

Student Voices on Sexual Violence: Overview of Selected Survey Results from the University Sector

Contents

- Student Voices on Sexual Violence: Overview of Selected Survey Results from the University Sector..... 1
 - Introduction 1
 - Response Rate and Demographics of University Students Participating in the Survey 2
 - Interpretation Guide for Tables Provided to the University Sector..... 3
 - Sexual Violence: Assault, Harassment, and Stalking Experiences 3
 - Sexual Assault Experiences 3
 - Sexual Harassment Experiences 6
 - Stalking Experiences..... 7
 - Unpacking the Numbers: Particularly Vulnerable Groups 8
 - Student respondents’ responses to sexual violence incidents 8
 - Helpfulness of University staff, faculty, administration or service 9
- Students’ Perceptions and Knowledge Related to Sexual Violence 10
 - Consent 10
 - Education and awareness 10
 - Bystander Beliefs and Attitudes..... 11
 - Knowledge of Institutional Supports 11
- Conclusion..... 12
- Contributors..... 12

Introduction

The Student Voices on Sexual Violence Survey was developed by the Ministry of Colleges and Universities (MCU) in consultation with content experts and sector stakeholders. The questions in the survey were designed and chosen to reflect topics commonly assessed to understand sexual violence on campuses. Existing surveys on sexual violence, such as the Association of American Universities’ Survey on Sexual Assault and Misconduct, informed the development of the Student Voices on Sexual Violence Survey.

The survey was administered by CCI Research between February 16 and April 2, 2018. All full-time undergraduate university students, full-time college students, students in graduate-level programs, and students attending registered private career colleges were invited to participate. Survey questions asking about students’ experiences assessed their experiences since the beginning of the 2017-2018 academic year. In March 2019, MCU released a [summary report](#) presenting key results.

This document was prepared by members of the Council of Ontario Universities' Reference Group on Sexual Violence in consultation with experts in survey methodologies and sexual violence issues. The document provides an overview of select data tables provided to universities in February 2020. These tables include responses provided by Ontario's university students who participated in the survey. The findings cannot be generalized to the full population of university students in the province. Further, it is not possible to determine if differences exist between the students who chose to participate in the survey and those who did not. Results are not weighted to account for groups of students that may have over- or under-responded to the survey compared to the actual population of Ontario university students. As noted in the March 2019 MCU summary report: The tables should be "interpreted and presented as reflecting the experiences, perceptions and opinions of those students who responded to the survey. It is best to express survey results in the following manner: 'Of the students who responded to the survey, ##% indicated...' "(p. 5). The summary below focuses on university sector results.

The data provided to Ontario universities was in the form of tables which do not allow for determinations of statistical significance or effect sizes, which reflect the magnitude of the differences between groups. Ontario universities have not been provided the data of individual survey respondents, so further analysis (beyond what is included in the data tables provided) is not possible.

Response Rate and Demographics of University Students Participating in the Survey

The survey was designed as a census of all full-time postsecondary students in Ontario, including undergraduate and graduate university students. The survey was sent to 441,499 university students, and 117,148 completed the survey. The response rate for the university sector was 26.5%.

Of the students responding to the survey, 82.2% indicated they were enrolled in an undergraduate program, 10.1% in Master's or Master's research programs, 5.1% in Doctoral programs, and 2.5% in other programs such as a Graduate Diploma.

Survey respondents also provided information about gender identity: 69.3% of survey respondents identified as a woman/girl; 28.9% identified as a man/boy; 1.8% identified as transgender, Two-Spirit, non-binary or gender fluid.

These participation rates can be compared to the 2017-18 fall full-time enrolment count for the university sector to determine if survey respondents are representative of the larger university student population. At Ontario universities, women were 55% of the total student population in 2017-18 (see <https://ontariosuniversities.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Table-7.pdf>). At 69% of the survey respondents, women are over-represented in the survey sample; men are therefore under-represented in the survey sample¹. International students were approximately 16% of the student population in 2017-18 (see <https://ontariosuniversities.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Table-5.pdf>), and represent 7.3% of the survey sample. International students are therefore under-represented in the survey sample).

