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# YOUTH EXPERIENCES OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND

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*“There is a ridiculous amount of sexual assault happening at high schools, more so than high schools understand or are willing to admit. I know too many victims and too many perpetrators. Hoping it’s cracked down on and future generations don’t have the same experiences as us.”*

- Participant #109



## Call to Action

For young people, sexual violence threatens our lives, our education, our wellbeing and our futures. We can not afford to continue to be complicit while we – the future of Aotearoa - are abused and left to spend our lives healing from the impacts of violence. The voices of 300 youth power this report . We are advocating for swift and significant changes to create safer schools. In our current system, schools have become an environment where we are assaulted, violated, and retraumatised. Until consent is embedded in every part of the school environment – in curriculum, in policy, in school leadership and wider school culture – young people, especially girls, will continue to be traumatised by the impacts of sexual violence. The youth of Aotearoa are powerful agents of change and our voices must be listened to.

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## Acknowledgements

Thank you to the 300 youth who courageously shared their experiences with myself and Teach Us Consent in the hopes for a safer Aotearoa. I would like to express my gratitude for the generosity, compassion and guidance from the team at Dear Em (HELP Auckland), Women's Refuge and YWCA Tāmaki Makaurau who helped create a path for justice for our voices to be advocated for. Thank you to Chanel Contos and the team at Teach Us Consent for inspiring this advocacy and for broadening the outreach of the call for submissions. Finally, thank you to Elena Titkova for generously offering guidance and a wealth of knowledge in the consent education space.

Genna Hawkins-Boulton

*Co-Founder & Director of Let's Talk Consent & Associate at  
YWCA Tāmaki Makaurau.*

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### CONTENT WARNING.

*The following testimonies included in the report cover a range of sexual violence experiences that includes rape, sexual assault, sexual harassment, harmful digital abuse, lack of bystander intervention, strangulation, and pack assault. Please be mindful these might be difficult to read. We share them to help show the range of experiences young people are facing.*

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# Executive Summary

- Out of 300 testimonies, 288 described horrifying experiences of sexual violence, including rape, harassment, assault, sextortion, and more. These testimonies reveal that schools are struggling to provide a safe environment, failing in their duty of care. Without effective prevention and response policies, students who report inappropriate behavior often see no accountability. As a result, schools can become places where victims of sexual violence are re-traumatized, severely impacting their ability to receive an education.
- In a survey of 131 participants, 54% received education on consent, but a significant majority, 72%, felt it was inadequate. Participants were concerned about the lack of comprehensive, school-wide consent education and the school's ability to identify and support victims of sexual violence.
- Our recommendations include a two key components.
- **Responding to Sexual Violence Disclosures:** revising guidelines to have a zero-tolerance stance on sexual violence, involving specialists in creating disclosure policies, ensuring school boards follow these policies, and training relevant staff to support victims properly.
- **Promoting Consent Culture:** The plan aims to create a culture of consent in secondary schools. It proposes making consent-based education to the curriculum compulsory, collaborating with experts for curriculum updates, and introducing an evaluation system for consent culture in schools.

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## Introduction

When looking at the state of sexual violence within our youth in Aotearoa, one can feel an overwhelming sense of despair or frustration. Our youth continue to call for our current legislation and education system to do better to support survivors.

In May 2022, Genna Hawkins-Boulton posted an anonymous forum on Instagram, calling for youth who were willing to share their experiences of sexual violence and their perspectives on consent lessons taught in school with the intention to share with local MPs. The youth of Aotearoa delved into their struggles and experiences to campaign for better support services in high schools, justice and an improved quality of consent-based lessons. The campaign gained support from Teach Us Consent in Australia, an organisation lobbying for and providing holistic consent and sexuality education. Within two weeks 300 youth across Aotearoa courageously shared their stories to stand with survivors.

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# Introduction

The testimonies were collected with the intention to advocate for better consent education, not for research purposes. This report centres on youth lived experiences to show the impact of the lack of school-wide promotion of consent culture with experiences of toxic masculinity, victim-blaming, hyper sexualisation and objectification of young girls. The report additionally highlights the needs for nationally coordinated robust responses to sexual violence disclosures and support for victims.

