

An Exploratory Study on Teacher Perpetrated Sexual Misconduct in Irish and UK Secondary Schools

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Survey content

The survey findings presented in this report relate to personal experiences of sexual misconduct, specifically sexual harassment, but also other forms of sexual misconduct, in secondary schools. The language used in the report is explicit and some people may find it uncomfortable. Contact information on where to get help and support, can be found on the last page of this report.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to sincerely thank everyone who gave their time, and reflected on their experiences, to participate in this study. Although it was beyond the remit of this report to include all your qualitative responses, we read and considered each response, and did our best to draw attention to the overarching themes of misconduct that we identified in the data. Thank you once more for speaking up and sharing your experiences: your contribution is invaluable, and we greatly appreciate it.

We would like to thank Dr. Caroline West, Dr. Lorraine Burke, Dr. Siobhán O'Higgins, Rebecca Connolly, Theresa O'Rourke, and Kate Tierney for their time in reviewing this project. We would also like to thank the University of Galway Illuminate Programme for supporting this study, and to our colleagues and networks who helped us to disseminate the study findings.

Data collection for this study is ongoing. For research updates or to share your experience and participate in this study follow the author on:

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Background to the Report

There is little research on the topic of sexual misconduct in schools beyond peer-peer instances of harassment.

This small, retrospective pilot survey of adults who attended secondary school in Ireland or the UK was conducted in May 2022 to provide preliminary insights into the experiences of teacher-to-student sexual misconduct in Irish and UK secondary schools.

The study was led by Dr. Kate Dawson, University of Greenwich, United Kingdom and supported by colleagues at the University of Galway, Ireland, Brighton & Sussex Medical School, United Kingdom, and Massey University, New Zealand.

This project was funded under the 2021 Illuminate Programme. The Illuminate Programme is supported by the University of Galway Strategic Fund and managed by the Innovation Office within the Office of the Vice-President for Research and Innovation at the University of Galway.

Research Question

What experiences of teacher-to-student sexual harassment and sexual misconduct do past secondary school students in Ireland and the UK report?

Summary of the Findings

The aim of this report was to identify instances of teacher perpetrated sexual misconduct.

All respondents completed this survey because they had experienced some form of sexual harassment or misconduct by a teacher during their time in secondary school.

This study is based on the responses of 593 adults' retrospective accounts of their experiences of being victims of teacher perpetrated sexual misconduct while they were students in secondary school. A total of 369 respondents attended school in the UK, and a total of 224 respondents attended school in the Republic of Ireland. The majority of respondents were young women, who reported being sexual harassed on at least one occasion by a male teacher in their school. Almost all instances of sexual misconduct took place on the school grounds.

Overall, sexist harassment was experienced most often by both Irish (86%) and UK (95%) respondents, followed by sexual harassment (72%, and 85% in Ireland and the UK respectively). Approximately 10% of Irish and 27% of UK respondents experienced unwanted sexual attention, and 7% of Irish, and 18% of UK respondents experienced at least one type of online sexual harassment.

Study Overview

Considering the ethical implications associated with asking current second-level students to share their experiences, we decided to conduct a nationwide study that explores retrospective accounts of teacher-to-student misconduct among young adults who recently attended secondary school in Britain and Ireland. A qualitative component was included in the survey to better understand the types of misconduct that may be taking place.

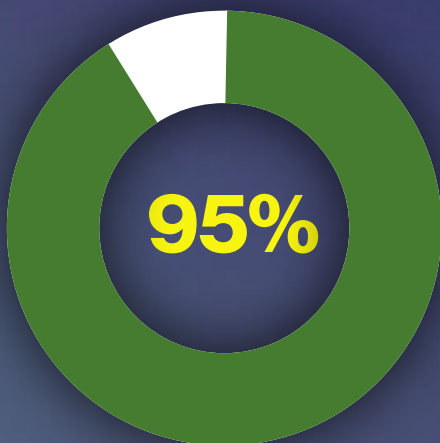
This study provides preliminary insights into experiences of sexual misconduct in Irish and British secondary schools. However, because of the targeted sampling employed, and small sample size, these findings cannot be considered generalisable or representative of experiences among the general population. This report provides the foundation from which to further understand and explore the circumstances that facilitate teacher-to-student sexual misconduct.

