some deeper mental health problems that need to be investigated in the community. Anyone who hears or views such disturbing comments/ writings should report these immediately.

Many of the accounts provided in the research reveal that the students feel powerless to stop the abuse. In some cases that may be the case, but students may have more tools in their armament than they currently use. I recommend that CGHS students use the cameras and videos on their phones to record all incidents of abuse, when safe to do so, using a strategy called 'empower, enable, equip'. This could be in the nature of collecting evidence, such as number plates, identities and the nature of interactions. I suspect that sexual harassment withers in the light of day and that ubiquitous tool, the smartphone, may be a useful tool. There could be a discussion about how and when this data is collected centrally and used.

Over twenty of the participants in this study detail experiences ranging from non-consensual sex with a boyfriend to group sexual assaults. It is possible also that some of the individual rapists have done it before or since. None of these incidents were

reported to police, and most never disclosed at all. If the students continue to hide their experiences, it leaves perpetrators free and clear to do it again.

It is difficult to know how to help young people overcome their reluctance to talk about these terrible experiences. We know from the current national inquiry into abuse in state care that some people are now disclosing only after 50 years or so, with it hanging over their heads the whole time. We know that some students do not want the perpetrator caught because people will find out about what happened. There is evidence that the lives of some of these young women are already significantly affected and will not improve without help. The school cannot fix this alone but education can help.

The role of the police is important here. Young women are being abused, raped and verbally assaulted. When police do prosecute, the outcomes for rape victims can be terrible re-victimisation in court, which only goes to reinforce young women's views that they somehow must be to blame for what happened to them. We know there have been 2700 sexual harassments perpetrated on around 400 young women in one school this year alone. I was told the police have been working side by side with the school since the student marches and expect that this report will provide some ideas around better strategies to combat sexual harassment of all types.

There is an active community of gender and sexual role discovery at the school. I found this refreshing and quite liberating, but it also puts young people at risk. Gender discovery is strongly linked to mental health and needs to be supported.

Finally, this is a report for CGHS and it is not my role to recommend action by others. However, the community outside CGHS needs to consider why there are so many incidents and how these can be prevented into the future, because they are hugely damaging to the young people concerned.

I wish the school all strength in tackling these issues. I am sure there are a range of services and tools available to assist you in this important work.

## Introduction

In March, a group of students at Christchurch Girls' High School took action against sexual harassment affecting students. As a result, the school commissioned this study to try to understand the extent and nature of sexual harassment faced by the students.

The chosen approach was an online survey. Knowing that many students were unwilling to reveal in public what has happened to them, the survey provides a way for people to have their say while remaining anonymous. The survey introduction committed to privacy and confidentiality for the students, and that has been maintained throughout the study. The survey offered a range of quantitative and qualitative questions. These provided opportunities for students to both 'state the facts' and also to outline their thoughts and experiences in more depth. We thank them for the time and effort they put into responding to such a sensitive subject. Support options were available at several places during the survey.

## Ethical approval and consent

Ethical approval was sought from the New Zealand Ethics Committee. A letter of approval was issued (no. 2021/24) on 6 May 2021. Aside from issues around privacy and confidentiality, the Committee was very involved in helping us develop a consent regime that would recognise the sensitivity of the topic while ensuring maximum opportunity for participation. Students under 15 years of age were required to receive parental agreement to participate (an opt-in system), while those over 15 were able to participate unless their parent/guardian actively objected (an opt-out system). None opted out.

The first question asked 1042 students to agree to participate, decline to participate (survey will end) or request further information. They were then offered a list of contact details for organisations, if they needed support.

## The survey

The survey was run on the Qualtrics platform. Invitations were sent out to 1042 verified email addresses on 10 May 2021, with two reminders on 14 and 20 May. In total, 725 participants agreed to take part and 21 declined. The survey was closed at midnight on 24 May. The 70%+ response rate is the benchmark for this kind of study.

## Personal experience of sexual harassment

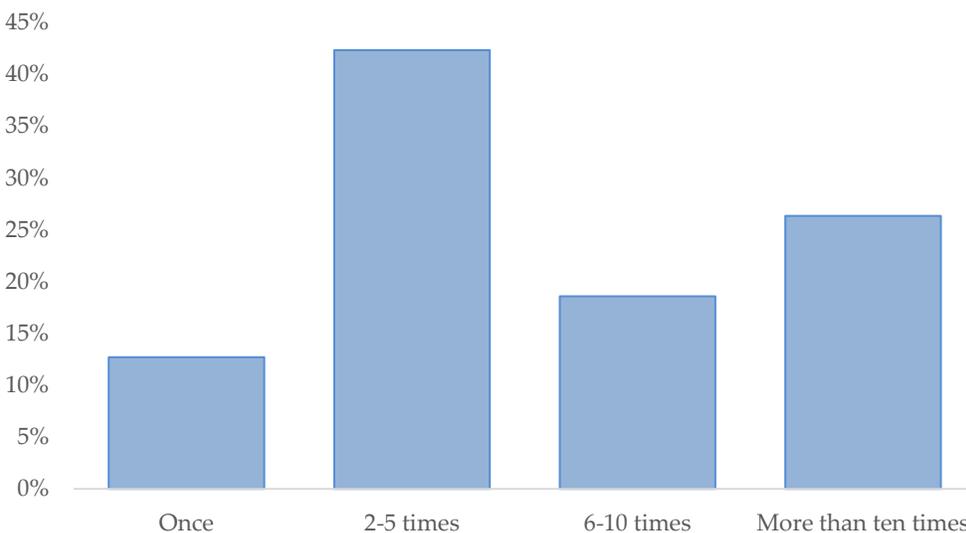
The survey outlined a definition of sexual harassment which was broad-ranging and inclusive, as follows:

Sexual harassment is any form of unwanted verbal, non-verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature that creates an intimidating, hostile, degrading or offensive environment. It can be relatively minor or very serious. This can include unwanted physical contact, invasion of personal space, suggestive remarks, comments on dress and appearance, jokes of a sexual nature or the display of sexually offensive material in a public space.

Students were asked: 'Have you ever been sexually harassed?' A further prompt was offered if unsure. In total, 430 students noted they had been sexually harassed and went on to complete the section about personal harassment. The survey 'skipped' the remainder (260) to the section on others' harassment.

Students were asked to estimate how many times they had ever been harassed and the responses are laid out in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1. Reported number of times sexually harassed (n=425).