## Data Collection

The data was originally collected via a google form, 'Have Your Voice Heard'. The following questions and answers are being used in this report.

- 1. Did you receive consent education?**
- 2. Do you believe it was adequate?**
- 3. What school did you/do you attend?**
- 4. What is your graduate year?**
- 5. What is your experience of consent education and/or sexual violence?**

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After receiving support from Teach Us Consent, the call for testimonies moved to Teachusconsent.com where we received 170 testimonies about experiences of sexual violence and consent education received. The anonymous testimonies received from the Teach Us Consent website were in a different format, answering the following questions.

- 1. What school did you/do you attend?**
- 2. What is your graduate year?**
- 3. What is your experience?**

The total testimonies from these two collection methods provided us with 301 testimonies.

*The themes from the testimonies were analysed with the help of Women's Refuge and HELP Auckland. Any identifying information, that could identify the person or school, have been altered to protect anonymity of participants.*

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# What do we mean when we talk about sexual violence?

Disabled adults are 52% more likely to be sexually assaulted

Trans and non-binary experience higher rates of sexual violence .

Wāhine Māori are more likely to experience violence

Gay, lesbian, or bisexual adults are 2x more likely to be assaulted than heterosexual adults.

Statistics received from Te Aorerekura 2021

Sexual violence (mahi tūkino) is a significant societal and public health problem where almost half (47%) of victims in Aotearoa are between 15-29. Sexual violence is defined by the World Health Organisation as ‘any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or acts to traffic, or otherwise directed, against a person’s sexuality using coercion.

For Māori, sexual violence is a “violation of te whare tangata (the house of the people)”. Sexual abuse is viewed to be an attack on the spiritual being, mana and entire whakapapa line of the victim. Sexual abuse such as rape and incest are viewed as; “The transgressing of mana, the status, the dignity and the future birth right of not only the victim but the abuser and his people”

The breadth of sexual violence in the testimonies varies from rape, indecent assault, sexual harassment, physical violence, harmful digital communication, pack assault, child sexual abuse, and grooming. The youth testimonies also detail ongoing mental health impacts such as post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, suicidal ideation, anxiety, eating disorders, and substance abuse. Within the context of this report the term ‘sexual violence’ will be used to encompass the violation of mana, sexual harassment, sexualised bullying, harmful digital communication involving sexual content, sexual abuse, attempted sexual assault, any form of non-consensual touching, and sexual assault.

## Background

### Who were the contributors?

The 300 contributors ranged from as young as 12 year olds to a 37 year old who experienced sexual violence in high school. With the majority being under the age of 19. We received testimonies from young people who identified themselves as male, female and members of the LGBTQIA+ community. The testimonies came from 14 towns across nine regions spread throughout the motu. More than half of the testimonies came from students attending co-educational secondary schools.

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# Background

Type of School	Contributors
Co-educational.	58%
Same-sex female.	24%
Same-sex male.	1%
Undisclosed.	21.7%



## What are youth experiencing?

*Disclaimer: The following themes were discovered in the testimonies. This is not prevalence data as the testimonies were voluntary with limited prompts, more research should be conducted to understand the prevalence and severity of sexual violence experienced by high school students.*

The 300 contributors described, all up, 288 assaults/episodes of abuse. For some, this was almost daily harassment, normalised within their school’s culture. For others, it was brutal, forceful, and left them injured, anxious, in pain, and too afraid to speak about. Some students described pack rape, by groups of young men without any consequences faced. They described patterns of rape by a single perpetrator who used sexual violence with impunity, leaving a string of victims in their wake. It happened at schools, homes, parks, and parties. It was perpetrated by other young people they were dating, by people they were friends with, and by people they hardly knew at all. There were also incidents where bystanders were present and did nothing to intervene.

The level of violence described involved shoving, restraint and strangulation with victims experiencing injuries, almost losing consciousness, and fearing for their lives. One story resulted in a miscarriage. A large number of stories also involved victims being assaulted when they were asleep or intoxicated while losing consciousness. There were many examples of victims saying no and not being listened to. A number of students experienced abuse as children and were later assaulted in their teen years.