¹ Currently, university sector gender information is assessed as male, female, and other/not reported; therefore, information about students who identify as part of the trans community is not available.

Further sector demographic information, including sexual orientation, ethnic/racial identity, Indigenous identity or Indigenous ancestry, disability status, and age, is also provided in the sector demographic report, which can be found on the COU website.

Interpretation Guide for Tables Provided to the University Sector

The Student Voices on Sexual Violence Survey tables for universities were provided in two separate files: 1) overall Ontario university tables by key demographic variables (**Demographic** tables); and 2) institution specific tables presenting results for each university (**Institution** tables). The institution tables do not provide demographic information; thus, individual universities cannot assess the representativeness of the survey respondents from their institution to their actual full-time student population when the survey was conducted.

Caution is advised when using the tables provided to compare institutions to each other – especially in terms of statements such as “X institution is better or worse” on the sexual violence measures. The institutional tables only provide the overall average and percentages for each institution. It is not possible to determine if the differences across institutions are due to university demographic profiles, demographic profiles of survey respondents at each university, or a real difference in terms of overall rates of sexual violence and other variables reported below. For example, a university with a higher proportion of woman students and students under the age of 25 most likely has a higher over-all rate of sexual assault compared to a university with a lower proportion of women students and those under 25. As outlined in the recent report of the [Association of American Universities](#) (AAU) climate survey, prevalence rates vary by such factors as gender identity, sexual orientation, age, and undergraduate/graduate status. Given these factors, overall averages and prevalence rates of sexual violence must be interpreted with care.

A word about language: Some labels used in the tables provided to universities do not reflect the language commonly used by the university sector. For example, in some tables, gender identity is grouped into three categories: Female, Male, and “Other Gender Identity.” The “Other Gender Identity” category is used to describe survey respondents who selected any of the following gender identities: transgender, Two-Spirit, non-binary, gender fluid, queer, gender non-conforming, or gender identity not listed in the survey. For the purposes of this summary, “gender diverse” will be used to refer to students whose responses are included as “Other Gender Identity.” Similarly, in the provided tables, sexual orientation includes: bisexual, heterosexual (straight), homosexual (gay or lesbian), and “Calculated Other.” “Calculated Other” includes students who selected the following options: asexual, fluid, pansexual, queer, questioning, Two-Spirit, or a sexual orientation not listed on the survey. For the purposes of this summary, “another sexually diverse identity” will be used to refer to students whose responses are included in the “Calculated Other” sexual orientation category. Likewise, this report does not use “homosexual” when referring to students who identify as gay or lesbian.

Sexual Violence: Assault, Harassment, and Stalking Experiences

Sexual Assault Experiences

Student respondents were asked about sexual assault (non-consensual sexual experiences) that occurred since the beginning of the academic year. The survey asked about various types of sexual assault behaviours, including being fondled or kissed, attempted oral/penetrative sex, and oral/penetrative sex. The specific questions comprising sexual assault can be found in the data tables.

The prevalence rate of sexual assault for the university sector and individual institutions is included in the data tables and is provided in Table 1. Overall, 23% of university students responding to the survey indicated that they experienced sexual assault since the start of the 2017-2018 academic year. This includes experiences that happened on-campus and off-campus. As the tables provided to universities do not allow for disaggregation by gender identity or other key factors, comparing across universities should be done with caution.

University Sector	23.0%
Algoma University	32.2%
Brock University	30.1%
Carleton University	26.1%
Lakehead University	23.6%
Laurentian University	26.2%
McMaster University	22.0%
Nipissing University	26.8%
OCAD University	23.5%
Ontario Tech	14.6%
Queen's University	30.8%
Ryerson University	23.3%
Trent University	30.6%
University of Guelph	28.7%
University of Ottawa	21.9%
University of Toronto	17.2%
University of Waterloo	18.4%
University of Western Ontario	32.4%
University of Windsor	20.6%
Wilfrid Laurier University	32.0%
York University	18.2%

Context of Sexual Assault Experience

Students who responded that they had experienced at least one instance of sexual assault were also asked to provide additional information about the incident(s).