There were many examples given of forms of harassment that only occurred once, either due to being in particular circumstances (a particular place or street) or dealing with relationships: "I was alone with a boy and he kept grabbing my hand and putting

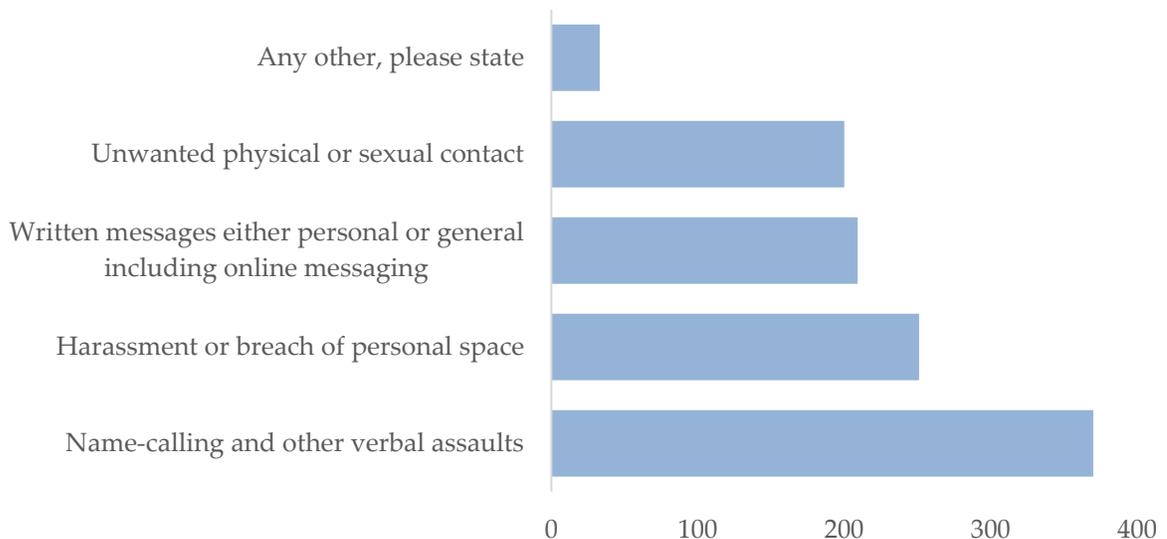
it on his dick even though I said no". One off events often included groping, but many participants were also groped more frequently.

Many participants told us of the forms of sexual harassment they had experienced:

I have so many examples I want to talk about. First, when I would go to school when I was younger boys would come up to me and grab my ass and my boobs. When I was year 9, I used to bus home from school and the closest bus stop is outside a nearby school and then when I would try to get off the bus it was full of boys standing up and I would always get my ass pinched so now I don't bus. I sent an explicit photo to my boyfriend when I was younger and he showed all his friends who shared it around, recently found out that it went everywhere.

Many students, like this one, have experienced a number of different forms of harassment. For the purposes of this study, we divided harassment 'types' into four categories: verbal, 'space' issues (including cyberspace/ pictures), written messages and physical or sexual contact. The numbers experiencing each of these forms are summarised in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2. Type of sexual harassment experienced by participants (n=425).

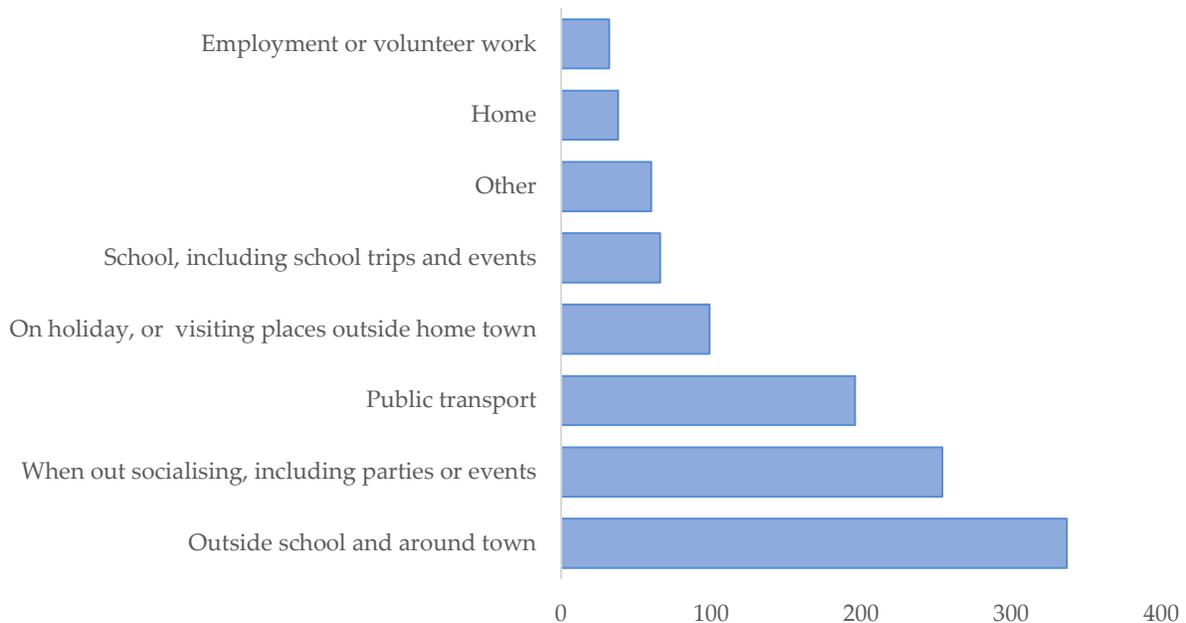


The 425 participants gave multiple responses, on average responding they had experienced harassment of 2.5 types. The most common was verbal assaults, and 87% had experienced these. Even the least common form listed, physical or sexual assault, was experienced by 47% of participants. Other types specifically listed were several comments about harassment that took place at the anti-harassment protests, being

asked for nude photos (21 cases), being sent ‘dick-pics’, or being filmed without permission (13 specific examples noted), being followed, being touched without permission, unwanted intercourse, ‘looks’ including up skirts, and rapes<sup>1</sup> (3). One person was offered money to allow herself to be touched.

Participants were asked about all the places that sexual harassment took place. Most cited two or three places where harassment took place. More than three quarters of harassment experiences took place in the course of daily life, around town, out socialising or on public transport. This is important because it is hard to avoid harassment when it is occurring in all the places students are likely to be, or have to be, because of their life commitments.

Figure 3. Number of harassment events by place (1082 events n=425)



The ‘other’ comments were divided between three main categories: in streets, malls and local places (24), at the homes of friends and relatives (18) and online (16). Three girls mentioned they were harassed at a nearby school and one was biking home from the school day of protest. Four specifically mentioned the gym, and sports training, as sites where they were harassed.

<sup>1</sup> Three specifically mentioned rape under ‘other’, but it is clear from responses below that more than 3 participants have been raped.

While by far the majority of incidents were face to face, online incidents were reasonably common. The main activities in that space were around the receipt of nude photos from boys (or 'dick pics') and boyfriends demanding that the girls provide 'nudes', self-taken photos of their bodies with no clothes. Several noted they had been filmed without their permission.

Some noted they were sexually harassed on holiday, in the home or at work. Various examples of such harassment were provided (including some hair-raising events on holiday). Students should be made aware that holiday and workplaces can bring particular challenges. In terms of the home environment, these issues usually involved relatives or family friends. In a number of cases, the issue is now historic, as over time the abuse has stopped (often as a result of the victim calling out the perpetrator or refusing to be near him).

### Who are the sexual harassers?

Males constitute 91% of the sexual harassers and women 3.4%, and the rest (teachers, family members and other) are mostly gender unknown. Others mentioned are younger males, work colleagues and a former coach. Figure 4 below provides data on 718 harassers, on average just under two different categories per participant.

Figure 4. A profile of the sexual harassers, as reported (n=718).