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**22 instances of brutality including shoving, restraint and strangulation.**

**17 instances of child sexual abuse.**

**17 abused in the presence of inactive bystanders**

**47 instances of grooming.**

**55 abused while asleep or intoxicated**

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## Response

Of the 300 contributors, those who were courageous enough to report the incident talked about unhelpful or lack of action taken from adults or institutions afterward. A number of students reported their experiences of abuse to their school with zero action or consequence. Some students were left in the same classes as the perpetrator and some watched their perpetrator step into leadership positions. Other students felt the only option to avoid their perpetrator was to move schools. For the schools that did offer help, it did not always come from a trauma-informed perspective with a knowledge of sexual violence response and prevention. Some students were offered the option of being placed in a conflict-resolution session with their perpetrator, which led to an increase in anxiety.

Of those victims who did speak up, a large number were blamed for their experience and received ongoing bullying from the perpetrator and their friend groups. The heavy presence of victim-blaming culture in the school meant that some victims were silenced as they felt too ashamed to speak up because they felt they wouldn't be believed. However, 13 contributors experienced a positive outcome from reporting their abuser from parents, bystanders and the justice system.

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## Impacts on mental health

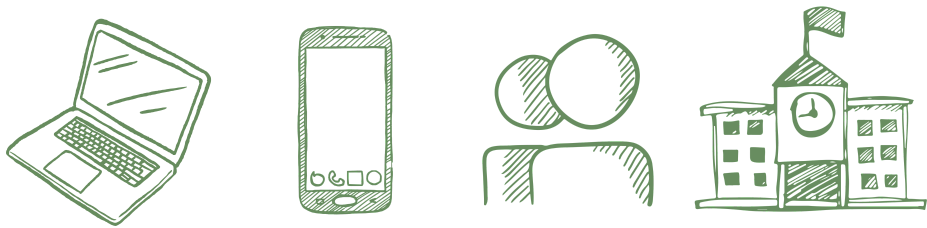
The experience of not being listened to, silenced, bullied, victim-blamed, being in the presence of their perpetrator, and feeling ostracized contributed to a range of mental health challenges including PTSD, depression, panic attacks and ongoing anxiety. Many students faced continued harassment with ongoing issues with trust and intimacy.

A quarter of testimonies talked about the lack of quality or absence of consent education in relation to their experiences or understanding of sexual violence. Some students talked about not fully understanding what consent was until after incidents had occurred. Others talked about how it could help, especially with bystanders.

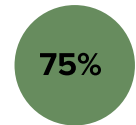
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# What influences violence at a society level?



15% of youth participants expressed the influence of gendered expectations on their experience of harmful sexual behaviour, often in heterosexual relationships. The common harmful gender norms were toxic masculinity, hyper-sexualisation and objectification of girls and gender stereotypes. Pornography is a significant enabler of harmful gender stereotypes. A report by Te Mana Whakaatu - Classification office. in 2018 found 75% of NZ 14–17-year-old have seen porn & 73% of young people that watch porn state they use it as a learning resource. A 2019 study by Te Mana Whakaatu - Classification office found 35% of porn scenes showed non-consensual behaviour. A 2014 study from Opium Research found 70% of young people believed watching porn influenced them to view women as sex objects.



of 14-17 year olds have watched pornography.



of regular users use porn as a learning source.



were influenced to view women as sex objects .



of porn scenes showed non-consensual behaviour

Statistics recieved from The Light Project 2023

## The normalisation of sexual violence

The broader culture of normalising sexual violence as a common experience disempowers victims from seeking help and recovering from their experience. It’s important for sexual violence disclosures to be responded to with compassion, trust and guidance to access help.

A boy in my year at school grabbed my bum and I was frozen and didn't know what to do. That night I told one of the coaches about what happened, I thought she would help me I trusted her, she told me " that things like that happen to her when she goes clubbing and that I should get used to it.

