

Stalked and beaten up: student stories of sexual violence in clubs



Student stories indicate that sexual violence in clubs is an issue that must be taken seriously. Photograph: Alamy

Nightclubs are a hotbed for sexual harassment, according to an [NUS report](#). Many [students](#) even view sexual violence as a normal but unwanted part of a night out – and [they say](#) they don't report it.

This month popular London venues [signed a pledge](#) to tackle the harassment of women and lgbt people. The clubs, backed by harassment charity [Hollaback](#), want to give staff specialist training and put posters up that encourage victims to come forward.

But many more club nights around the country continue to [make a business model out of sexism](#) and sexual violence towards women.

Last year a club in Glasgow [installed two-way mirrors](#) in the women's toilets. More recently, a [Valentine's Day speed dating](#) night in Nottingham was cancelled after people complained about the "bag a slag" and "grab a hag" theme.

Young people can be particularly vulnerable. Last year a poster promoting a student club night in Cardiff contained an image with the words: "[I was raping a woman last night and she cried](#)". And themes like "rappers and slappers" and "geeks and sluts" are common in student areas.

In this kind of club culture students can experience harassment "every time" they go out.

We spoke to students about their experiences. From a stranger groping a girl's vagina, to another young woman being pinned against a wall, the stories indicate that sexual violence in student clubs is an issue that must be taken seriously.

I felt a hand move slowly and grope my vagina

"I was out with a friend on New Year's Eve. We were dancing and had no interest in getting any male

attention. Then I felt a hand move from behind me, quite slowly, and grope my vagina. As I turned around the man who was doing it was bold as brass. He gave me a look as if to say, I'm here.

"Another time I was out with a friend and the same thing happened to her. She got really angry and threw a drink in the man's face. Then he got aggressive towards her."

I had to lock myself in a toilet cubicle

"I was at a quaint indie night where you wouldn't expect any trouble. A man approached me and said, I've watched you all night and you've ignored all advances from any of the men in here, what's wrong with you? I went to the toilets to get away from him and he followed me in. I had to lock myself in the toilet and call a friend to come and meet me in there while he waited outside.

"The thought of reporting it didn't even cross my mind. I think people need to realise they can't get away with it – because they are getting away with it."

Two students asked if I was gay and knocked me to the floor

"I was with a few of my friends, dancing on the main dance floor when I was tapped on the shoulder. When I turned round I was asked by a tall well-built man behind me if I was gay. I replied I wasn't and turned back to my group to carry on dancing. About fifteen seconds later I was grabbed from behind with an arm around my neck and another one pulling me from behind by my collar. I was pulled violently and suddenly, my shirt was ripped and I was thrown into a table. Two men aimed punches at me when I was on the floor. One hit me below the eye and the other missed."

When I defended myself he tried to punch me in the face

"Last year I was at a club in Oxford. I was dancing with a group of friends when I felt someone grab my arse. I turned around and told him to fuck off. He then tried to punch me in the face. Luckily my boyfriend at the time saw what was happening and pulled me out of the way. It was really frightening."

He spanked me as I walked up the stairs. I was 15.

"I was grabbed by two men on two separate occasions within an hour at a club. One grabbed my chest and the other spanked me as I walked up the stairs. I was 15 at the time.

"That same night a middle-aged man followed me around town asking me to kiss him. He wouldn't leave me alone and I was very scared. He followed me to the car I was getting into and wouldn't leave me alone. I didn't know what to do, so being 15 I hugged him and left feeling shaken."

I couldn't move, despite being in a nightclub

"A man approached me in the middle of the dance floor, and put his hand around the back of my neck. He's a stocky rugby player and the way he held me meant that I couldn't move at all. He kept repeating

'give me a chance' and I kept shaking my head and saying no but he wouldn't let go.

"It took another female friend to bulldoze into him for me to get free. I felt really afraid because I physically couldn't move from him, despite saying no and despite being in a nightclub surrounded by friends."

I experienced my worst harassment as a fresher

"Harassment has always been a problem. I don't remember a single party in the five years I've been [clubbing](#) where I haven't had an unwanted touch on my body.

"I encountered the worst harassment as a fresher. A few months ago I was dancing with a circle of friends and someone put their hands all the way around my waist and started to drag me away from the group. Another time a man at a campus party tried to cut me off from my friends. He and his friends shoved me and tried to snatch pieces of my costume off me."

I was kicked out of a club for defending myself

"I was in a club, walking from one room to another and a man got in my way. He stood in front of me, leering, so I moved to the side and attempted to get past. He grabbed my arm and pulled me towards him, gripping me and telling me to dance with him. I told him to let me go. I remember him laughing and I stamped on his foot to get away.

"Later I was tapped on the shoulder by a bouncer and asked to leave because I had assaulted this man. I explained what had happened, and they repeated that I had to leave. I asked if I could at least leave a while after him because I was worried about what he'd do. They told me that he hadn't left, and if I didn't go with them right away, they would call the police. I was escorted from the premises past my attacker and his leering mates who were dancing away, happy they had got what they wanted."

My friends and I experience harassment every time we go out

"My friends and I experience harassment every time we go out. From having my bum pinched, to being pushed against a wall by a stranger. I've even had my crotch grabbed while on the dance floor. Recently on a night out my friends and I were encircled by a gang of 'lads' who were all grabbing us wherever they could. The sad thing is that it's seen as par for the course when you go out if you're female with a nice dress on."

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