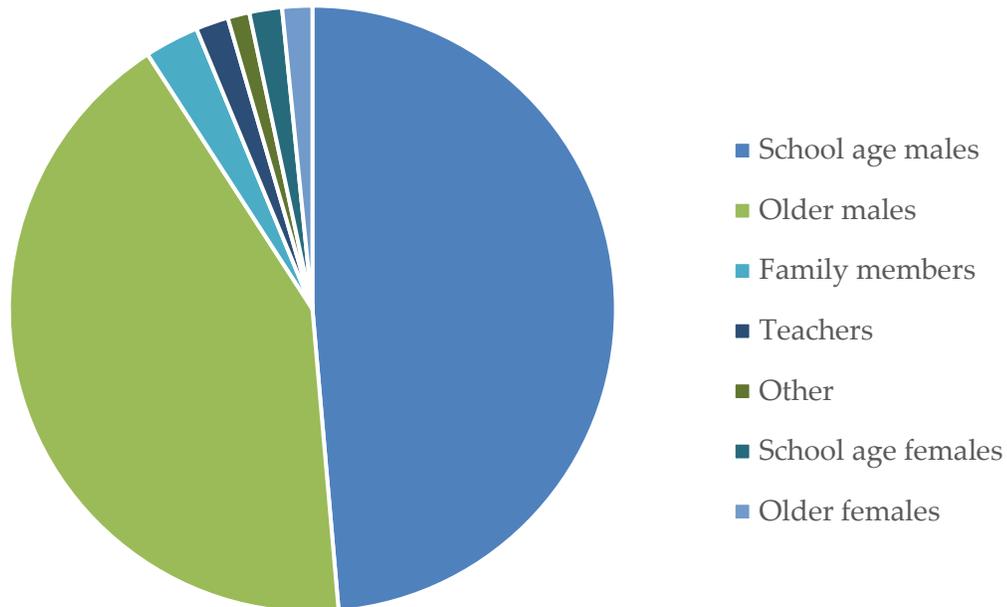
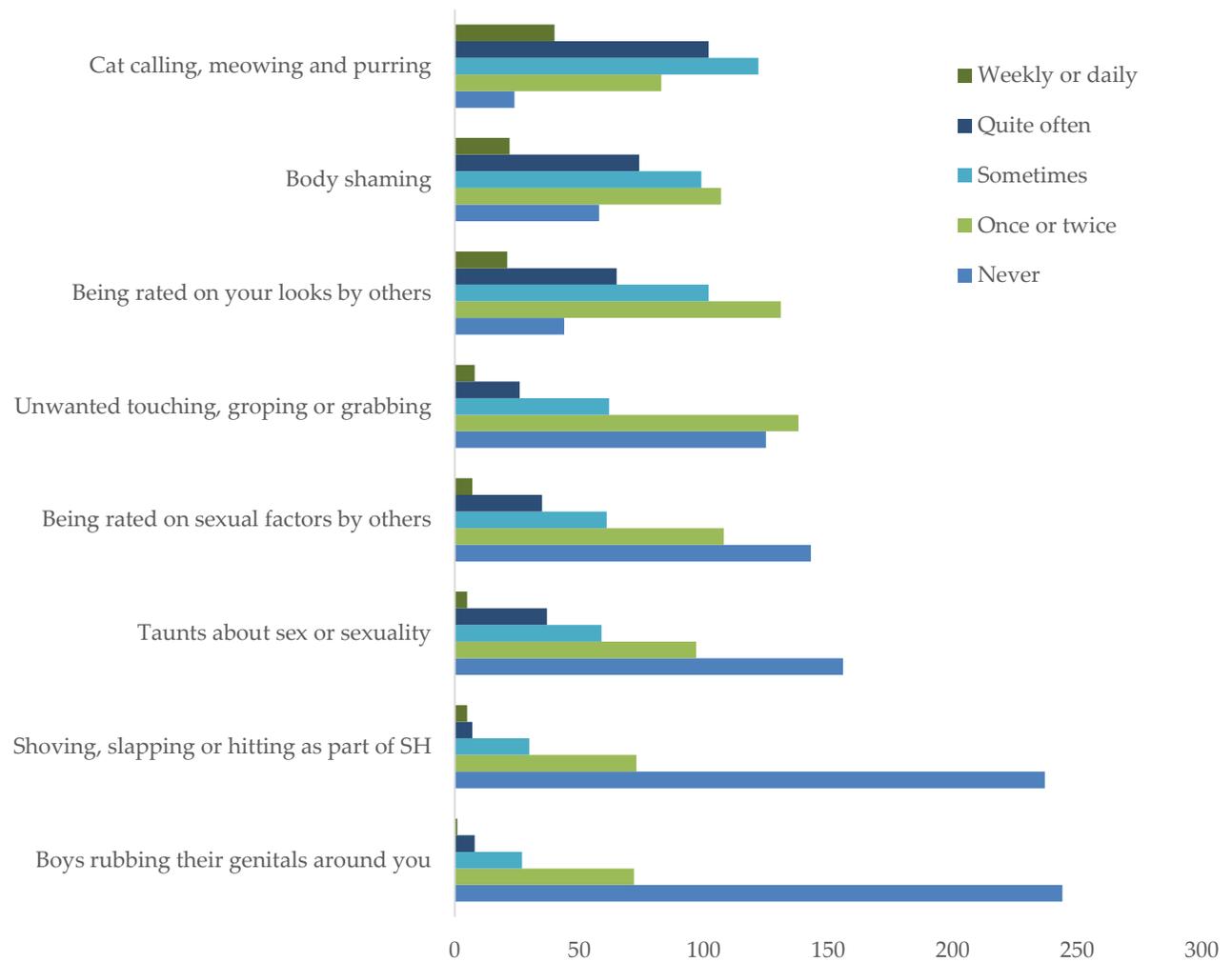


Figure 4 is important as it gives an unequivocal profile of those carrying out the sexual harassment. The largest category is school-aged males, followed right behind by older males. While debates around who commits sexual harassment are often muddled, it is very clear that these two groups are the source of over 90% of the sexual harassment facing these students.

### What did they do, and how often?

Participants were asked to think about everyday comments and actions they faced. The aim was to build up a general picture of the kinds of scenarios experienced on a day by day basis. The results are summarised in Figure 5 below.

Figure 5. Frequency of commonly cited forms of sexual harassment (n=371)

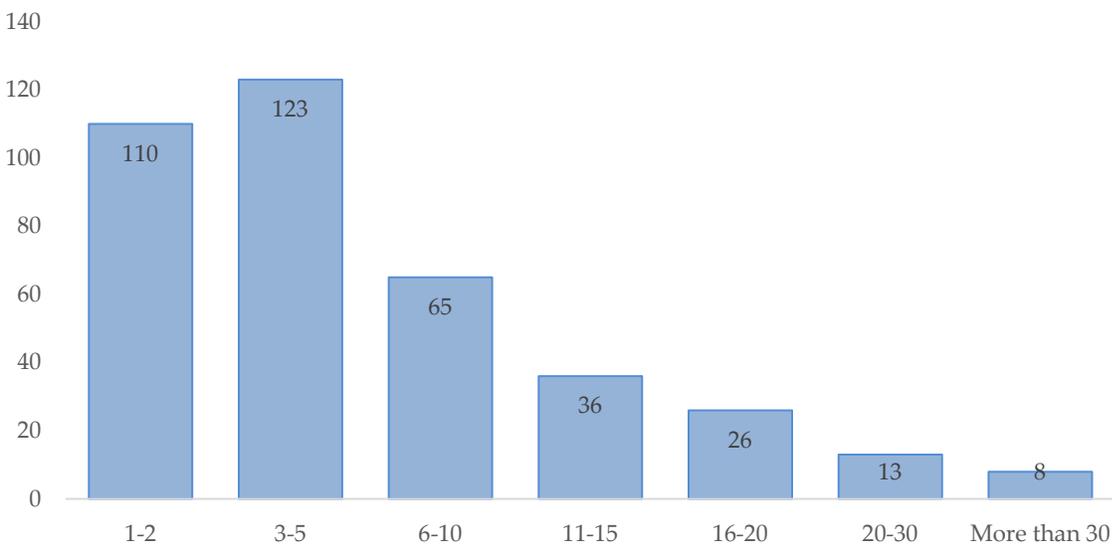


The items have been arranged from more to less frequent. The first three categories are more frequent than the rest. But nevertheless, in all but the last two categories, more than half of all participants experienced each type of harassment at least once. Quite a number of students took the opportunity to outline specific examples of harassment. In their own words, these comments are outlined below (from multiple participants:

Being told to “get back to the kitchen” by boys<sup>2</sup> when I walked past, being followed when I was out running in Hagley Park; asked for nudes; surrounded by students whilst walking home from school in Mona Vale and followed and shamed for trying to leave without interacting; being called a slut; being slapped in the face when having sex with a person I didn’t want to have sex with; peer pressure; taken advantage of while drunk x2; inappropriate requests; unwanted dick pics; unsolicited nudes; whistling; unasked for dick pics; being yelled derogatory/sexual terms; getting harassed for saying no, friends not believing truth; being forced to touch a boy; cat-calling all the time; stranger invaded space; being called homophobic and transphobic slurs; comments about appearance and dress; boys calling people sluts and whores; being sent unwanted nudes; boys believing is OK to treat girls like this...

Those participants who had experienced sexual harassment were asked how many times they had experienced this in 2021 to date (i.e. to mid-May). The question was asked in response to some input to the survey by the focus group that harassment was almost a daily occurrence for some. The responses showed the number of harassments in 2021 were high overall, with 80 students experiencing at least weekly harassment.

Figure 6. Frequency of sexual harassment occurrences in 2021 to date (n=381)



<sup>2</sup> This comment appears bizarre, but is clearly picked up from the internet, where get back to the kitchen/ make me a sandwich is a relatively common meme.

## What the numbers mean

The research team calculated what these numbers meant in terms of actual incidents occurring during 2021 for 381 participants. By calculating responses at the mid-point of each count category (e.g. 11-15 translated to 13), we estimated that the students who answered this question have experienced 2677 incidents of sexual harassment in 2021 to mid-May, or seven per student (7.192).

Participants were asked whether they were harassed by individuals or by groups. They were more likely to have been harassed by individuals, with 150 never being harassed by groups, but over 100 reported being subject to group harassment at least 'sometimes' in 2021.

This project did not include a literature review of other work, but a quick scan of the literature has failed to come up with anything near these high figures. There have been some recent reports out of the UK on the spread of a 'rape culture' in schools, but none suggest figures this high<sup>3</sup>. A website called '[everyone's invited](#)' has listed 16,409 testimonies from young people across the UK, which is tiny compared to the CGHS findings of 2600 plus events by 381 people in around 4 months. And, in case it is thought that the experiences of the students in this survey are less severe than on that website, the definition of 'rape culture' used there is very similar to that of sexual harassment used in this study.

A recent follow up UK report by OFSTED found 90% of girls had been the victims of sexual harassment and online sexual abuse. The daily abuse experienced by girls here is very similar to that in the UK. That study concluded that sexual harassment has been normalised for young people in schools.<sup>4</sup>

The literature on sexual harassment in schools notes that it affects learning outcomes and self-concept and has an impact on wellbeing and mental and physical health. In short, a community cannot keep being bombarded with unpleasant and shameful messages without effects.

The figures discovered in this study cannot be ignored and must be taken as a wake-up call.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2021/mar/27/sexual-abuse-rife-in-state-schools-say-police>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2021/jun/10/sexual-harassment-is-a-routine-part-of-life-schoolchildren-tell-ofsted>

## The worst incident

Participants were asked to provide information on the 'worst' incident of sexual harassment they had experienced. The aim of this question was to examine the harm profile of the harassment. But this is not an exact science. There is no objective 'scale' of sexual harassment. Any such event can be viewed legally, morally, physically, emotionally, social or in terms of psychological effect. Also, the amount of harm caused may differ significantly based on a range of factors. These include immediate or long-term factors, with abuse able to trigger post-traumatic stress disorders that persist long after the event.

Please note that the police have been involved in only a tiny number of these cases - less than five that we know of and none of them rape. In most cases the victim has told no-one and certainly not reported any incident to the police. Some of the cases described below would attract prison terms of up to twenty years if successfully prosecuted. The research team agreed to maintain the confidentiality of participants no matter what we were told and many stories were revealed to us.

Nineteen of the 'worst incidents' described were rapes by individual men<sup>5</sup>. We define rape as sexual intercourse with no consent, but in truth the events as described ranged from lack of consent alone to violent sexual assaults. A small number of rapes were perpetrated by family members, including some where the events happened over a long period of time.

Most occurred at events and parties and were perpetrated by peers, often boyfriends. We did not want to include some of the more illustrative comments here due to confidentiality, but one generic example was: "On [date redacted] I was at a party and forced to have sex and oral sex with a friend. I bled quite badly during and after".

Where the rapist was a family member or friend of family, the behaviour commenced generally at a young age. If he was a young man, the most common context was a party. Dressed in their party clothes and perhaps having too much alcohol, young women are relatively easy prey (which makes many of them feel guilty afterwards). None of the participants described being raped by a stranger after being picked up off the street. The danger of rape is from those they know, not strangers, in practice.

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<sup>5</sup> In a number of cases, the participant did not make it clear that rape took place, and in some others, just refused to say. We did not count these cases.

Negotiating sexual demands from boyfriends caused much difficulty. In one case, an ex-boyfriend threatened to kill himself unless a young woman visited him that evening. She went around to his house and he stripped off her clothing, pinned her down on his bed and raped her. It was a well-planned attack that devastated her. Although she acknowledged she needed help, she never got any and never disclosed.

In addition to being raped by individuals, some were raped by groups of young men, generally in the party context. The following is one of several events of a similar nature where the facts are almost identical: one male, possibly a boyfriend, is kind and helps a girl at a party and takes her to a bedroom to get some sleep because she has had too much to drink. A number of other men appear in the room and take turns with her. She may try to get away but they are strong and insistent. They may subdue her physically or with drugs and she is completely powerless.

It is disturbing that a number of these instances are remarkably similar and there is a question about how some of them appear to have been planned and staged, down to the choice of the room and, potentially, the victim.

Most of the 'worst incidents' were not rapes, but they were often equally frightening for the victims. The participants produced nearly 400 individual accounts of their worst experience, which we cannot do justice to here without making the report far too long. We have divided the responses below into sexual harassment perpetrated by young men and then older men, as these often seem different in kind to one another.

### Young men sexually harassing females

The most common place for sexual harassment to occur is outside of school and on the streets of Christchurch. The second most common area is social events, including partying. In both these instances, young men are heavily implicated as perpetrators.