- Contributor #50

## Toxic masculinity

Toxic masculinity is an attitude or set of social guidelines stereotypically associated with manliness that often have a negative impact on men and society in general. The attitude contributes to the normalisation of sexual violence by asserting dominance over women, therefore removing women’s agency to give consent and their ability to recognise harmful sexual behaviour. Influential media figures such as Andrew Tate exacerbate the danger of toxic masculinity within young men.

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# What influences violence at a society level?

## Impact on women

Toxic masculinity can negatively impact women through the normalisation of sexual violence. Creating a culture which fosters toxic masculinity risks exacerbating violence against women.

I do believe the toxic masculinity culture of his high school contributed to the fact he raped me, and also how he thought that what he did to me was “normal.

- Contributor #24

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## Impact on male survivors

Toxic masculinity also has negative impacts of male survivors of sexual violence, as young boys are socialised to always be in pursuit of sex. Testimonies from young male students state a culture where they feel emasculated when saying no. In a heterosexual relationship, testimonies from male students detailed experiences of sexual violence where the girls believed they did not need consent from boys.

[Sex is] glamourised by boys which reflects upon girls that the answer is always yes. It's not. Especially at my school having heaps of sex is seen as a good thing so it's hard to speak up unless you want to be seen as a 'pussy.'

- Contributor #32

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## Peer-peer relationships

Toxic masculinity is also present in peer-peer male relationships where sex and the objectification of young women. is framed as an act to impress each other. Peer relationships can come “incubators of sexual harassment.” Sexual violence is also masked as “joking around” making it difficult to perpetrators to be held accountable for their behaviour.

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# What influences violence at a society level?

I was sexually assaulted by a boy in my class. He would touch me DURING class, when no one was looking. This continued on for weeks. He would corner me with his friends in a room and they would all think it was a game. I've never told anyone this, he still makes jokes about doing it again because 'I'm easy'.

- Contributor #191

## Hyper-sexualisation and objectification of girls

The youth testimonies detail an experience where they felt objectified through being catcalled, groped, harassed, and their body parts rated on a scale. Several testimonies discuss experiences where they were made to feel shame when they ignored the harassment.

When I was 14 or 15 walking alone to class and a group of boys were behind me and one kept asking if I'd like him to finger me and how much they would like to. I thought this guy was a friend and he was actually seeing a friend at the time, so I didn't know what to do. When I didn't really respond they all laughed and called me frigid.

- Contributor #88

## What are Youth Experiencing?



The following testimonies show the breadth of youth experiences of sexual violence

### The lack of bystander intervention

Multiple youth experienced of sexual violence in the presence of others. Testimonies often detailed situations where the victim was bullied by bystanders and no action was taken to support them.

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# What are Youth Experiencing?

I was assaulted in a room surrounded by people I thought were my friends. I had a knife held to my throat as he groped me.

- **Contributor #43**

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## Intimate partner violence

We saw many testimonies where youth experienced abuse from their partners. For many youth, it was difficult to recognise their experience as sexual violence because of the expectation of guaranteed consent from partners.

I had a boyfriend at 16. I didn't want to have sex one day while we were watching a movie, so he proceeded to turn my head towards the tv, whilst he took off my clothes and raped me.

- **Contributor #108**

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## Male victim

Testimonies involving male-identifying victims often expressed the idea where males are commonly framed as the perpetrators of violence, making it difficult to validate their experiences as victims.

I am a male and was sexually assaulted by a female, I was only 15 and I only now feel comfortable coming forward with this. She touched me on my private parts multiple times after I said no. She continued to do it until I had to physically restrain her, it has bothered me ever since, I felt like my voice was never heard, I am a survivor of sexual assault.

- **Contributor #203**

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## Pack assault

Many testimonies involve experiences with multiple perpetrators often involving male friendship groups and a vulnerable victim.

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# What are youth experiencing?

A boy in year 10 would beg me for nudes and all his mates would slut shame me and cat call me. He forced me to give him oral and to let his mates basically rape me one after another.

- Contributor #299

## LGBTQIA+ victim & transphobia

Testimonies involving victims identifying LGBTQIA+ victims expressed the experience of hypersexualisation and normalisation of sexual violence based on their sexuality.