For example, students were asked whether their unwanted sexual experiences were the result of coercion (see Table 2). As shown below, the most common response was that someone was caught off guard or their body language and non-verbal signals were ignored (59.9%), followed by someone being taken advantage of when drunk, had taken drugs, were asleep or unconscious (41.6%).

Catching you off guard or ignoring your body language or non-verbal signals.	59.9%
Taking advantage of you when you were drunk, had taken drugs, were asleep or unconscious.	41.6%
Any other means when you said or showed you didn't want to.	38.4%
Showing displeasure, criticizing your sexuality or attractiveness, getting angry but not using physical force, after you said you didn't want to.	29.8%
Telling lies, threatening to end the relationship, threatening to spread rumours about you, making promises you knew were untrue, or continually pressuring you after you said you didn't want to.	22.4%
Using force, for example holding you down with their body weight, pinning your arms, or threatening you with a weapon.	17.8%
Threatening to physically harm you or someone close to you.	6.2%

Perpetrator Characteristics

Students who indicated they had one or more experiences of sexual assault were also asked to describe the perpetrator(s). For this question, the most common categories selected by survey respondents were “another student” (49.5%) or “someone with no affiliation to their university” (46%). The least commonly selected categories were “Faculty member, professor, instructor, graduate supervisor, administrator, teaching assistant, research assistant, coach” (1.9%) and “other person employed at your university” (2.1%).

Students also indicated their relationship to perpetrator(s). The most common relationships selected by survey respondents were “someone they had no relationship with” (37.8%), “an acquaintance” (26.1%) and “a friend” (24.7%), followed by “a current romantic partner” (17.6%) and “a former partner” (13.3%). The majority of survey respondents indicated the perpetrator’s gender identity as male (86.6%).

Timing and Location:

Students were also asked about the timing and location of the incident(s). The timing of sexual assault experiences varied. As shown in the tables provided by MCU, 18% of students reported the incident happening just before classes (i.e., the fall semester) started in the 2017-18 academic year; 12% reported it occurred during the first 2 weeks of classes; and 20% reported the experience happened in weeks 2 through 6 of the semester. Students shared the location where the unwanted experiences occurred. Overall, 79.8% of sexual assault occurred off-campus in a setting not affiliated with their

university, 20.3% occurred on-campus, 12.4% occurred online or through social media, and 7.6% occurred off-campus at a university-sponsored activity.

Sexual Harassment Experiences

Students were asked 13 questions about different forms of sexual harassment experienced since the start of the 2017-18 academic year. Please see the data tables for specific questions.

Students who reported that they experienced one or more these 13 behaviours are included in Table 3 below. Overall, 63.2% of university students responding to the survey indicated they experienced sexual harassment one or more times.

University Sector	63.2%
Algoma University	70.9%
Brock University	67.7%
Carleton University	67.3%
Lakehead University	62.8%
Laurentian University	64.4%
McMaster University	63.7%
Nipissing University	63.6%
OCAD University	62.2%
Ontario Tech	49.3%
Queen's University	71.4%
Ryerson University	63.5%
Trent University	68.9%
University of Guelph	67.6%
University of Ottawa	62.4%
University of Toronto	58.7%
University of Waterloo	59.0%
University of Western Ontario	71.6%
University of Windsor	60.7%
Wilfrid Laurier University	69.4%
York University	59.2%

Perpetrator Characteristics

Students were asked to share information about the perpetrator(s). The most common categories of perpetrator selected were “other students” (64.7%) and “people with no university affiliation” (37.9%). The least common categories of perpetrator selected were “faculty member, professor, instructor, graduate supervisor, administrator, teaching assistant, research assistant, coach” (6.3%) and “other person employed by your university” (3.3%). When asked about their relationship to the perpetrator, “someone they had no relationship with” (38.2%), “an acquaintance” (36.5%) and “a friend” (30.5%) were the most commonly selected options. The majority of survey respondents indicated the perpetrator’s gender identity as male (81.3%).