On the streets are the voices of cat-calling, whistling, honking, yelling and making "sexual remarks". While these may seem trivial, and are often treated as such, they can be very harmful and sometimes quite dangerous and predatory:

Four boys aged 14 or 15 shouted "I'll fuck you until your back breaks" "let me see your tits", "I'd love to rape you" all while I walked past a school on my way home.

The bus exchange was a particular site where young men were "yelling and screaming at me, some really gross stuff. I simply avoid that space now". "They called me c\*nt and b\*itch". "Slut".

If a student ends up alone with a group of boys, the response can be frightening:

I was walking home through Mona Vale about 10 minutes after school finished. I was one of the last students walking through there and was relatively alone. I was wearing full correct summer school uniform. A group of senior boys walked up behind me and started making farting sounds. They were nudging each other and pointing at me. I walked faster and started to call my parent. These students surrounded me and commented that I shouldn't look so sad and annoyed. I managed to get out of the circle and walked away whilst on the phone to my parent. They called after asking why I was leaving and that I should stay.

Apart from the verbal abuse, students were routinely grabbed by boys in numerous ways, including on breasts, bottoms and other sensitive bits. Boys "stuck hands down my pants"; "pulled my skirt", "grab me to kiss me". Boys grabbed girls to hug them, kiss them, feel them and, occasionally, to prevent them leaving. The following incident was terrifying:

In year 9 a boy my age who my friend knew and I had only met for the first time that day, took me away from my friends in an area I didn't know well. He put his arms round my waist and tried to kiss me, I told him I didn't like him like that and that I think we should just stay friends. He got angry, cursed and shouted at me and grabbed me tighter, he put his hands underneath my clothes, wouldn't let me go and run his hands up and down my body, he continued to try kiss and touch me and every time I tried to pull away or I said no he would grab me tighter, touching me in places I did not wish to be touched, got angrier and tried again. He used his physical advantages such as his height and strength to get what he wanted. He tried to scare me so I would just give in, my fear almost turned him on.

Aside from the numerous cases where young men used their physical presence and power to intimidate and harass students, they are also present online. Participants are sent videos of boys masturbating and 'cumming', not to mention the ubiquitous dick pics.

### Older men: alone or in packs

The participants noted as nearly as many cases overall relating to older men as for school-aged males. Some were historical events relating to relatives or friends of the family, starting from age 5. Many events occurred on the streets. Some events included men showing pictures of, or actual, genitals in public, a man exposing himself while peering out of bushes, 'deep staring', following girls, shouting rape threats and so on.

For some, this happened very frequently. In terms of the worst kind of experience, one participant offered up the following account:

Once when walking to work (on a very busy street) in daylight a man on his bike starting riding right behind me and yelling at me and commenting on my body (butt boobs etc), I was wearing baggy jeans, my work t-shirt and a bug jacket over the top cause it was winter. He was also yelling at me to have sex with him. This man was in his 40s to early 50s. I chose to ignore him and kept walking like I hadn't heard him, it wasn't until he said "I'm gonna fucking rape you!" that I turned around, at that point I knew I was in a lot of danger so I ran into the closest restaurant and waited out for him to leave.

There were also a number of other reports of older men (some on bicycles) making rape threats on the streets, including when students were walking home after sports.

Much more common was the 'drive-by harassment' often perpetrated by groups of men in cars. Some are young but often they are older. The most common scenario is that there are around 3-4 of them. They see some feature of a student they like – 'ass', 'tits' or whatever – and start cat-calling. They then slow down and invite the victim of their heckling to get in the car with them, and may circle back three or four times. This is relatively common. Either there is a gang of men out there doing this for recreation or there are a number of groups.

One young woman noted that she was walking close to the school and an older man started "honking and yelling" and encouraged his school-aged son to do so as well, which indicates at least some inter-generational transmission.

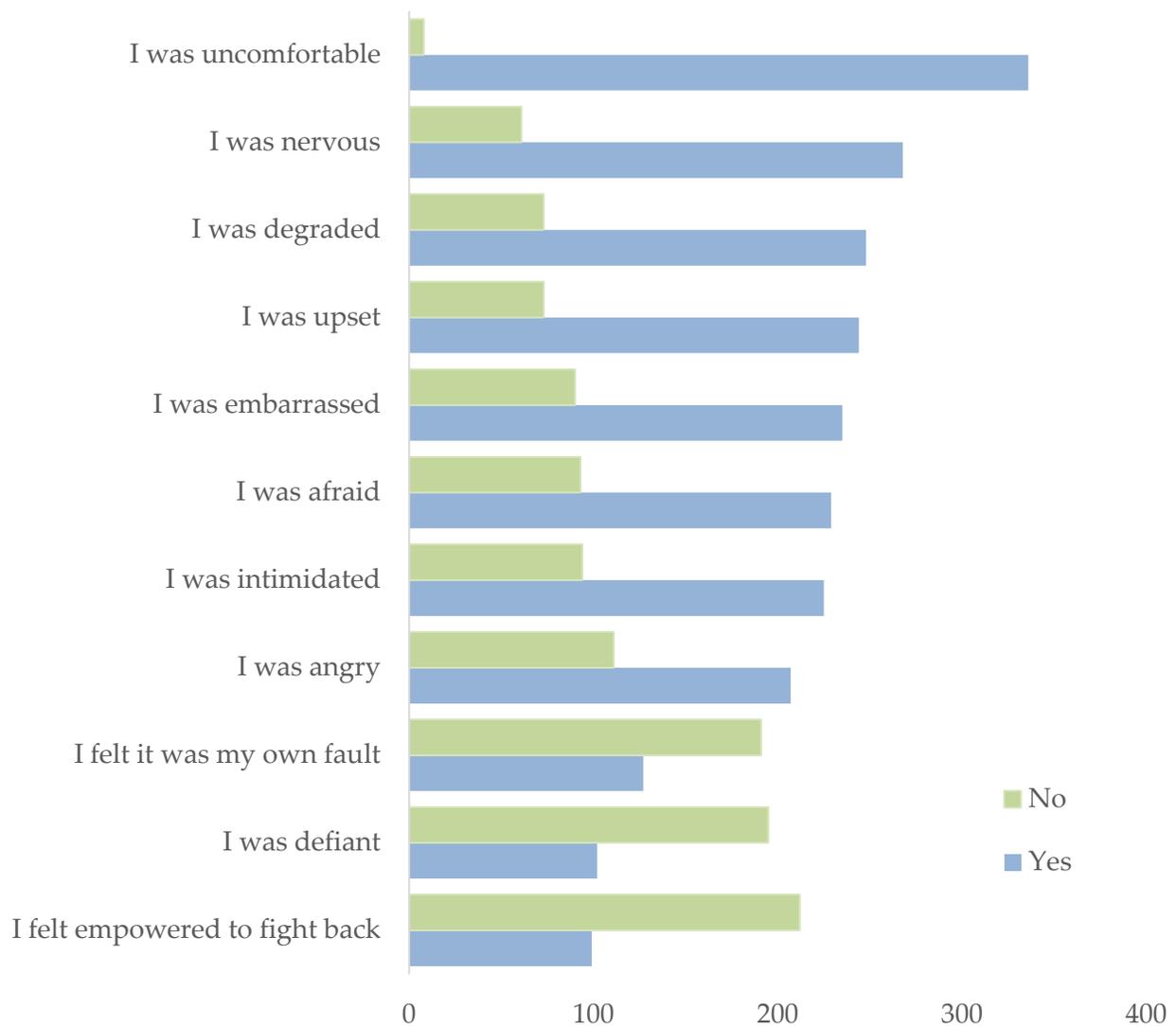
Students were the victims of harassment on buses (including some frightening events), in taxis and Ubers, in the vehicles of friends or, waiting in a line of traffic, seeing cars pull up alongside and men start playing with themselves, trousers open.