I go to school and at lunch and intervals and stuff, students from all over the school comment on my body and how I'm looking "hot" or "sexy" meaning it in a sexual way that they know makes me uncomfortable because they are transphobic and like to make fun of me being a female. It's tough enough to go to a school with only males. But every day having my body commented on and my gender and sexual identity too just makes me want to f\*cking die.

- Contributor #207

## Strangulation

A number of testimonies involved strangulation and choking – across relationships and casual encounters. The expectation and normalisation of violence towards women in pornography can be seen as a contributing factor to the rise of choking.

I was assaulted by a guy I was friends with at the time. He was a year older than me. He forced his hand into my pants and fingered me while strangling me with his other hand. I said no multiple times. Courses around consent were nowhere near good enough at our school.

- Contributor #59

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# What are youth experiencing?

## Grooming

Youth who experienced grooming often found themselves in the position where they did not see anything wrong with the relationship until they were older.

When I was 14, I was groomed by an 18 year old man. When I went over to his place several times, he would ask to do sexual things with me (not sex, but pretty close), and I didn't think of it as wrong until just recently.

- Contributor #198

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## Digital communication abuse: sextortion

Multiple experiences involve male students soliciting nude pictures from other young female students. The nude photos were often spread around friendship groups and used as blackmail. The youngest victim was 12 years old.

I sent nudes on Snapchat to a guy in year 13, while I was year 11. He snap-saved them and used them to blackmail me into having sex with him.

- Contributor #129

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# Can secondary schools respond to student's experiences of sexual violence?

## What is currently in place to support students?

Under civil law, Schools must ensure students a duty of care to provide a safe physical and emotional environment (Code of Professional Responsibility and Standards for the Teaching Profession, clause 1(f). Under the Education and Training Act (2020) & the Human Rights Act (1993).



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# Can secondary schools respond to student's experiences of sexual violence?

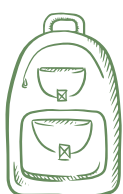
Under the Education and Training Act (2020) & the Human Rights Act (1993). The statement of the National Educational and Learning Priorities (NELP), that came into effect in 2023, has a clear objective of putting 'learners at the center' of their education with the priority of 'ensuring places are free from racism, discrimination and bullying.' Former Education Minister, Chris Hipkins stated there are strict legal standards and processes in place to ensure the safety of students, which school boards must follow. To achieve a physically and emotionally safe environment for students, schools are required by the Ministry of Education to consult their communities to develop their own rigid policies. Schools are expected to regularly review their policies to ensure they are fit for purpose.

## What's missing to support students?

There is no nationally coordinated policy requirements and action plan to ensure all school environments (including ECE, Primary, Intermediate and Secondary Schools) are free from sexual violence. The focus on student safety tends to be on bullying, harassment, and family violence. Under current obligations, all schools are required to have a child protection policy which outlines how teachers can identify and report signs of abuse and neglect, and how to appropriately respond to disclosures of student experiences of family violence. However, there are no clear resources on how teachers must respond to student experiences of sexual violence, other than the expectation to involve Police and Oranga Tamariki. The current response recommendations do not provide support for rehabilitation routes working with whānau and student offenders or alternative pathways for victims and whānau to be supported outside of the justice system.

There is no clear commitment from the Ministry of Education to ensure school staff can conduct trauma-informed responses when handling student's experiences of sexual violence. The Ministry of Education and NELP must recognize sexual violence as a serious risk to students in their policy commitments. The prevalence of sexual violence among youth means schools must be provided with the resources and training to ensure student wellbeing is being prioritized. It's imperative sexual violence prevention specialists are involved in creating these resources. This can ensure the appropriate trauma-informed responses are provided to avoid traumatization.

## What can we learn from youth experiences?



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# What can we learn from youth experiences?

From reading the student testimonies, it is clear schools are struggling to uphold their duty of care responsibilities to achieve a physically safe environment for students, free from sexual violence. Without robust prevention and response policies, the student testimonies show a culture where those who are showing sexually inappropriate behaviour are not held accountable. Therefore, schools have become a site of re-traumatisation after experiencing sexual violence, creating a direct impact to student's ability to receive an education.

