

Scottish Women's Aid and NUS Scotland Join Forces to Raise Awareness

Media Release

30 Nov 2016

Students experiencing domestic abuse are being urged to seek support as NUS Scotland and Scottish Women's Aid join forces to mark the 16 Days of Action, which are 16 days of international activism against gender violence.

Scottish Government figures for 2015-16 reflect 22,075 incidents of domestic abuse of women up to the age of 30 – this is up 8.9 per cent from 20,283 in 2014-15. Scottish Women's Aid warn that whilst these figures are significant, the recording of domestic abuse as an 'incident' does not take into account that domestic abuse is experienced by many women and children as a constant pattern of intimidation and control.

Colleges and universities are being urged to help make students aware of the support available from local Women's Aid groups across Scotland and through the National Domestic Abuse and Forced Marriage helpline which provides non-judgemental specialist support and advice 24 hours a day, seven days a week on 0800 027 1234.

NUS Scotland will be sending all member Students' Associations posters advertising the helpline number to put up on campuses across Scotland.

In addition to the helpline, there are a number of positive projects currently underway at universities across Scotland looking at tackling and preventing violence against women more broadly, given that previous NUS research found almost one in five colleges and university students have experienced some sort of sexual harassment during their first week of term alone.

Last year, students at Glasgow University launched the Let's Talk initiative focused on building a communication system for reporting rape, making necessary resources available to survivors and providing education on bystander intervention.

Glasgow Caledonian University recently set up a strategy group to develop a university response to tackling violence against women and hate crime affecting students. The Students' Association has also been working with Glasgow University's Student Representative Council and Rape Crisis Scotland providing students with the skills to be trainers in preventing sexual violence.

And earlier this year, the University of Strathclyde was awarded funding from the Scottish Government to develop a violence against women toolkit to help stop abusive behaviour at home, work or on campus. However, reporting systems for sexual harassment in colleges and universities are either lacking or not visible to students in a lot of cases. This needs to change – and it is hoped the findings from these projects encourage other colleges and universities to adopt similar systems of reporting and support.

NUS Scotland Women's Officer Angela Alexander said:

"Violence against women affects every corner of our society – and women students are just as likely to experience abuse at the hands of a partner as anyone else. In many cases, those experiencing violence or threatening behaviour may not know where to turn for help and support – and this is particularly the case for younger students. That's why NUS Scotland is joining forces with Scottish Women's Aid to mark the start of 16 Days of Action and highlight the fact that support is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. "It's clear there is a need to reach out to more women and let them know help is available. During the 16 Days of Action, I will be encouraging our member Students' Associations to highlight the National Domestic Abuse and Forced Marriage Helpline Scotland to their

students. It's important for everyone to know that the first step to support is only a free phone call away."

Marsha Scott of Scottish Women's Aid said:

"We're excited to join forces with NUS Scotland – it's absolutely important that students experiencing domestic abuse know that they are not alone, and it's okay to ask for help and support.

"We've got better over the years at recognising physical violence as a real problem, but the way domestic abuse is experienced by women is so much more than hitting, and indeed physical violence may not feature at all – emotional, sexual and/or financial abuse in amongst intimidation and control are really common in domestic abuse.

"We know there are students who are experiencing domestic abuse, and we want to make sure that you know we are here for you too. University and colleges are often whirlwinds of new experiences, friendships and relationships. This is often exciting, but it can make finding someone to trust and talk to about potential abuse really tricky. The National Forced Marriage and Domestic Abuse helpline is somewhere that will listen, support and talk with you about yourself or someone you are worried about 24 hours 7 days a week."

ENDS

Notes: 1. The latest Scottish Government domestic abuse figures are here: <http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0050/00508511.pdf>

2. 2014-15 figures are here: <http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2015/10/8859/downloads#res487981>

3. The NUS study which found almost 1 in 5 students experienced some sort of unwanted sexual harassment in their first week of term is here: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-34591905>