

Report # 3

A Closer Look:

Cornell's Campus Climate Survey on Sexual Assault & Sexual Misconduct

The context of nonconsensual penetration experienced by Cornell undergraduate women

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.

Undergraduate women are at particular risk of experiencing sexual violence. As observed in Report #1, they reported experiencing nonconsensual penetration at a rate five times higher than their male undergraduate peers.¹ This report focuses on the context in which undergraduate women at Cornell experienced nonconsensual penetration involving physical force or incapacitation.

The charts in this report show population estimates² for Cornell students based upon responses to the survey. 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.

Characteristics of Victims

Table 1 shows that 5% of undergraduate women experienced nonconsensual penetration involving physical force or incapacitation since entering Cornell. However, prevalence rates vary across specific populations of undergraduate women and by the tactic used.

Nonconsensual Sexual Penetration

The survey asked about students' experiences of unwanted or nonconsensual sexual contact while attending Cornell, including attempted or completed sexual penetration (vaginal, anal, or oral). Students were asked if these nonconsensual acts occurred as a result of:

- **physical force:** Incidents in which the offender used physical force or threats of physical force against the victim.
- **incapacitation:** Incidents in which the victim was unable to consent or stop what was happening because they were passed out, asleep, or incapacitated due to drugs or alcohol.

Table 1. Estimated percentage of undergraduate women experiencing nonconsensual penetration since entering Cornell, by tactic

% experiencing since entering Cornell	physical force	incapacitation
Overall	5%	5%
By sexual orientation		
Straight	5%	5%
LGBAQN	11%	4%
By race/citizenship		
White (U.S.)	6%	7%
Asian (U.S.)	3%	2%
Black (U.S.)	4%	2%
Hispanic (U.S.)	5%	4%
Other/Multi (U.S.)	8%	7%
International	7%	1%
By disability status		
No disability	5%	4%
Disability	9%	8%
By year in school		
First year	2%	2%
Sophomore	4%	5%
Junior	5%	4%
Senior	10%	7%

¹ 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. Male and, to an even greater extent, TGQN undergraduates experience sexual violence while at Cornell. However, the small numbers of male and TGQN survey respondents who reported experiencing nonconsensual penetration precludes further analysis of the context in which their victimization occurred.

² Cornell-specific weighting variables were used to generate estimates of the prevalence and context of sexual violence for the Cornell student population.



Characteristics of Victims (continued)