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## *The following issues were raised in the testimonies:*

### 1. Low rates of reporting

While it was not one of the survey questions, we discovered out of 300 testimonies, only 7% reported their experience to the school. 3% of participants explicitly stated they did not report their experience of sexual violence to their school because they believed no action or support would be provided based on previous inaction.

I went on to be assaulted/raped by 5 other men throughout my time at school and never reported it or told anyone because I got no help the previous time. That was until I got a new counsellor and then I ended up telling her when I was older, she also did nothing. My school failed me. I will never send my children to that school because they did nothing to help me, and I will never again believe that it is a safe school.

- Contributor #111

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### 2. Lack of accountability or possible consequences for the accused

Out of 288 testimonies, two students who reported their experience of sexual violence to the school the alleged abuser was expelled, with one case taking 3-4 years and multiple students being abused, to reach a result. A further 13% of the 288 contributors who reported to their school state no action was made to support them after reporting their experience of sexual violence. Students recall a lack of intervention from coaches, teachers, and senior staff members. Therefore, creating a school-culture where issues of sexual violence are "swept under the rug" rather than being dealt with.

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# What can we learn from youth experiences?

He sexually assaulted me - and when the school found out they did nothing, they allowed him to be in my classes, they didn't give him even so much as a talking to, nothing. I was crying to the deans about him touching me, and how I said no, and he faced no consequences.

- Contributor #189

### 3. Victim-blaming response

10% of contributors state they experienced victim blaming behaviour after disclosing to their friends and/or to school staff. By providing school staff with disclosure training, we can help ensure staff are handling disclosures from a trauma-informed response.

My dean told me to forgive him because we were still young and I would ruin HIS chances of going somewhere in life. The school swept it all under the rug and made me feel as if it was my fault that he did what he did to me. I wish the school listened to me. Maybe if they did I wouldn't have had to go through the trauma I went through. The fact that he has done it to me and another person should've been enough for the school to take action against him. All he got was pity and a flick on the wrist.

- Contributor #278

### 4. Being placed/remaining in the same class as the accused

12% of students were left in the same classes as their alleged abuser, despite disclosing their experience to the school. This resulted in mental health impacts and learning disruptions such as the inability to focus and making the decision to move schools.

The school knew he assaulted me but kept putting us in the same classes. I began failing academically and the school suggested I leave and do a course, while my rapist was able to graduate high school with our peers. I will never get those years back and suffer to this day. We were never taught consent in school.

- Contributor #185

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# What can we learn from youth experiences?

## 5. The accused being placed in leadership positions

Across the testimonies, there are experiences where students who did not report saw their alleged abuser be put into positions of leadership. However, there were also testimonies where students did report their experience and further saw their alleged abuser rewarded with leadership positions.

In high school he was a student leader. I would watch as he would sit at the front of the assembly next to the principal and I would have to look at him. I wish I could have screamed and shown him for what he was. I wanted to go to the principal and tell him he was a rapist and he should be banned from the school. I never felt safe at school because he was around. I cried almost everyday at school. It was awful, I was so depressed I didn't want to leave the house because I would have to see him. I finally saw a therapist in year 12 and I realised I had PTSD. She helped me through a lot and assured me I have nothing to feel guilty for. I felt icky every day, dirty, no matter how much I showered I never felt clean.

- **Contributor #216**

## 6. The impact on student wellbeing & disruptions to learning

Students who reported to their school, explicitly stated severe mental health impacts including suicide attempts, frequent panic attacks, and anxiety that linked to a direct impact to their learning. 10% of students moved schools due to the impacts of retraumatisation. Students who didn't report experienced shame, PTSD, anxiety, and distrust in the system with the fear of not being believed. Therefore, remaining silent also had an impact on students' wellbeing and disruption to their learning.

Four times a week minimum I was getting panic attacks and revisiting trauma, and in return I tried to kill myself. I continued to tell my school how I could not focus in class with him there and that it was very detrimental for my mental health yet nothing happened. I eventually moved schools, and things got better for me. But I still hear things that he is abusive to girls and there is still a large problem with how the school is dealing with the problem.