Recommendations

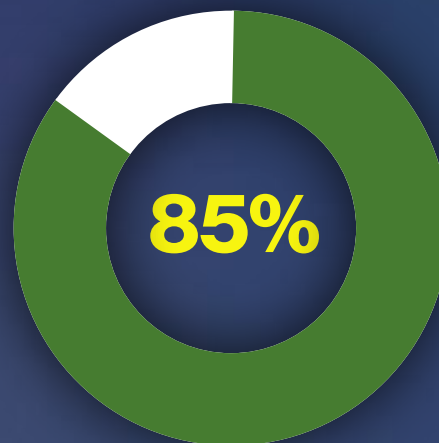
The key recommendations made from the findings of the survey provide the impetus to conduct ongoing research to explore this phenomenon at a national level, with the potential to develop appropriate supports and trainings for both staff and students.

All respondents completed this survey because they had experienced some form of sexual harassment or misconduct by a teacher during their time in secondary school

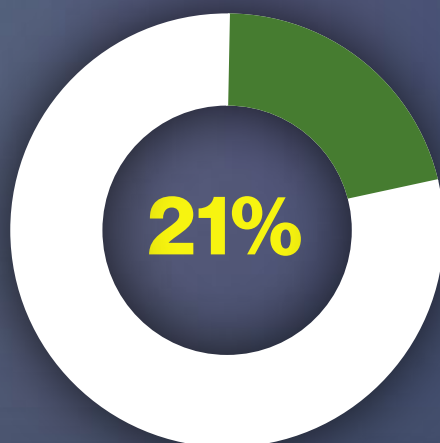
Percentage of respondents who experienced sexist harassment by a teacher



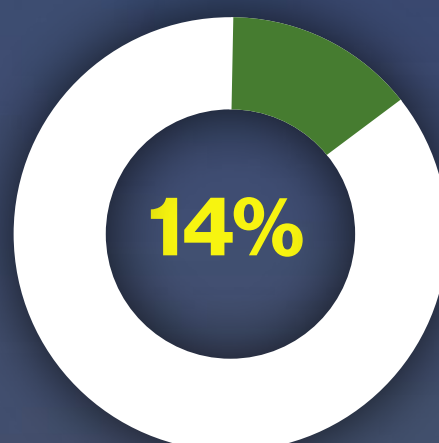
Percentage of respondents who experienced sexual harassment by a teacher



Percentage of respondents who experienced unwanted sexual attention by a teacher



Percentage of respondents who experienced at least one type of online sexual harassment by a teacher



Recruitment

Respondents who were over the age of 18 were invited to participate in an anonymous online survey. Respondents were recruited to participate in the study via various social media platforms, including Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook. The study recruitment social media post read “Did you experience any sexually inappropriate comments or behaviour from a teacher during your time in secondary school (or 6th form college (UK))? Anonymously share your experience in this 5-min survey: [\(link\)](#)”.

The study invitation contained brief information regarding the nature and duration of the study, as well as the link to the anonymous survey. The first page of the study provided a detailed study overview, including the risks of participating, and associated support information. Respondents were invited to tick a box to indicating their consent to participating in the study. The survey took approximately 5-7 minutes to complete.

The study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee, NUI Galway (ref # 2022.03.004)

Measures

Demographic questions. Demographic questions related to age, gender identity, sexual orientation, and ethnicity.

School questions. Four questions concerned the type of school respondents attended, including the gender breakdown of the student body, and whether the school was in a rural or urban setting.

Sexual harassment victimisation. The frequency and type of sexual harassment experienced by respondents while they were a student in secondary school was measured using nine items developed by Fitzgerald et al. (1995) and used in the Sexual Experiences Survey (Burke et al., 2020); a survey of young adults in the Irish third level education system. Three items were also included measuring media-based harassment from the American Association of University Women Knowledge Networks Survey (Nukulki, 2011). Respondents reported the frequency of these experiences using a 5-point response scale, from Never = 1, to Many Times = 5. Additional follow up questions provided more detailed information about the sexual harassment incident that had the greatest effect on them, including the type of incident, the gender of the perpetrator, the location in which the incident occurred, and the person’s response to the incident. All items were elicited from previous campus climate surveys in the USA and Ireland (Burke et al., 2020; Swartout et al., 2019).

