Overview
In spring 2015, Cornell participated in the Campus Climate Survey on Sexual Assault and Sexual Misconduct as part of a consortium of 27 colleges and universities organized by the Association of American Universities. The survey asked questions related to a wide range of climate issues including nonconsensual sexual penetration, touching and harassment while at Cornell, the context in which the incidents occurred, whether the incidents were reported, and familiarity with available resources and support. Of the 20,547 Cornell students invited to participate, 3,906 students—2,345 undergraduate and 1,561 graduate and professional students—completed the survey for an overall response rate of 19 percent.

This report summarizes findings related to the prevalence of nonconsensual sexual penetration across different communities of undergraduate students since they enrolled at Cornell. The charts in this report show weighted counts and percentages (rounded to the nearest whole number) to reflect the undergraduate population. Survey results for all Cornell participants and aggregated results for all participating institutions are available through Cornell's SHARE website: share.cornell.edu/education-engagement.

Prevalence by Gender
Figure 1 compares the prevalence of nonconsensual penetration among respondents who identified as a woman or a man.

Women undergraduates reported experiencing nonconsensual penetration at a rate at least five times higher than male undergraduates regardless of the tactic used. For women and men alike, the prevalence rates of nonconsensual penetration involving the use or threat of physical force were similar to the prevalence rates of non-consensual penetration involving incapacitation or the absence of affirmative consent.

---

1 Prevalence refers to the proportion of people in a population who have had a particular experience within a given time period. A student who has experienced more than one incident is counted only once in a measure of prevalence.
2 Cornell-specific weighting variables were used to generate estimates of the prevalence of sexual violence for the Cornell student population.
3 In the survey, absence of affirmative consent was defined as someone having sexual contact “without your active, ongoing voluntary agreement. Examples include: initiating sexual activity despite your refusal; ignoring your cues to stop or slow down; went ahead without checking in or while you were still deciding; otherwise failed to obtain your consent.”
4 When asked on the survey to describe their gender identity students could select: woman, man, transgender woman, transgender man, genderqueer or gender non-conforming, questioning, or “not listed” small number of undergraduate students reported a gender identity other than woman or man (n=22).
“LGBAQN” includes students who reported their sexual orientation as: gay or lesbian, bisexual, asexual, questioning, or “not listed.”

Prevalence by Sexual Orientation

Compared to straight women, LGBAQN women were much more likely to have experienced nonconsensual penetration involving the use of physical force or the absence of affirmative consent (Figure 2).

Nonconsensual penetration involving force, incapacitation or absence of affirmative consent was also much more prevalent among LGBAQN men than straight men (Figure 3).

Prevalence Among Undergraduate Women by Race and Citizenship

Given the small number of men reporting nonconsensual penetration, the rest of this report focuses on particular aspects of undergraduate women’s victimization.

Overall, white (U.S.) women and those who reported “other” or multiple races had the highest prevalence of nonconsensual penetration while Asian (U.S.) women report the lowest (Figure 4). 5

Prevalence within specific race/citizenship groups varies by tactic. For example, penetration involving physical force was most common among other/multi-racial (U.S) and international women.

5 The category of “Other/Multi (U.S.)” includes students who self-reported their race as American Indian or Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, and those who selected multiple races.
Prevalence Among Undergraduate Women by Ability/Disability

Figure 5 compares the prevalence of nonconsensual penetration among undergraduate women who answered either "no" or "yes" to the survey question asking whether they had a disability registered with Cornell’s Student Disability Services.

Across all tactics, undergraduate women who said they have a registered disability had a much higher prevalence of nonconsensual penetration than undergraduate women without such disabilities.

Prevalence Among Undergraduate Women by Class Year

Figure 6 compares prevalence rates “since being enrolled at Cornell” while Figure 7 shows prevalence just within the 2014–15 academic year.

The likelihood of experiencing nonconsensual penetration increased with the number of years a female undergraduate had been enrolled at Cornell. Almost one in five (19%) of senior women reported having experienced nonconsensual penetration by force, incapacitation or absence of affirmative consent; this compared to 7% of first-year women (Figure 6).