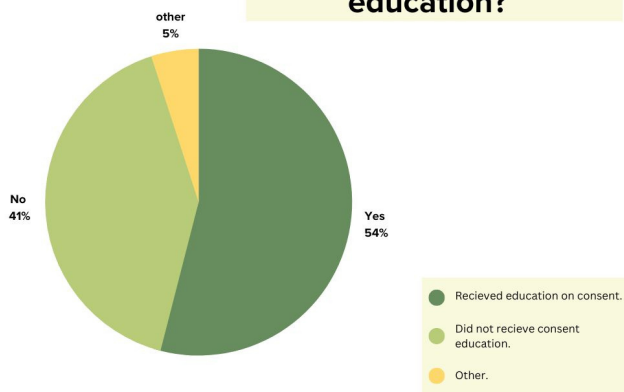
- **Contributor #96**

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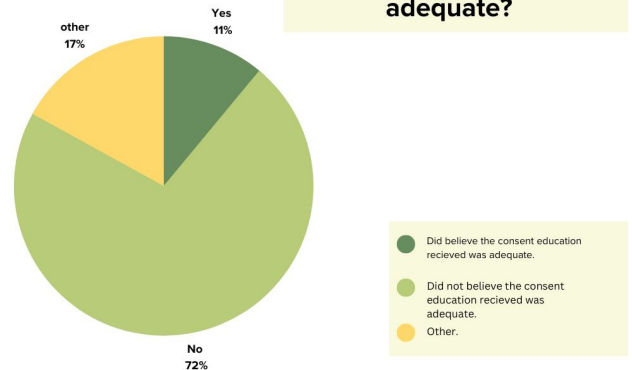
# What can we learn from youth experiences?

## 7. Inadequate or absent consent education

**Did you receive consent education?**



**Do you believe the consent education you received was adequate?**



Out of 131 participants from the Have Your Say survey, 54% received education on consent-based topics. However, 72% did not believe the consent education they received was adequate enough. The issues raised in the quality of consent education included lack of comprehensiveness on topics such as consent in the context of relationships, drugs, alcohol, and how to recognise verbal and non-verbal cues of discomfort. The testimonies also discuss the lack of whole-school approach and understanding of how to recognise sexual violence and support for victims.

Consent education is so incredibly important. It wasn't until much later that I realised that I didn't owe him sex just because he was my boyfriend. Consent isn't something you automatically have just because you're in a relationship, and young people NEED to learn that.

- **Contributor #96**

I believe if consent/coercion/relationships had been taught at school, it would have massively reduced and prevented such events from happening. If anything, giving students the ability to understand what was happening and to then be able to make a more informed decision. I believe it would also teach students to look out for their peers and to notice when certain behaviours were dangerous and harmful.

- **Contributor #215**

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# Conclusion

The testimonies collected shows the dire and shameful reality of sexual violence experienced by our youth in Aotearoa. The absence or low level of consent culture promotion across multiple sectors of society, especially in schools, has enabled sexual abuse to thrive without consequence. Our youth share heartbreaking stories of abuse, pain and ongoing mental health struggles in the hopes to see change. The 300 testimonies show only a fraction of the issue of sexual abuse experienced by our young people. We deserve to live a life where our youth is spent getting an education and growing into adulthood. Instead, for many of us, it is spent suffering from the consequences of sexual violence.

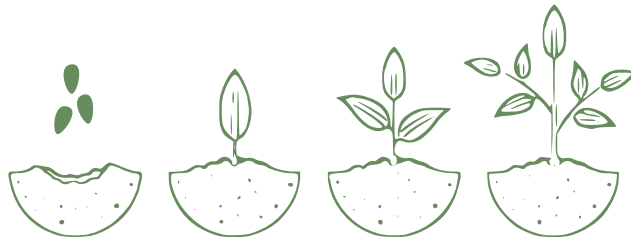
The message from the youth testimonies is clear. Not enough action is being done to foster a school culture where consent is promoted across all areas with a zero tolerance policy of sexual violence. We cannot afford for schools to continue to be a site of retraumatisation and abuse where the livelihoods of our youth are being destroyed. Consent must be embedded into the DNA of every school environment - in curriculum, in policies to prevent and respond to sexual violence, in school leadership and broader school culture.