The section on sexual harassment was introduced with the following statement: “The following questions concern your experiences of secondary school. Please note the following sections contain questions about unwanted sexual attention, comments, or behaviour.” The statements on sexual harassment were behaviour-specific descriptions of harassment (Fitzgerald et al., 1988). The statements were preceded by introductory text that read: “During your time in secondary school, were you in a situation in which a teacher in your school:”. The sexual harassment statements then followed. The statements fit within the following four categories:

- 1 Sexist hostility:** There were three items on harassment concerning sexist hostility. This refers to being treated differently, personalised verbal mistreatment, or offensive sexist remarks being made because of the person’s gender - e.g., “Made offensive sexist remarks” (for example, suggesting that people of your sex are not suited for the kind of work you do).
- 2 Sexual hostility / crude gender harassment:** There were four items on sexual hostility. This refers to receiving derogatory remarks and treatment that has a sexual basis, e.g., “Made offensive remarks about your appearance, body, or sexual activities”.
- 3 Unwanted sexual attention:** One item assessed unwanted sexual attention which explored persistent efforts by an individual to have a sexual or romantic relationship that was unwanted - e.g., “Made unwanted attempts to establish a romantic sexual relationship with you despite your efforts to discourage it”.
- 4 Sexual harassment via electronic communication or visual / written materials:** Three items assessed sexual harassment via electronic communication. This refers to the use of the Internet or communication platforms as a basis for harassment, including pornography and sexual images - e.g., “Sent or posted unwelcome sexual comments, jokes or pictures by text, email, Facebook or other electronic means”.

For each of the four categories, response options ranged from 1 = Never to 5 = Many Times.

Description

Respondents were also invited to provide detailed descriptions of sexual harassment experiences: specifically, the incident of teacher-student harassment that had the greatest effect on them. Because of the nature of these examples, some text has been redacted, and highly specific examples have been omitted to preserve the anonymity of respondents. Respondents were asked not to provide specific identifying information about the person/people involved and were signposted to the appropriate police reporting procedures.

Impact on School/ Extracurricular Participation

Respondents were invited to describe how the incident of harassment influenced their participation in school or school-related events.

Data Analysis

Quantitative analysis

Data are presented in two forms – quantitatively, and qualitatively. The four categories of sexual harassment described above were assessed. Percentages related to each form of harassment are presented by category (i.e., percentage values for each response category ranging from 'Never' to 'Many Times').

The item groups, representing sexist, and sexual hostility, unwanted attention, or sexual harassment via electronic means were combined to get a total score for each respondent who experienced at least one of the four sexual harassment types described above. Those who had no experience of any type of harassment were coded as 0, and those who experienced at least one type of harassment within a category were coded as 1.

All values pertain to the total sample. No gender-specific analysis are presented in the current report because most respondents were female. Future iterations of this study will seek to recruit a wider sample to conduct more detailed gendered analysis.

Qualitative analysis

Qualitative comments were coded in accordance with the four categories of sexual harassment which the quantitative questions, described above, were premised on; sexist hostility, sexual hostility, unwanted sexual attention, sexual harassment via electronic communication or visual / written materials. Data were coded according to these categories, and we provide illustrative quotes to support our quantitative findings, with explanatory material within quotes presented in square brackets. In the instance where some qualitative comments did not map on to the four pre-defined categories, these are included in a separate section we have called 'Other Experiences of Sexual Harassment'. These are of particular importance as they highlight experiences which may not be captured by quantitative methods.

Demographics

A total of 593 respondents from Ireland (n = 224) and the UK (n = 369) completed the survey, 85 Irish respondents and 74 UK respondents completed the qualitative component (i.e., described the situation that had the greatest effect on them, and the impact experiences of harassment had on school/extracurricular participation).

Irish Respondents

Most respondents identified as a woman (88%), 9% identified as a man, and 3.1% identified as genderqueer or non-conforming. Most respondents were aged 18-34 (57%), and 21% were 35-44 at the time they completed the survey, the remaining sample were aged 45 and over. Most respondents identified as White-Irish or another white background (97%), 2% identified as Black or Asian-Irish, and the remaining 1% identified as having a mixed racial/ethnic background. A total of 71% identified as heterosexual, 21% identified as bisexual or queer, and 2% chose not to disclose their sexual orientation. The remaining sample identified as Gay, Lesbian, Asexual, or another sexual orientation that was not listed in the questionnaire.