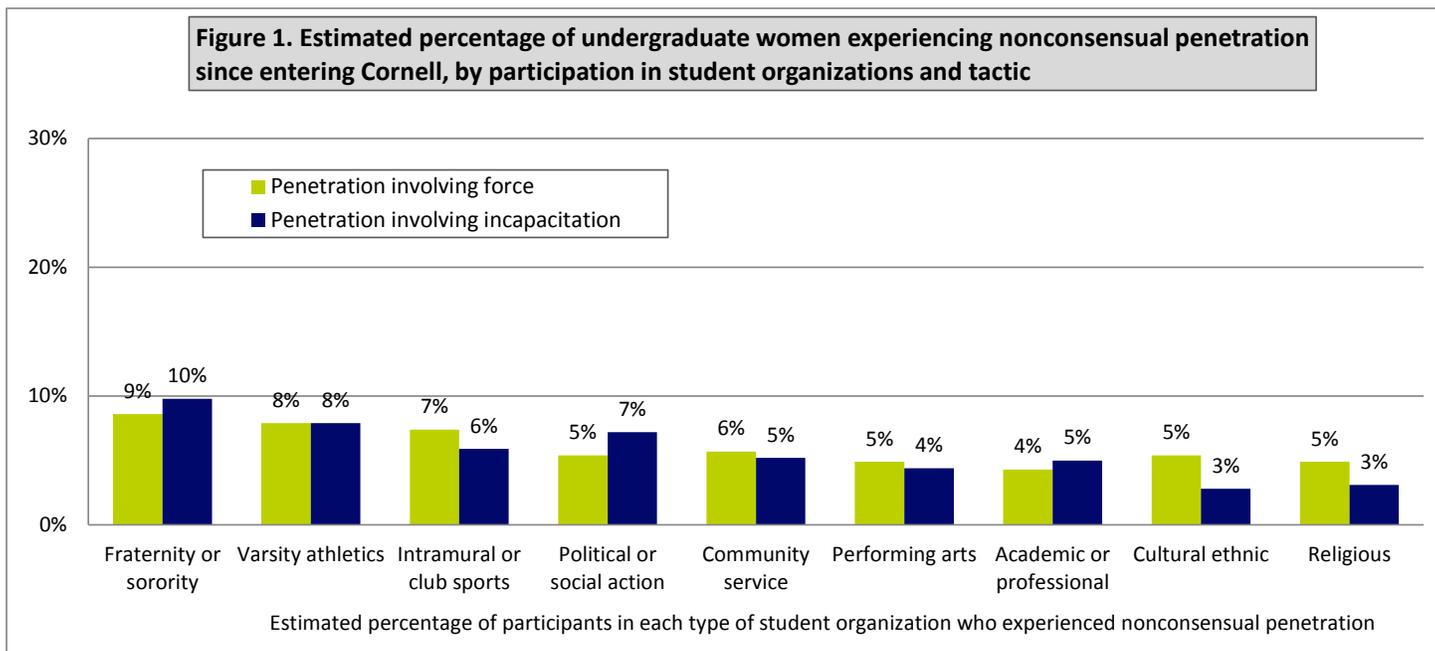
Penetration by force: Among respondents, higher rates of nonconsensual penetration involving physical force were experienced by the following subsets of women: those who identify as LGBAQN³, those who selected multiple races/ethnicities or “white” as their race/ethnicity, international women, women with a disability, and those in their senior class year.

Penetration by incapacitation: Multi-ethnic women, white women, women with disabilities, and seniors reported the highest rates of nonconsensual penetration involving incapacitation. However, prevalence rates among LGBAQN and, in particular, international women are much lower for penetration by incapacitation than those observed for penetration by force.

Prevalence by Participation in Student Organizations

All students were asked if they had “... been a member of or participated in any of ...” nine types of student clubs and organizations at Cornell. Figure 1 shows the percent of undergraduate women participants within each type of organization who experienced nonconsensual penetration by force or incapacitation since entering Cornell. The highest

prevalence rates are associated with women’s participation in Greek-life and athletic organizations, including varsity, intramural or club sports. To be clear, these associations do not necessarily mean that victimization occurred at events held by these organizations or that the offenders were members of the same type of organization.



Context of Nonconsensual Penetration Incidents

On the survey students who experienced nonconsensual penetration were asked a series of follow-up questions about those incidents including: characteristics of the offender(s), the timing and location of the incident, and the use of alcohol or drugs prior to the incident. Students who had experienced more than one incident of nonconsensual penetration involving the same tactic (force or incapacitation) provided summary information about those incidents.

³ “LGBAQN” includes students who reported their sexual orientation as gay or lesbian, bisexual, asexual, questioning, or not listed.

Characteristics of Offenders

Students who experienced non-consensual penetration were asked about the offender's sex, association with Cornell and relationship to the victim.

As shown in Table 2, a similar profile of offenders is associated with acts of nonconsensual penetration by force and incapacitation. Virtually all undergraduate women who experienced nonconsensual penetration by force or incapacitation described the offenders as male and affiliated with Cornell in some capacity. The vast majority reported the offender was another Cornell student.

Victims of nonconsensual penetration frequently knew the offender in some capacity; approximately two-thirds described them as a friend or acquaintance. Much less often, and about equally likely, the offender was described as a former or current intimate partner at the time of the incident, or as a stranger.

When and Where Incidents Occur

Nonconsensual penetration incidents involving force or incapacitation mostly occurred during the academic year (see Table 3).

Penetration by force: Three-quarters of incidents of nonconsensual penetration involving physical force took place on campus. Campus-based incidents were most likely to occur in residence halls or fraternity or sorority houses. Off-campus experiences of penetration by force occurred primarily in private residences, followed by fraternity or sorority houses.