Timing and Location

The timing of sexual harassment incidents varied: 12% of students reported that harassment happened before classes (i.e., the fall semester) started, 12% during the first 2 weeks of classes, and 18% in weeks 2 through 6. Student respondents shared where the sexual harassment incidents occurred: 55.9% occurred off-campus in a setting not affiliated with their university; 47.2% occurred on-campus; 32.2% occurred online or through social media; and 10.8% occurred off-campus at a university-sponsored activity.

Stalking Experiences

The survey also asked respondents about stalking experiences that occurred since the beginning of the 2017-18 academic year. The specific questions are included in the data tables.

University prevalence rates for stalking are provided in Table 4:

Table 4: Stalking Experience Prevalence Rates	
University Sector	23.7%
Algoma University	35.2%
Brock University	26.5%
Carleton University	26.8%
Lakehead University	23.7%
Laurentian University	27.3%
McMaster University	21.1%
Nipissing University	23.9%
OCAD University	26.1%
Ontario Tech	22.0%
Queen's University	22.4%
Ryerson University	29.3%
Trent University	28.1%
University of Guelph	23.4%
University of Ottawa	23.6%
University of Toronto	22.1%
University of Waterloo	18.6%
University of Western Ontario	24.2%
University of Windsor	23.6%
Wilfrid Laurier University	27.2%
York University	26.0%

Perpetrator Characteristics

As with sexual assault and harassment, students who reported any stalking experience were asked to share information about the perpetrator(s). The most common categories of stalking perpetrator selected by survey respondents were “other students” (47.1%) and “someone with no university affiliation” (46.6%). The least common categories of stalking perpetrator selected by survey participants were “faculty member, professor, instructor, graduate supervisor, administrator, teaching assistant,

research assistant, coach” (3.0%) and “other person employed by your university” (3.1%). In terms of their relationship to the perpetrator, “someone they had no relationship with” (40.4%), “an acquaintance” (30%) and “a friend” (21.2%) were the most common options selected by survey respondents. The majority of students indicated the perpetrator’s gender identity as male (83.3%).

Timing and Location

Nearly 20% of survey respondents indicated that the incidents happened before the fall 2017 semester started; 13.5% indicated that the incident occurred during the first 2 weeks of the semester; and 19% indicated it occurred in weeks 2 through 6 of the semester. Students also shared that the most common place for stalking to occur was off-campus in a setting not affiliated with their university (56.5%), followed by online or through social media (45.2%), on campus (33.5%), and off-campus at a university event (10.4%).

Unpacking the Numbers: Particularly Vulnerable Groups

Consistent with other studies of sexual violence, available results from this survey suggest that certain groups of students are particularly vulnerable to experiencing sexual violence. The overall university sector rate and institutional rates of sexual assault, harassment and stalking mask variation across key demographic factors such as gender identity, sexual orientation and age.

For example, prevalence rates of sexual assault, sexual harassment and stalking for women and gender diverse survey respondents are higher than the overall university sector rates; similarly, prevalence rates among survey respondents who identify bisexual, gay or lesbian, or students with another sexually diverse identity are higher than the sector rate for all three forms of sexual violence.

Student survey respondents also experienced different rates of sexual violence based on their racial or ethnic identity: students who identified as White, Black, other racial and ethnic identity, and as having Indigenous identity or ancestry had higher rates of sexual assault and sexual harassment than the overall university sector prevalence rates. Students who identified as having a disability also had prevalence rates higher than the overall university sector rates for each of the three types of sexual violence.