UK Respondents

A large majority were female (98%), 1.5% were male, and 0.3% identified as genderqueer or non-conforming. Most respondents were 25-34 (65%) at the time of study participation, identified as White-British (82%), and heterosexual (75%).

Responses from the Irish and UK respondents have been combined for the purpose of this report.

School information

Most respondents attended a mixed secondary school (57%) or all-girls secondary school (39%), while 3% attended an all-boys secondary school. There was an approximately equal distribution of respondents who attended secondary school in an urban (46%) or rural (54%) community.

Results

Results are presented under the four categories of sexual harassment previously described. Percentage values are reported first, followed by illustrative quotes for each category.

Sexist Hostility

Examining the full responses on the sexist hostility items, 82% of the sample reported being treated differently because of their gender, 82% reported that a teacher in their school made offensive sexual remarks, and 74% reported that their teacher put them down or was condescending to them because of their gender. (see Table 1)

Illustrative quotes

There were several examples of teachers commenting on girls' clothing. One respondent said that male teachers would often comment on their uniforms, saying "those trousers don't show off your figure", while another teacher in the same school once said "that they were uncomfortable when we wore strappy tops or low-cut tops" (Age undisclosed, Female, UK Respondent)."

Sexist comments also invalidated girls' experiences regarding menstrual pain and their participation in sports. For example, one respondent said:

"I have very bad periods and presented my male PE teacher in (2017) with a note to excuse my participation. He made a snide remark and said having 'lady issues' was no reason to not do PE and that it helps with cramps." (18-24, Female, Irish Respondent)

"... teachers would often comment on their uniforms, saying "those trousers don't show off your figure."

(Age undisclosed, Female, UK Respondent)

Table 1. Percentage of respondents who indicated they had experienced sexist hostility by a teacher in their secondary school

How often a teacher ...	Never	Once or Twice	Sometimes	Often	Many times
Treated you "differently" because of your gender (for example, mistreated, slighted, or ignored you)	18.1	18.4	33.7	20.9	8.9
Made offensive sexist remarks (for example, suggesting that people of your sex are not suited for the kind of work you do)	18.5	24.9	31.9	18.2	6.6
Put you down or was condescending to you because of your gender	26.0	23.7	29.2	14.6	6.5

“Male teacher picked a long hair off of my back and commented that it looked like one of my best friend’s hairs and asked what we had been up to at playtime and did we have a ‘lie down’ when I took offence he accused me of being on my period.” (25-34, Female, UK respondent)

“The female deputy head used to measure the length of our skirts and said they had to be a certain length ‘out of respect for male members of staff’.” (18-24, Female, UK respondent)

Another respondent described how one teacher would make offensive comments regarding their same-sex relationship:

“A male teacher made several inappropriate comments about my same-sex relationship and how it offended him and other teachers and how the relationship was just happening to get a reaction from others.” (Age undisclosed, Female, Irish Respondent)

Sexual Hostility / Crude Gender Harassment

The four statements used to assess experiences of crude gender harassment referred to actions that have sexual connotations, including stories or jokes, offensive remarks, inappropriate sexual conversations, and non-verbal gestures or body language.

The most common experience was related to a teacher making offensive remarks about the respondent’s appearance or sexual activities (66%). The second most prevalent issue reported related to a teacher making gestures or using body language of a sexual nature (54%), followed by repeatedly telling sexual stories or jokes (52%), and making unwelcome attempts to draw the respondent into a discussion of sexual matters (44%). (see Table 2)

“A male teacher said he heard I’d been a ‘naughty girl’ at the weekend and that he wouldn’t mind seeing ‘that side’ [sic] of me.”

(18-24, Female, Irish Respondent)

Table 2. Percentage of respondents who indicated they had experienced sexual hostility, by a teacher in their secondary school.