There is a lot we do not know about the street-level and vehicle-based perpetrators who are older men. Are they all the same two or three people/ groups who circle the town endlessly looking for victims, or are there many different groups out there? The victims are, of course, most concerned to get away from the abuse, and do not take time to seek evidence. As many victims are horrified by these incidents, and often consider themselves responsible or ashamed, there is not only no accountability for, but also no record of, the events or the perpetrators. The fear and shame the participants feel works in the favour of the perpetrators, who can be assured in most cases that their identity will be protected.

## Feelings

Participants who identified a 'worst' case were asked about the feelings they had about it. The responses are ranked in Figure 7 below, from most to least common. The top seven feelings: discomfort, nervousness, degradation, upset, embarrassment, fear and intimidation were all described by more than half of participants.

Figure 7. How the 'worst' incident made participants feel (n=372).



Around one in four participants (96/372) felt they needed help with the worst incident and the feelings it brought up. But two thirds of that small number reported they did not get the support they needed. Indeed, only 34 of the participants actually received any help at all which was most likely to come from friends (40%), family or a school

counsellor. A small number approached a teacher, helpline or social media. Three cases saw the police involved: stalking, flashing and behaviour at a public event. None of the rape cases appeared to have been reported to the police.

What is striking about the worst incidents is the level of powerlessness experienced by the majority of the participants. That lack of power derives from the very strong feelings experienced by the girls - discomfort, nervousness, degradation, upset, embarrassment and fear, often all at once. These feelings are internalised instead of being directed at the perpetrators. It is that powerlessness that has led to us recommending a more proactive strategy, perhaps called "empower, enable, equip" that would support the victims of sexual harassment to record and expose their experiences and bring their harassers to account.

## Making changes

More than 60 percent of participants (227/372) reported they have changed some aspects of their lives as a result of being sexually harassed.

The most common change is clothing (67 mentions). Participants are more likely to cover up, wear a baggy jacket, wear pants instead of dresses, wear shorts under skirts and wear larger clothing. Many of them noted frustration about having to make this change:

I love, love, love skirts and stuff when I wear them I feel really good in my skin and it's the same with anything 'revealing' when I'm in my room and just wearing it because it makes me feel good it's incredible but I am just point blank uncomfortable to wear anything like that in public. It feels so contradictory y'know like women should be able to wear what we like but at the same time I will always feel safer if I'm in something more 'solid' like a jacket and long pants.

Some participants reported that they have lost friends as a result of their new 'baggy' looks. Results of wearing the new look are mixed. For some, it works well, but for others the cat-calling on the streets continues. Walking in school uniform, even with long skirts, still attracts attention. Some mentioned that they have not been able to wear the clothes they had on when they were sexually harassed.

The second most common change is the walking route that participants take either to and from school or in town (49 cases). Some go via.; the same route but are "hyper-alert" and change direction if they see a group of boys. Many stick to busy roads, avoid walking home after dark, talk to a friend or parent on the phone while they are walking or no longer walk home at all: "I can't walk home anymore 'cause I'm scared I'll see him". Some take multiple precautions:

This isn't because of that specific incident, it's more a result of everything that has happened to me and others in my life. I feel afraid walking home at night, I feel afraid and nervous when I wear something that could draw unwanted attention, even though I know that what I wear doesn't justify men's behaviour towards me. I stay on lit roads whenever possible, and make sure I'm never on a street at night on my own.

The third major change relates to those who have been harassed on buses (23 responses). They stop taking the bus, use a different route, catch an earlier or later bus, sit at the front of a bus or stand up if a male sits beside them. Some hold their bag in a

hug to stop people looking at their breasts. Some no longer listen to music on the bus because of the need to be aware at all times. One person noted:

I walk different ways to school, wait an extra half an hour at the bus stop so I won't have to catch a bus with any of the boys on it. Yes these things may keep me out of danger's way but I didn't think I should have to be the one making the change, having to deal with daily inconveniences, since I'm not the problem.

Many have stopped using buses and one person expressed satisfaction that she now had her own car, which solved a number of problems.

Participants face a range of issues when around boys. Some go to significant effort never to be alone on the streets per se, or to avoid groups of boys:

I have always kept a distance away from boys, I never feel comfortable around them alone. Whenever I see a boy coming towards me I feel so scared and feel the need to move elsewhere. Once a group walked near me while I was alone and I went the opposite way that took me double the time to walk home.

Over 20 participants express quite strong fear of being near groups of boys and change their habits to avoid them. These include groups of boys on the streets, on buses and other places likely to harass the girls. Girls talk about walking past boys "making sure to keep my head down and to not make eye contact because I am afraid of being cat-called".

I have had to not go to places with my friends anymore because we know a certain group of boys will be there and something always goes wrong while they are there, we have tried to get them talked to by their school but nothing has been done.

Other changes include no longer drinking alcohol, not going to parties, learning self-defence, never being alone and keeping their phone handy. Some have an emergency call system in place to alert their contacts if they are in trouble.

Around 7% of participants identify as non-female and a quarter as gay, lesbian, bi, pan, queer, asexual or other sexuality. Some have been particularly targeted because of their gender orientation or sexuality. Because the numbers are relatively small, we will not give specific responses here, but it is clear that among the sexual harassment is a certain amount of sexuality hate-speech.

Participants talked of a number of new habits and practices they had adopted. These include isolating themselves from the perpetrators, changing their looks (cutting hair

etc), giving up sports, never going to the places where abuse happened, showing extra caution over their safety, being 'mindful', "never trust anyone again" and "never wearing a skirt since". When asked how this was working out for them, a range of responses were received, including several along the following lines:

'Working out' isn't necessarily a perfect term. No matter what we do or how many differences we make in our lives, there is always a chance of being at risk just by existing as women, especially as women in minority groups. I can do things differently but that doesn't mean harassers will act differently too.

What the participants rarely talk about is disclosure habits. In most cases, what has happened to them is firmly locked away and is too risky to be disclosed. Friends and family may suspect from the baggy clothes, changed habits and different demeanour that something has happened, but that is usually as far as it goes. While the harm remains privatised, it is unlikely to go away.

## What do sexual harassment victims want to see done?

The message from participants is clear: their experience of harassment was, in many cases, made worse by the particular context within which it took place. Most of the participants in this study have kept what happened to them a secret for fear of being blamed for their own abuse:

I want to have a safe space where people can individually share any discomforts with other trusted people. I never had a space to share this event with anyone. This is the first time anyone will ever know this happened to me.

On other occasions participants reported trying to talk with friends about what happened only to encounter a brick wall. She suggests that people “actually listen to the people being harassed instead of brushing their experience off by saying something like “boys will be boys””.