Sexual violence experiences also varied by the age of student survey respondents, with students who were 21 or under and 21-25 having higher prevalence rates, and those over 35 having lower prevalence rates for sexual assault, sexual harassment and stalking.

Student respondents’ responses to sexual violence incidents

Student respondents who indicated experiencing any incident of sexual assault, sexual harassment, and/or stalking were asked a series of questions about their response to these experiences. For example, the tables provide information regarding affects on students’ academic engagement. In addition, the tables indicate whether students told someone about their experiences: 46.5% of respondents indicated they told someone, 35.6% did not tell someone, and 17.8% selected “not sure.” The decision to tell someone varied across demographic groups such as gender and racial and ethnic identity. For example, 51.5% of women respondents, 43% of gender diverse respondents, and 29.6% of men respondents shared the incident with someone else.

For those student respondents who told someone, 97.8% reported telling a friend, family member, or roommate, and 9.4% told an institutional representative such as a staff member at the sexual violence

centre, university therapist, or other university staff. Given the information provided in the tables, it is not possible to determine the types of behaviours not reported to university staff and whether or not these behaviours occurred on campus or as part of a university-sponsored activity.

Students responding that they did *not* tell a university representative were asked follow-up questions about this decision. Students could select all applicable options. Of these responses, the five most commonly selected reasons for not telling a university representative were “not thinking it was serious enough” (50.7%), “not needing any help” (32.3%), “did not want any action taken” (24.8%), “believed it would cause more trouble than it was worth” (26.7%) and being “too embarrassed” (15%).

Focussing on the most common response of “not thinking it was serious enough,” 54.0% of women students selected this option compared with 38.2% of men and 46.5% of gender diverse students. Approximately 52% of student respondents under 21 years old and 49.3% of students aged 21-25 selected this option compared to 46.8% of students 26-30 years old, 44.1% of students 31-25 years old, and 35.7% for students over 35 years of age. As these findings indicate, students holding the belief that their experiences are not serious enough are also some of the most at risk for sexual violence (women, gender diverse, and younger).

Helpfulness of University staff, faculty, administration or service

Students who indicated they told university staff about an incident were also asked to assess how helpful these university sources were to them. It is important to note that the number of responses in this section are much lower than for other questions. This is because of the design of the survey itself—only students who reported an experience and also told a university staff member were asked questions about helpfulness. Of the university students who responded in this section (N=4,956), 49.5% indicated staff were “moderately” to “very helpful,” while 18.5% indicated staff were “not at all helpful.” Further detail regarding specific offices or resources is provided in Table 5:

Institutional Source	# Students who reported to the source	% rating moderately helpful or very helpful
University sexual violence centre staff	555	58.9%
University counsellor or therapist	1381	52.5%
Campus security/Campus police	451	44.8%
University health services or on-campus doctor or nurse	399	44.6%
Student union or association	172	40.7%
Office of student conduct/Employer or sponsor	77	32.5%
University equity or human rights office	157	42.7%
Resident advisor or residence life staff	426	52.8%
University faculty	646	51.2%
Teaching assistant or research assistant/Teaching assistant	134	40.3%
Other university staff	430	46.3%

Students’ Perceptions and Knowledge Related to Sexual Violence

Consent

Student respondents were asked to about their knowledge of sexual consent. Specifically, they indicated their level of agreement with different statements related to opinions, attitudes, and beliefs about consent in various sexual situations. The survey posed seven questions. A summary of sector responses is included in Table 6.

Overall, university student respondents demonstrate consistent and strong understanding of consent. For some elements of consent, there is variation across groups of students who responded to the survey, such as by gender identity, sexual orientation and Indigenous ancestry or identity. For example, 93.3% of women students, 85.2% of men students and 78.1% of gender diverse students strongly agree or agree with the statement “Consent must be given at each step in a sexual encounter.”