How often a teacher ...	Never	Once or Twice	Sometimes	Often	Many times
Made offensive remarks about your appearance, body, or sexual activities	34.0	27.1	20.1	12.2	6.5
Made gestures or used body language of a sexual nature which embarrassed or offended you	46.0	25.3	16.	8.4	3.7
Repeatedly told sexual stories or jokes that were offensive to you	48.1	22.3	19.2	7.6	2.9
Made unwelcome attempts to draw you into a discussion of sexual matters (for example, attempted to discuss or comment on your sex life)	56.5	22.3	12.8	5.4	3.0

Illustrative quotes

There were multiple reports of teachers making inappropriate comments about students' sexual behaviour, making inappropriate gestures, and making comments about students' appearance.

"He commented on my spending time with an older male student at break time, implying I was getting a reputation for myself and also made it clear it was being discussed in the staff room." (*Age undisclosed, Female, Irish Respondent*)

"A male teacher said he heard I'd been a 'naughty girl' at the weekend and that he wouldn't mind seeing 'that side' [sic] of me." (*18-24, Female, Irish Respondent*)

"The teacher raised his hand pointing two fingers, put it under my friend's nose and said smell [his wife's name]. Another teacher on the same trip also invited me into his hotel room on a school trip to look for keys he lost whilst telling me moments before my shorts were very short and looking at me inappropriately (I was 14)." (*25-34, Female, UK respondent*)

"During a conversation between a group of students on the school bus, one of the sports masters (teaching assistants) said 'when an apple is green it's ready to pluck, when a girl is 16 she's ready to fuck' and made some other gesture to indicate I was the subject of his attention. On another occasion, he and the other sports masters were talking, when I walked past one of them made a sexual rhyming joke that included my name." (*25-34, Female, UK respondent*)

Some of these comments could be defined as racist, for example, one respondent said that a male teacher would have "weird discussions about my blackness in conjunction with my sexuality. Strange things about how we are all 'loose' and 'like to party'." (*Age undisclosed, Male, Irish respondent*)

Table 3. Percentage of respondents who indicated they had experienced unwanted sexual attention, by a teacher in their secondary school.

How often a teacher ...	Never	Once or Twice	Sometimes	Often	Many times
Made unwanted attempts to establish a romantic or sexual relationship with you despite your efforts to discourage it	79.8	12.1	3.5	3.0	1.5

Unwanted Sexual Attention

One item concerned unwanted sexual attention. The statement refers to someone making persistent efforts to have a sexual relationship which was unwanted, or after the person had already said 'no'. Overall, 20% of survey respondents said that a teacher made unwanted attempts to establish a romantic or sexual relationship with the person despite their efforts to discourage it, on at least one occasion. (see Table 3)

Illustrative quotes

Several respondents reported receiving unwanted attention from a teacher in their secondary school, with many reporting that they did not know how to respond to the attention.

"My [topic] teacher was not long graduated and used to always say that if I wasn't his student things would be very different between us. I was 14. He did this for many years, and I never knew how to deal with it. He'd make comments about my body, wink when walking past me etc.". (Age undisclosed, Female, Irish Respondent)

"I didn't realise his behaviour towards me was wrong because I was 16 and had a crush on him, he would make sexual jokes with me and keep me back after class and was extremely flirty, but I thought it was just to me." (25-34, Female, Irish Respondent)

"Constantly [flirting]. Friends said he was flirting but I wasn't sure. When I left school [he] contacted me and asked me on a date." (25-34, Female, Irish Respondent)

One respondent said that a male teacher once commented that they liked their breasts and pointed out that they could see their nipples were "hard". When the respondent alerted the teacher to their discomfort, the teacher told them that he was "giving them a compliment", and that they should "learn to say thank you" (18-24, Other gender, Irish Respondent).

"Constantly [flirting]. Friends said he was flirting but I wasn't sure. When I left school [he] contacted me and asked me on a date."