They believe there is a ‘normalised’ culture of abuse that expects abuse to occur and tolerates it. “Survivors should know there is support available and that they will not be invalidated by people they trust or figures of authority.”

The main demand (83 responses) is that young men be educated about the effects of their sexual harassment. These range from the idea that boys do not understand the effects their words and actions have on girls, to the view that they understand very well but have learned to get away with it:

I want boys to be educated on how to help woman that have been sexual harassing and how to emotionally support people better. My boyfriend used to slut shame me without even thinking it was bad. It’s this inherited behaviour from the society and culture of boys that they have grown up around that leave them with ignorance. I just want boys to know how to help because I think they definitely know what consent is and they specifically choose to conduct non-consensual behaviour, its sick and disgusting but it’s something I want to stop. No woman should ever have to go through what I went through.

They are interested in boys learning to self-regulate their own communities. The irony currently is that the victims of abuse, those at CGHS, are spending a lot of time on assemblies, protests, surveys and so on. Some participants wanted to know what was going on in other schools to prevent harassment:

The culture change. We shouldn’t be needed to do anything - it should be focused on the boys doing it.

The next biggest response group called for the school and society to be more supportive (45 responses). There were a number of suggestions about how this may be achieved: better education, better services and acknowledgement of the issues.

A number of students talked about the need to foster a sense of sisterhood, which was non-judgemental, kind and supportive. Several mentioned that a number of students thought that cat-calling behaviour was acceptable, and that girls should just put up with it. In the words of one: "Cat-calling is not sexual assault or rape". In such an environment, it is difficult to disclose what has happened.

This further begs the question about where to draw the line. Is cat-calling a completely different thing to assault, or do they both draw from the same attitudes about girls and women. Is a young woman wrong to be nervous and frightened after receiving a barrage of cat-calls? Is it worse if the calls say "I am going to rape you 'til your back breaks", than meowing, woofing and sniffing behaviour? There is a lot of unanswered questions in this space (programmes such as 'Loves Me Not' do provide clarification of these issues). As a result, a sort of silence results, as one participant explains:

It's a hard and a really overwhelming topic to talk about because it's been almost hushed and no one ever talks about it. I feel like there is a certain taboo around sexual assault and the toxicity of boy culture. I want to be better, but I feel like a part of me will never be the same from this assault and others. I have spoken to many health professionals but nothing quite makes the pain go away fully. One thing I have learnt, and I want people to know, is that the impacts of sexual assault do not just occur days after the time of assault, it's the weeks, months and years that you spend questioning your own self-worth over something you had no control over. People need to know that the feelings that come with sexual assault are not those that can just disappear.

The overwhelming message from this group of responses is that it is not just the culture of the boys that needs to change, but that of girls as well. There is a need to stop tolerating and allowing for any kind of sexual harassment. It all degrades girls/ people of different sexualities and opens the door further to abuse.

There is a plea for 'more openness' from 24 participants. First, the onus should not be on the victims to do all the teaching:

Just people to acknowledge it, and acknowledge every part of it, and I am so very, very, very, very sick of it being on the victims/survivors to be the ones teaching anyone anything.

Second, there needs to be more thought and mindfulness going into the space to counter the prevailing culture:

Normalise talking to others about sexual harassment and supporting each other through these experiences. I myself feel like I have to keep it to myself and not burden others. Even a few weeks back I was walking with a friend and a man I walked past attempted to touch me inappropriately but missed, and I told my friend and she dismisses it because it is such a common problem.

The list of potential changes suggested include: talking openly about the problem (including one's own experience), being able to talk openly with men, listening and ensuring help is available to back up the open culture and having potential safe areas. Even those very keen to support their friends often do not know what to do:

Many of my friends have had serious encounters with sexual harassment. I find it hard to support them/suggest options of what to do next. I think it would be good to see more systems put in place around support for those after facing such a traumatic event.

Participants were sometimes held back from reporting incidents because they thought they may get into trouble:

I'd like to have a system where you don't have to feel like you will get in trouble for speaking up, like I never reported the boys who leaked my nudes because I thought I would get in trouble with the police<sup>6</sup>.

But it appears this is not the biggest barrier to reporting. It appears that few incidents, and none of the 20+ individual or group rapes reported in this project were reported to police. In most cases, the victims did not tell anyone at all. It appears the reason for this is primarily the fear that the victim would be blamed or judged for the rape. One victim of a group rape discussed above noted that her whole life had changed. What she would like is to "talk about it more, make it okay to talk about it and not feel guilty". Because she cannot talk about it (due to embarrassment and a pervading feeling that it was her own fault), there is no way to break the logjam in her mind that she should be

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<sup>6</sup> The issue of nudes needs further work. Often at the behest of a boyfriend, as an act of love or friendship, girls are encouraged to share pictures of themselves. The fact that these are then touted around to friends and on the internet as commodities feels like a rape and betrayal.

blamed. Meanwhile, it is possible that this group of men have gone on to do the same thing to other young women, secure that they will not be sanctioned.

There is a movement for change within the school community, and this is reflected in some of the responses (25). Demands for change include:

- Sexual harassment of whatever kind should not be normalised – call it out;
- Change the (toxic) culture using campaigns;
- Provide protection in public places;
- It is not OK to touch girls using the excuse you are drunk;
- Ensure action is taken when someone seeks help;
- Safety and security on buses, taxis, Uber.
- Ensure education for all on this issue;
- Systematic education about gender and sexuality for all;
- Provide a safety system for students (e.g. alarms);
- Have a dedicated police section that specialises in sexual harassment.

Most supported the work that has been going on at CGHS to educate the students, but several participants felt that the focus should not be on the school community, as this could be harmful:

It would also be good when discussing these matters to provide triggers and stop forcing us to go to events and discussions about sexual harassment and assault if we are not comfortable. If we are being labelled as the victims, why are we one of the only schools receiving discussions and talks and speakers on sexual harassment and how we can amplify the activism surrounding it? Why not other schools to be allies? Why must the girls who are struggling to face these issues that have hurt them be the ones held accountable to stand up? Whilst this education is helpful to many and part of education we have been receiving since we were ten, it can be difficult for some to face and that doesn't seem to have always been acknowledged.

There were a number of calls for the perpetrators to be held accountable (11) or face some consequences (11) for their actions. It was noted that currently the boys often congratulate themselves for their actions. Potential consequences might include public naming and shaming, real sanctions and enforcement. A number note that this must be accompanied by “have it made a less taboo/shameful topic for victims to come forward about”.

## Knowing about others' harassment

All participants were invited back into the survey for these final questions. Participants were asked whether “any other people you know” have been sexually harassed over the past three years. The period chosen was relatively arbitrary, designed to give a broad overview of the reported occurrence of sexual harassment in the community. Responses are outlined in Table 1 below.

Table 1. No. who know other people sexually harassed within past three years

| Answer | %      | Count |
|--------|--------|-------|
| Yes    | 78.31% | 491   |
| No     | 21.69% | 136   |
| Total  | 100%   | 627   |

The 627 participants noted that they knew 957 people who had been sexually harassed in that period, as follows:

Table 2. Relationship of person known to have been sexually harassed in past three years

| Answer                    | %      | Count |
|---------------------------|--------|-------|
| A student at your school  | 42.53% | 407   |
| A friend outside school   | 29.89% | 286   |
| A family member           | 13.17% | 126   |
| Someone in your community | 12.75% | 122   |
| Other                     | 1.67%  | 16    |
| Total                     | 100%   | 957   |

On average, each participant in this survey knew 1.5 other people who had been sexually harassed in the past three years. It is notable that less than half of those known to have been sexually harassed came from CGHS. Whether this reflects the low disclosure rate discussed above, or some other unknown trend, is not clear. Other relationships noted in responses included friends of family members, more distant relatives, close family members and coaches.

