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 graduate and professional students since they enrolled at Cornell. The charts in this report show population estimates for Cornell students based on responses to the survey. Survey results for all Cornell respondents and aggregated results for all participating institutions are available at: share.cornell.edu/education-engagement.

Prevalence of Nonconsensual Sexual Contact by Gender

Women reported experiencing nonconsensual sexual contact at a rate at least three times higher than their male peers. Gender differences in prevalence were largest for nonconsensual sexual contact involving the use or threatened use of physical force, and absence of affirmative consent.

Among women, nonconsensual contact was more likely to involve the use of physical force or the absence of active, ongoing affirmative consent than to be the result of incapacitation.

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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. A small number of undergraduate students reported a gender identity other than woman or man (n=11).
Prevalence of Nonconsensual Sexual Contact Among Women by Race and Citizenship

The prevalence of nonconsensual sexual contact among female graduate and professional students varied across specific race/citizenship groups. Women who reported “other” or multiple racial/ethnic identities had the highest prevalence, followed by those who identified their race as white (Figure 3).

Prevalence of Nonconsensual Sexual Contact Among Women by Sexual Orientation

As shown in Figure 2, LGBAQN women are more likely to have experienced nonconsensual sexual contact than heterosexual/straight identifying women. This pattern holds across all three tactics considered.

Sexual Harassment

The survey asked students about situations in which a student or someone employed by or otherwise associated with Cornell said or did something that:

- interfered with the victim’s academic or professional performance
- limited the victim’s ability to participate in an academic program, or
- created an intimidating, hostile or offensive social, academic or work environment

Overall, 39% of graduate and professional students reported experiencing sexual harassment at Cornell.

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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.
Forms of Sexual Harassment

The survey asked students whether they had experienced any of five specific forms of sexual harassment:

- **[someone]** made sexual remarks or told jokes or stories that were insulting or offensive to you
- **[someone]** made inappropriate or offensive comments about your or someone else’s body, appearance or sexual activities
- **[someone]** said crude or gross sexual things to you or tried to get you to talk about sexual matters when you didn’t want to
- **[someone]** email, texted, tweeted, phoned, or instant messaged offensive sexual remarks, jokes, stories, pictures or videos to you that you didn’t want
- **[someone]** continued to ask you to go out, get dinner, have drinks or have sex even though you said, “No”

Prevalence of Sexual Harassment by Gender

Overall, 39% of graduate/professional students reported experiencing sexual harassment at Cornell. The most common harassing behaviors cited were having inappropriate comments made about their body, appearance or sexual behavior; followed by being told sexual remarks, or insulting or offensive jokes or stories.

Women experienced sexual harassment at much higher rates than men; fully one-half of women had experienced some form of harassment compared to 31% of men. This pattern was consistent across all specific forms of harassment (Figure 4).

Prevalence of Sexual Harassment by Sexual Orientation

Compared to heterosexual/straight identifying women, LGBAQN women were much more likely to have experienced sexual harassment (Figure 5). Sexual harassment was also more commonly experienced by LGBAQN men than heterosexual/straight identifying men.

Prevalence of Sexual Harassment by Race and Citizenship

Hispanic (U.S.) students and those who reported “other” or multiple races/ethnicities had the highest prevalence of sexual harassment experiences; conversely, sexual harassment was least often experienced by international students (Figure 6). This pattern was observed for women and men.
Stalking

Students were asked whether someone behaved in the following ways such that they felt afraid for their personal safety:
- made unwanted phone calls, sent emails, voice, text or instant messages, or posted messages, pictures or videos on social network sites
- showed up somewhere or waited for you when you did not want that person to be there
- spied on, watch or followed you either in person or using devices or software

Prevalence of Stalking by Gender

About four percent of graduate/professional students reported that they had been the victims of stalking while attending Cornell. The prevalence rate among women was three times higher than the rate for men (Figure 7).

In addition, stalking was much more commonly experienced by LGBAQN women than heterosexual/straight identifying women (12% prevalence rate versus 5%, respectively).

Intimate Partner Violence

Students who indicated they had been in a partnered relationship since enrolling at Cornell were asked if a partner had treated them in any of the following ways:
- controlled or tried to control you (e.g., kept you from going to classes or pursuing your educational goals; did not allow you to see or talk with friends or family)
- threatened to physically harm you, someone you love, or themselves
- used any kind of physical force against you (e.g., bent your fingers or bit you; choked, slapped, punched or kicked you)

Prevalence of Intimate Partner Violence by Gender

More than three-quarters of graduate/professional students indicated they had been in a partnered relationship since enrolling at Cornell. Six percent of these current or previously partnered students reported having experienced intimate partner violence; prevalence rates were the same for women and men (Figure 8).

For women and men alike, prevalence of IPV was slightly higher among heterosexual/straight identifying students compared to LGBAQN students (6% versus 5%).

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6 The Partnered relationships included: casual relationship or hook-up; steady or serious relationship; or marriage, civil union, domestic partnership or cohabitation.
Discussion and Implications

The prevalence of unwanted sexual experiences among graduate and professional students at Cornell is very concerning. There are particular aspects of this report that warrant further consideration.

Forms of Sexual Violence

Survey results estimate that 8% of graduate and professional students have experienced nonconsensual sexual contact (penetration and sexual touching) since entering Cornell. Among graduate and professional women, this nonconsensual contact most often involves the use or threat of physical force, or the absence of affirmative consent, with incapacitation playing a comparatively smaller role.

The rates of sexual harassment among graduate and professional students are strikingly high, with half of women and close to one-third of men having experienced some form of sexual harassment during their time at Cornell. The most common experiences involved receiving inappropriate comments about one’s looks or offensive sexual remarks. These results suggest that many graduate and professional students experience an academic, professional or social environment that negatively affects their performance and ability to fully and comfortably participate.

Stalking and intimate partner violence (IPV) are less common but no less concerning forms of sexual misconduct experienced by Cornell graduate and professional students. While women were three times more likely than men to have been stalked, the rates of intimate partner violence were comparable among men and women. These are aspects of sexual and intimate violence that deserve more attention.

Vulnerable Communities

The data confirm that particular populations of graduate and professional students experience higher rates of victimization.

On the whole, women are much more likely to be victimized than men. One exception to this pattern is intimate partner violence, where prevalence rates are the same for women and men. Women who are white or multiracial, and those who identify as LGBAQN are more likely to experience sexual violence.

A substantial portion of men experience sexual violence, a finding that may run counter to common stereotypes about victimization. Almost one-third of men have been sexually harassed. Those men who identify as Hispanic, multiracial or LGBAQN experience higher rates of victimization.

Implications for Prevention and Reduction of Sexual Violence

Graduate and professional students face distinct challenges concerning their experiences of sexual violence. Compared to undergraduate students, they may be less aware of campus services available to them, and more reluctant to seek help for fear of jeopardizing professional relationships with faculty members and other students. Resources provided must be inclusive, must reflect the specific needs of the various communities of graduate and professional students, and the availability of these resources needs to be clearly communicated.

Compiled by the Research and Evaluation Committee of Cornell’s Council on Sexual Violence Prevention

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

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