(25-34, Female, Irish Respondent)

Sexual Harassment Via Electronic Communication or Visual/Written Materials

This section comprised three statements that described being exposed to visual or written materials with sexist or suggestive content or the electronic sending or posting of unwelcomed sexual comments, jokes, or pictures. Approximately 10% of respondents reported experiencing teacher-student sexual harassment by electronic means. (see Table 4)

Illustrative quotes

Several respondents who had experienced sexual harassment from a teacher via electronic communication provided illustrative quotes:

“A teacher who I did not have messaged me on Grindr [online dating application targeted towards members of the gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer community] during school, I blocked him.”
(Age undisclosed, Male, Irish Respondent)

“A teacher took my phone number when they left to work at another school. They then text and called me and we engaged in phone sex a few times. I was flattered as he was 23 and good looking, but I was 15 years old. I only realised when I was older how wrong this was. He also suggested us meeting and spending the night together but this didn't happen in the end.”
(35-44, Female, UK respondent)

“Teacher messaged me on Facebook - then we exchanged numbers. Sent me numerous videos of him masturbating and I felt awkward and compelled to respond.” (25-34, Female, UK respondent)

“A teacher who I did not have messaged me on Grindr during school, I blocked him.”

(Age undisclosed, Male, Irish Respondent)

Table 4. Percentage of respondents who indicated they had experienced sexual harassment via electronic communication, by a teacher in their secondary school.

How often a teacher ...	Never	Once or Twice	Sometimes	Often	Many times
Sent or posted unwelcome sexual comments, jokes or pictures by text, email, Facebook or other electronic means?	89.7	5.6	2.7	1.4	0.7
Spread unwelcome sexual rumours about you by text, email, Facebook or other electronic means?	96.4	2.2	0.9	0.3	0.2
Commented on your sexual or gender identity in a negative way by text, email, social media or other electronic means?	96.4	1.7	0.9	0.7	0.3

Sexual Harassment Experiences Combined

Overall, sexist harassment was experienced most often by respondents from both Irish (86%) and UK (95%) samples, followed by sexual harassment (72%, and 85% in Ireland the UK respectively). Approximately 10% of Irish and 27% of UK respondents experienced unwanted sexual attention, and 6.7% of Irish, and 17.5% of UK respondents experienced at least one type of online sexual harassment. (see Table 5)

Table 5. Percentage of UK and Irish respondents who experienced at least one type of sexual harassment by a teacher/school staff member

	Ireland	UK
Sexist Hostility	86.2%	95.0%
Sexual Hostility	72.3%	85.5%
Unwanted sexual attention	9.9%	27.2%
Electronic sexual harassment	6.7%	17.5%

Follow Up Questions on Sexual Harassment

Participants were asked follow up questions regarding the sexual harassment experience that had the greatest effect on them. For 39% of respondents, the incident of teacher-student sexual harassment that had the greatest effect on them involved unwanted sexual attention, 36% involved sexist or sexually offensive language, gestures or pictures, 19% involved unwanted touching, and 6% involved subtle or explicit bribes or threats.

Sexual Misconduct

Unwanted touching

There were multiple reports of unwanted touching that made the respondent uncomfortable. There were many reports of teachers touching respondents' lower backs or patting their bottoms. For example, "A female teacher told me to hurry up and slapped my bum" (18-24, Female, Irish Respondent).

There were several examples of overt sexual touching, including touching of a student's leg, and chest. It was evident in most cases that this was experienced as intrusive, inappropriate, and uncomfortable:

“At [event], [redacted] I was quite out of breath. The teacher took me to [private location] and lifted up my [shirt] to rub my breast and nipple ‘to help regulate my breathing’.”

(Age undisclosed, Female, Irish Respondent)

“A teacher rubbed my thigh while I was sat on a table waiting for class to end the same day when I’d asked to go to the bathroom in class he’d asked if ‘I needed any assistance with anything in there’ and then winked.”
(18-24, Female, Irish Respondent)

“The teacher opened my shirt and touched my chest and played it off like he was looking at my sunburn.”
(Age undisclosed, Female, Irish Respondent)

“At [event], [redacted] I was quite out of breath. The teacher took me to [private location] and lifted up my [shirt] to rub my breast and nipple ‘to help regulate my breathing’.” (Age undisclosed, Female, Irish Respondent)

“Teacher was demonstrating a concept in a science lab and making movements that could be viewed as a sexual gesture (wanking). He continued to do it for longer than necessary whilst maintaining eye contact with me and when the class started to laugh he said ‘you like that [my name], don’t you?’. He later came over to where I was sitting and put his hand under my skirt claiming to be looking for a phone.” (25-34, Female, UK respondent)