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# The Opportunity for Change



## How can schools foster a culture built on consent?

A whole-school approach to teaching relationship and sexuality education is believed to ‘create a safe and inclusive physical emotional environment for everyone’. The youth testimonies show a clear lack of whole-school approach in promoting healthy and respectful relationships between peers. A recurring issue raised in the testimonies was the lack of quality consent-based learning. The lack of quality consent education had impacts on students' ability to recognise episodes of abuse, and to clearly understand they have autonomy over their own bodies.

It is imperative for youth and sexual violence prevention specialists to partner with the Ministry of Education in the upcoming curriculum refresh to ensure student experiences are at the centre of decision making. The curriculum and delivery of Relationships and Sexuality Education must be aligned with the experiences of our young people to ensure their needs are being met

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## What can we learn from the youth experiences shared?

The youth experiences show the lack of nationally coordinated policies to handle sexual violence disclosures has created a culture of impunity, victim-blaming and sweeping experiences ‘under the rug’. This is impacting student wellbeing and causing disruptions to their learning.

Building a robust response strategy to respond to sexual violence disclosures must prioritise student wellbeing from a trauma-informed response. This must include partnering with sexual violence prevention specialists to create a survivor-centric code of conduct where students who disclose their experiences receive learning assistance and are provided pathways to avoid retraumatisation.

By having a robust and survivor-centered action plan, those in the education sector can work towards Te Aorerekura (our national strategy and action plan to eliminate family violence and sexual violence) following impact goals.

1. Young people understand how to seek help and can access specialised services.
2. People who use violence are held accountable and supported to change.

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# Our recommendations

## Equipping our secondary schools to respond to sexual violence disclosures

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### Ministry of Education

1. Reform current Duty of Care guidelines and NELP priorities to explicitly include a zero-tolerance approach to sexual violence.
2. Sexual violence prevention specialists help inform the national code of conduct to sexual violence disclosures.
3. Ensure Board of Trustees commit to the national code of conduct in developing policies to respond to sexual violence.
4. Ensure appropriate school staff receive disclosure training from sexual violence prevention specialists to appropriately support victims.

### School-wide consent culture promotion

1. The Ministry of Education makes whole-school approaches to consent-based learning a compulsory part of the secondary school curriculum.
2. Partner with youth and sexual violence prevention specialists in the upcoming curriculum refresh to ensure youth experiences are being considered to ensure whole-school approaches are effective.
3. Let's Talk Consent works with sexual violence prevention specialists to develop a criteria-based system to evaluate the consent education and culture at secondary schools based on an achieved, merit and excellence grading system.

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This Report was made in collaboration with



## Data bias

1. Majority of the data has come from students and youth based in Tāmaki Makaurau, more research is needed to be done to get a better understanding of experiences of students who live in the regions.
2. The testimonies collected were done in a voluntary manner, hence we are not able to conclude prevalence data.
3. We did not specifically collect data on sexual violence experienced by victims from different sexualities and genders. We were able to draw conclusions from contributors who specifically stated their gender or sexuality.

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**Rape:** sexual intercourse without consent (NZ Police)

Sexual violence in the context of digital communication abuse and physical violence:

A person does not consent to sexual activity if he or she allows the activity because of—

(a)

force applied to him or her or some other person; or

(b)

the threat (express or implied) of the application of force to him or her or some other person; or

(c)

the fear of the application of force to him or her or some other person.

(Crimes Act 1961, 128A)

**Grooming:** “the behaviour someone uses to gain access to children in order to sexually abuse them. Grooming often involves many activities that seem OK, like babysitting, outings, buying treats and presents. Abusers groom the child as well as the adults around the child. This makes it easier to access the child and harder for the child to tell an adult and be believed.” (TOAH-NNEST).

**Indecent assault:** unwanted sexual touching (NZ Police)

**Sexual harassment:** direct or indirect requests for sexual activity (The Employment Relations Act 2000)

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Crimes Act 1961 - New Zealand Legislation,  
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