Comparing prevalence rates within the 2014–15 academic year across class years, senior women were slightly more likely to have experienced nonconsensual penetration than women in other class years (Figure 7).

Results show that from 6% (juniors) to 8% (seniors) of undergraduate women experienced nonconsensual penetration by force, incapacitation or absence of affirmative consent.

Differences associated with class year were most apparent in the absence of affirmative consent, with first-year women experiencing this tactic less often than women in upper class years.

Almost one in five (19%) of senior women at Cornell reported having experienced nonconsensual penetration by force, incapacitation or absence of affirmative consent.
Discussion and Implications
While any occurrence of nonconsensual penetration is unacceptable, the prevalence rates shown in this report are especially concerning. There are some particular aspects of this report that deserve more attention.

Tactics used
The high prevalence of nonconsensual penetration involving the threat or use of physical force challenges a commonly held perception that sexual assault on college campuses is largely an issue of miscommunication — popularly described as “he said, she said.” The rates of nonconsensual penetration involving incapacitation also further challenge the belief that sexual assault is mostly due to some misunderstanding between individuals. Rather, the data suggest that while the lack of consent given in sexual intimacy may play some role, the circumstances under which undergraduate women at Cornell are sexually victimized more often involve the threat or use of physical force or taking advantage of highly intoxicated individuals. Given that the data reveal many incidents of sexual violence are not a function of understanding consent but demonstrate a disregard of consent or one’s ability to give consent, prevention strategies that focus on educating about the role of consent will likely be insufficient to reduce incidents of sexual violence.

Prevalence by class year
There has been a long held belief that first year women are at greatest risk of sexual violence on college campuses due to their age, lack of social and sexual experience, isolation from old, reliable friendships and dependable relationships, and subsequent need to develop new social connections upon entering college. However, the data don’t support this belief; rather, the prevalence of nonconsensual penetration experiences for undergraduate women is consistent across class years, regardless of tactic, with those who have been on campus longest (senior women) reporting the highest prevalence of nonconsensual penetration since entering Cornell. While sexual violence awareness and education for incoming students is important, it is worth considering whether this awareness needs to be heightened and sustained throughout the college years.

Vulnerable communities
The data confirm particular populations of undergraduate students experience higher rates of victimization: including white women, multi-ethnic women, those who identify as LGBAQN and those with a disability.

It is difficult to speculate as to why individuals with registered disabilities report higher risk of victimization. A wide range of disabilities are registered with Student Disability Services (e.g., physical, cognitive, psychological, etc.). Future surveys will need to ascertain how disability may increase vulnerability in this population.

Further, while more research is needed to gain a better understanding of specific experiences and the tactics involved, the variation in prevalence across tactics, particularly for multi-ethnic women, raises questions about whether or how cultural norms and expectations (e.g., sexual intimacy outside of marriage, alcohol use, gender roles) might influence women’s vulnerability.

Therefore, a greater focus of resources and prevention work within certain populations, especially those who identify as LGBAQN, with a disability, white women and multi-ethnic women, should be considered a priority.

Compiled by the Council on Sexual Violence Prevention Research and Evaluation Committee: Marne Einarson (Chair), PhD, Nina Cummings, MS, Liz Kars, MPH, JD, Beth Livingston, PhD, Laura Santacrosse, MPH, Janis Whitlock, PhD, MPH.

For More Information
Consider these resources for additional information about the topics raised in this report:

- **CAMPUS & COMMUNITY RESOURCES**
  Cornell’s SHARE (Sexual Harassment and Assault—Response and Education) website provides resources for care and support, information about reporting, and details about relevant laws and policies: share.cornell.edu

- **RESEARCH FINDINGS**
  Explore more fully the results from the 2015 survey, including the Executive Summary, full data report, and aggregated comparison data from other colleges and universities: share.cornell.edu/2015-campus-climate-survey-on-sexual-assault-and-sexual-misconduct

Published April 25, 2016