There were also multiple examples of respondents reporting that a teacher made unwanted attempts to kiss them:

“At [social event], a male teacher asked me to dance. He’d been suggestive before, but I agreed. When dancing, he grabbed my ass and then tried to kiss me. I ran off to my friends, and we laughed about it. Later he licked my neck when we were all drinking shots at a table. At the time I thought it was a joke, but I was 17. It was horrible, and I still think about it, and it makes my skin crawl.” (25-34, Female, Irish Respondent)

“At a club following our sixth form leavers do, some teachers came with us for whatever reason, the teacher who made a pass at me asked me to meet him on the seating on the other side of the club and when I did he tried to kiss me. I didn’t reciprocate and was not expecting it, he put his number in my phone and told me to call him when I was at uni.” (25-34, Female, UK respondent)

However, there were also some examples of sexual touching and behaviour from respondents who described the event as invited or desired at the time, and only understood the inappropriateness of the event when they reflected on the experience as an adult.

“At the time I thought it was so cool. He was the good-looking teacher in school. Looking back the weird attention started in 2nd year. I was 13.” (Age undisclosed, Female, Irish Respondent)

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(Age undisclosed, Female, Irish Respondent)

Identity of the Person Responsible for the Incident of Harassment

Most respondents reported that the person in question was a male teacher (90%), followed by a female teacher (8%), and 2% reported that they experienced sexual harassment by both a male and female teacher, or another member of school staff whose gender was not disclosed.

Location of harassment

Most incidents of sexual harassment took place on school grounds (88%), with 12% occurring outside of the school grounds (e.g., “school trip abroad”; “at our sixth form leavers do”), after school (e.g., “He gave me a lift home and it happened in his car”), while socialising (e.g., “at a friend’s party”), or online (e.g., “via text messages/phone calls”).

How Did You Respond to the Incident?

The next follow up question asked respondents how they reacted to this harassment situation. The most common reactions to the harassment situation involved ignoring or avoiding the teacher or treating the harassment incident like a joke. (see Table 6)

Table 6. How respondents reacted to the incident of sexual harassment that had the greatest effect on them

	Ireland	UK
I ignored the teacher and did nothing	31%	34%
I avoided the teacher as much as possible	24%	24%
I treated it like a joke	25%	42%
I told the teacher to stop	4.5%	5%
I reported the teacher	0.9%	4%
I asked someone for advice and/or support	2.7	3

Impact on School Participation

Approximately half of Irish respondents (47.3%) and one third of UK respondents (33%) reported that the sexual harassment that they experienced had a negative influence on their participation in school or extra-curricular events. A total of 43 Irish respondents and 74 UK respondents provided qualitative responses to describe how the incident impacted their life, as illustrated in the following sections.

Avoiding classes

Most respondents reported that the incident(s) significantly impacted their participation in school. Several reported purposefully missing classes to avoid the teacher in question, for example, one respondent said:

“[I] ended up getting grinds [private tutorials] and missing his classes where I could.” (25-34, Female, Irish respondent).

Several respondents reported that they withdrew from topics that they enjoyed and/or were proficient in, in order to avoid the teacher. One respondent reflected on how the incident impacted their life:

“I was great at the subject which this teacher taught, I chose not to study the topic in college because of his behaviour and my desire to distance myself from the memories. Now as an adult, I wonder how my life would be had I studied a subject I had a natural talent for and enjoyed, I could have had a great career in that area.” (35-44, Female, Location undisclosed)

Others reported that the incident influenced their performance in school. For example, one respondent said “It made me uncomfortable and embarrassed less able to concentrate”, while another said “It made me feel like my grades were affected by my appearance and that my looks were more important than my work.” (age undisclosed, Female, UK respondent)

Avoiding extra-curricular activities

Where the incident of harassment took place as part of an extra-curricular activity, several respondents reported feeling as though they had to withdraw from their activity to avoid further incidents of harassment. For example, one respondent said:

“Despite wanting to compete and being very good, I avoided further events because of the fear it would happen again. And as a subtle gesture to let the teacher know I was not happy about it.” (25-34, Female, Irish respondent)

Other Experiences of Sexual Harassment

There were some points of note in the qualitative comments which did not map on to the four categories of sexual harassment, but which would be remiss of us to exclude, namely; (i) the commonality of sexual harassment, and (ii) lack of reporting.