## Demographic information

Participants ranged from 12 to 18 years of age, with the modal age being 16 years, as outlined in Table 3 below:

Table 3. Participant number by age n=605.

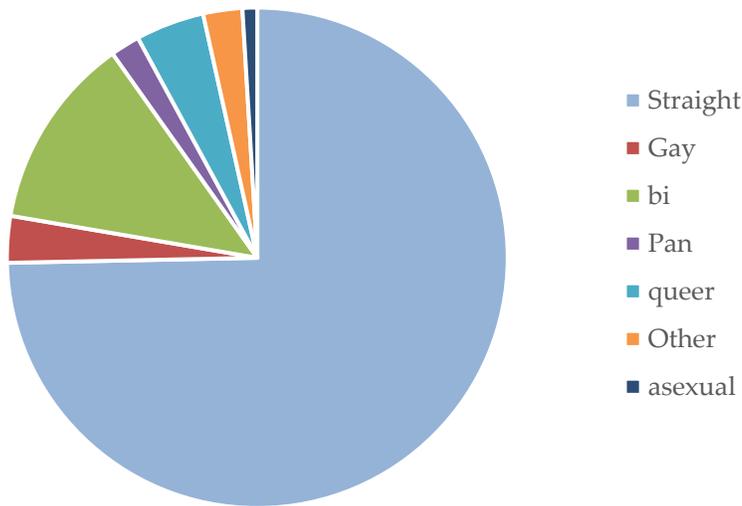
| Age   | %      | Count |
|-------|--------|-------|
| 12    | 0.33%  | 2     |
| 13    | 13.55% | 82    |
| 14    | 14.88% | 90    |
| 15    | 22.48% | 136   |
| 16    | 24.96% | 151   |
| 17    | 21.98% | 133   |
| 18    | 1.82%  | 11    |
| 19    | 0.00%  | 0     |
| Total | 100%   | 605   |

Table 4. Gender (n=623)

| Gender                   | %      | Count |
|--------------------------|--------|-------|
| Female                   | 93.26% | 581   |
| Male                     | 0.64%  | 4     |
| Nonbinary                | 2.73%  | 17    |
| Gender queer             | 1.28%  | 8     |
| Questioning              | 1.77%  | 11    |
| Other gender disposition | 0.32%  | 2     |
| Prefer not to say        | 0.00%  | 0     |
| Total                    | 100%   | 623   |

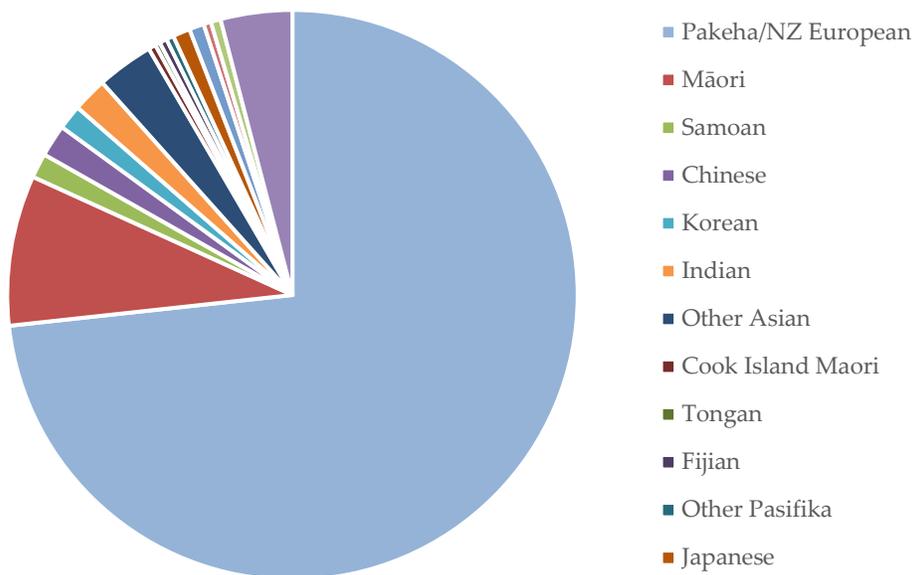
Most (97%) noted that they identified with the gender they were assigned at birth. Participants were asked to describe their sexuality.

Figure 8. Sexuality of participants n=623.



Others noted they were lesbian, or a number stated they were unsure or questioning as yet. Some noted they preferred not to be labelled. Participants described their ethnicity as outlined in Figure 9.

Figure 9. Ethnicity



Another large number of ethnicities were written in. These included: Malaysian, Filipina (4), American (3), Sri Lankan (2), Russian, Australian (4), Solomon Islands, German, British (6) European (4), Scandinavian, Hispanic, Welsh, Uyghur and South African

The demographic information provided here was intended to be used to provide a more detailed analysis of sexual harassment issues facing the community. However, in most cases group numbers were too small to allow for safe analysis of such data, as the numbers get very small and there is a risk people could be identified. However, the myriad ways in which the participants identify their gender and sexuality should provide a clear signal that, in a vulnerable situation, some of the non-dominant groups face particular issues in the sexual harassment context.

## Conclusion

We have not been able to find other similar surveys of high schools in New Zealand to compare and contrast results. We therefore do not know whether these findings are typical of high schools here, or very atypical<sup>7</sup>. We do think that they raise enough questions that further research needs to take place. Particular issues that need wider attention include:

- Whether the findings at this school are replicated at other, similar schools;
- The ways that young males taunt and cat-call students using high sexualised language;
- The colonisation of public spaces, parties and public transport by predatory young men;
- And the same (but in different ways) by older men;
- A small but disturbing trend towards gender and sexuality hate speech;
- The complete absence of police from crimes that would attract up to 20 years imprisonment if prosecuted, including some group rapes that may be organised;
- The ways that young women are 'locked in' by their own embarrassment and guilt that prevents them getting help and support when they have been sexually harassed, abused or assaulted;
- Related to this, regimes of effective support and disclosure;
- Our most inadequate understanding of what is happening to young people in our schools and society, and the potential that significant mental health issues are not being addressed;
- Despite programmes such as 'Loves me Not', a very significant knowledge gap about gender and harassment issues among the school community;
- Issues around support for victims and educating the perpetrators; and
- The need for a cultural reset that renders sexual harassment of anyone, and especially of young women/rainbow, unacceptable.

No-one reading this report can remain unmoved and shocked about what it discloses about the treatment of young women in our society now. The harassment, and its effects, constitute barriers that will shape and change the lives of those affected. One person noted that "you get over it eventually, just don't think about it". But it is not clear that people can just move on with so much unresolved bad feelings, grief and pain, and plenty of recent evidence from inquiries that abuse stays with the victims for many years. There is a compelling case for action.

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<sup>7</sup> As noted above, the very recent OFSTED report found extremely high levels of sexual harassment in UK schools, and a culture of 'normalisation'.