	Strongly Disagree + Disagree	Strongly Agree + Agree
Consent must be given at each step in a sexual encounter.	4.0%	90.5%
If a person initiates sex, but during foreplay says they no longer want to, the person has not given consent to continue.	4.2%	92.5%
If a person doesn't physically resist sex, they have given consent.	84.7%	4.4%
Consent for sex one time is consent for future sex.	93.9%	2.1%
If you and your sexual partner are both drunk, you don't have to worry about consent.	88.6%	2.1%
Mixed signals can sometimes mean consent.	84.4%	4.0%
If someone invites you to their place, they are giving consent for sex.	94.4%	1.2%

Note: Bolded text reflects responses indicating accurate knowledge of sexual consent.

Education and awareness

The survey included questions about educational experiences and awareness of sexual violence and institutional processes and procedure. Questions related to educational/awareness activities asked if students had experienced a variety of activities at their university since the start of the 2017-18 academic year.

The most common activity selected by university student respondents was “seeing university messaging about sexual violence through social media or in a course syllabi” (60.5%), followed by “discussing the topic of sexual violence with friends or family” (50.8%), “discussing sexual violence as part of a class” (29.1%) and “seeing the sexual violence policy at their university” (27.4%). At the same time, 17.5% of student respondents said that they did not do any of the activities listed since the start of the academic year.

The results related to those that had discussed sexual violence with friends or family varied by student demographics. For example, over half of women students and gender diverse students indicated they discussed sexual violence with friends or family (56% and 55.9% respectively), while just over one third

of men students did (38.7%). With respect to sexual orientation, 66.4% of bisexual students, 59.7% of gay or lesbian students and 49.3% of heterosexual/straight students indicated having these discussions. Finally, 63.7% of students who identified as having a disability indicated they discussed sexual violence with friends or family compared to those who do not identify as having a disability (47.2%). Similar patterns, though with different magnitudes, can be found in the disaggregated responses to “discussed sexual violence as part of class.”

Bystander Beliefs and Attitudes

All students participating in the survey were asked four questions to assess their understanding of bystander beliefs and attitudes. Responses were provided on a scale of “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.” Overall, the data provided in the tables indicate that the majority of student respondents “strongly agreed” or “agreed” that they can prevent negative consequences to others if they intervene when sexual violence might occur (79.4%); it is important for all students to play a role in keeping each other safe from sexual violence (89.8%); and they are someone who helps others when they can (86.6%). When asked if they agree with the statement “I don’t think there is much I can do to prevent sexual violence from happening to others,” 71.5% of student respondents “strongly disagreed” or “disagreed.”

Knowledge of Institutional Supports

All survey respondents were asked to indicate their knowledge of available institutional supports related to sexual violence. Specifically, selecting from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree,” student respondents rated their level of agreement that they would understand or know how or where to access supports or find information related to reporting incidents of sexual violence on campus. Five statements addressing institutional supports were provided on the survey; the chart below shows student respondents’ level of agreement with each statement (see Table 7).

Table 7: Knowledge of Institutional Supports Related to Sexual Violence		
	Strongly Disagree + Disagree	Strongly Agree + Agree
I understand how to access academic accommodations related to sexual violence.	57.2%	23.2%
I understand how to access supports (for example, counselling, health services, housing, safety and security services) related to sexual violence.	37.4%	43.1%
I know where to find information on filing a formal report about sexual violence at my university/college/private career college.	62.9%	19.7%
I understand the formal reporting options at my university/college/private career college.	69.1%	13.8%
I know how to file a formal report regarding an incident of sexual violence at my university/college/private career college.	72.0%	12.2%

Conclusion

This document provides a brief overview of some university sector results drawn from the 2018 Student Voices on Sexual Violence Survey. The reports provided by the Ministry of Colleges and Universities include additional detail and results, and universities are engaged in a comprehensive review of these materials.

Ontario universities are committed to providing a safe, supportive and respectful environment for all members of campus communities. These results are important as universities work to understand student experiences, enhance prevention and awareness programs, and ensure access to supports for those affected by sexual violence.

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