The Commonality of Sexual Harassment

Several respondents reported that teacher-student sexual harassment was a significant problem in their secondary school. Many reported that harassment was common and that it was accepted in the school. One respondent said:

“It wasn’t just one situation. It was multiple male teachers across the 3 different secondary schools I attended in [county] and [county]. It was rife and we (redacted) students and staff, were told its just their way, we’re too sensitive, kicking up a fuss would bring them down on us harder.” (Age undisclosed, Female, Irish respondent)

“Despite wanting to compete and being very good, I avoided further events because of the fear it would happen again. And as a subtle gesture to let the teacher know I was not happy about it.”

(25-34, Female, Irish respondent)

Reporting

Very few respondents reported the incident(s) of harassment to the school. There was no indication in the survey responses that any respondents made formal complaints to An Garda — Síochána in Ireland or police in the UK. Qualitative responses highlighted how, for the few who had reported the incident to the school, nothing was done about it. Some reports were believed, however, the teacher remained in their position at the school. Others were not believed and made out to be troublemakers, for example:

“I openly was against this and brought it up to a higher level of the school. [redacted]. After the incident, [redacted] I was removed from my position in [team/group] due to ‘spreading inflammatory and rude information about a staff member’.” (18-24, Gender not disclosed, Irish respondent).

Closing Statement

Schools largely play a powerful and positive role in young peoples' lives and futures. Schools can continue to support young people by changing school culture regarding the acceptance of sexual harassment, make trauma-informed support services widely available and accessible, and embed strict punishments for staff and students who violate school policy and laws on harassment.

To that end, it is essential for future research to be carried out in this area to gain a clearer understanding of the prevalence of sexual harassment in secondary schools in Ireland and the UK. More data on this topic is required in order to inform the support services and preventative measures that can be put in place nationwide to reduce the prevalence of this issue, and to provide the needed support to victims of harassment in secondary school.

“...it is essential for future research to be carried out in this area to gain a clearer understanding of the prevalence of sexual harassment in secondary schools in Ireland and the UK.”

Support Services

If you are affected by any of the issues raised in this survey, a list of organisations that may be able to provide help and advice, if you need it, can be found here:

Text 50808

Free 24/7 Support in a Crisis - Text 'HELLO' to 50808
<https://text50808.ie/>

Samaritans

National Helpline - 116 123

<https://www.samaritans.org/ireland/samaritans-ireland/>

Dublin Rape Crisis Centre

24-hour helpline - 1800 77 8888

[https://www.drcc.ie/Your local Rape Crisis Centre/ Network](https://www.drcc.ie/Your%20local%20Rape%20Crisis%20Centre/Network) <https://www.rapecrisishelp.ie/find-a-service/>

HSE

Sexual Assault Treatment Units (SATUs)

<https://www2.hse.ie/services/sexual-assault-treatment-units/rape-sexual-assault-where-to-get-help.html>

Sexual Assault Treatment Units

<https://www2.hse.ie/sexual-assault-treatment-units/>

Women's Aid

24-hour helpline - 1800 341 900

<https://www.womensaid.ie/>

Men's Aid

National Confidential Helpline - 01 554 3811

<https://www.mensaid.ie/>

Your local Gardaí

<https://www.garda.ie/en/crime/sexual-crime/>

HSE My Options

Freephone - 1800 828 010

<https://www2.hse.ie/unplanned-pregnancy/>

LGBT Ireland

National Helpline - 1890 929 539

<https://lgbt.ie/>

You may want to check here for any other support services not listed above.

<https://www.consenthub.ie/get-help/>

United Kingdom

The Counselling Helpline (UK)

Call: 0808 802 2088

Rape Crisis England and Wales

Call: 0808 802 9999

Rape Crisis Scotland

Call: 08088 01 03 02

Text: 07537 410 027

Email: support@rapecrisisscotland.org.uk

Call 999 in an emergency or 101 for a non-emergency query

If you wish to report any experiences or seek advice further legal advice regarding the information you reported in this survey please contact The Police (999/101)

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