Penetration by incapacitation:

A smaller proportion – 60% – of incidents involving incapacitation happened on campus. Campus-based incidents most often took place in fraternity or sorority houses, followed by residence halls and other residential housing. Off-campus incidents occurred primarily in private residences; off-campus fraternity or sorority houses were a secondary location.

Table 2. Estimated percentage of female undergraduate victims of nonconsensual penetration by offender characteristics and tactic

	physical force	incapacitation
Sex of perpetrator		
Male	99%	100%
Female	1%	0%
Other gender identity	0%	0%
Affiliation with Cornell		
Student	92%	95%
Don't know	9%	2%
Faculty or instructor	2%	0%
Coach or trainer	0%	0%
Other staff	2%	0%
Other affiliation	1%	3%
Not affiliated	1%	2%
Relationship to victim		
Friend or acquaintance	62%	67%
Partner at the time	24%	20%
Previous partner	21%	12%
Stranger	24%	26%
Teacher or advisor	2%	0%
Co-worker or superior	0%	2%
Other	2%	4%
Don't know	0%	0%

Table 3. Estimated percentage of female undergraduate victims of nonconsensual penetration by timing and location of incident, and tactic

	physical force	incapacitation
Occurred during academic year		
Yes	90%	88%
Occurred on campus/university property		
Yes	76%	60%
No	24%	40%
Campus-based incidents occurred in ...		
Residence hall	54%	33%
Fraternity or sorority house	42%	55%
Other space used by single-sex group	0%	3%
Other residential housing	9%	18%
Non-residential building	10%	3%
Other property (e.g., outdoors)	8%	8%
Off campus incidents occurred in ...		
Private residence	87%	85%
Fraternity or sorority house	27%	13%
Other space used by single-sex group	0%	7%
Restaurant, bar or club	8%	0%
Other social venue	4%	0%
Outdoor or recreational space	8%	0%
Some other place	5%	0%

Prior Involvement of Alcohol or Other Drugs

Students were asked about alcohol and other drug use, on their part and on the part of the offender, just prior to incidents of nonconsensual penetration. Questions that asked about the victim’s use of alcohol and other drugs were prefaced with this text: “Keep in mind that you are in no way responsible for what occurred, even if you had been drinking/on drugs.”

As Table 4 shows, a large percentage of nonconsensual penetration incidents were preceded by alcohol consumption on the part of the offender and/or the victim.

Penetration by force: As reported by victims, about three-quarters of offenders and two-thirds of victims had consumed alcohol prior to incidents of nonconsensual penetration involving force. Consumption of other drugs by the offender or victim was much lower. Less than 10% of victims suspected they had been given alcohol or other drugs without their knowledge. Fifteen percent of victims were passed out during all or parts of the incident.

Penetration by incapacitation: Virtually all incidents of nonconsensual penetration by incapacitation involved alcohol consumption. There was much less use of drugs other than alcohol. Less than 10% of victims suspected they were given alcohol or others drugs without their knowledge. One-third of victims were passed out for all or parts of the incident.

Table 4. Estimated percentage of female undergraduate victims of nonconsensual penetration by involvement of alcohol and drugs, and tactic

Just prior to the incident...	physical force	incapacitation
Offender was drinking alcohol		
Yes	73%	93%
No	23%	0%
Don't know	4%	7%
Victim was drinking alcohol		
Yes	68%	98%
No	32%	2%
Offender was using other drugs		
Yes	5%	22%
No	59%	44%
Don't know	36%	34%
Victim was using other drugs		
Yes	5%	11%
Victim given alcohol or other drugs without knowledge or consent		
Yes, victim is certain	0%	0%
Victim suspects, but not certain	7%	8%
No	88%	86%
Don't know	6%	6%
Victim was passed out for all or part of incident		
Yes	15%	33%
No	76%	44%

Data Summary

- Undergraduate women at Cornell are as likely to experience nonconsensual penetration by physical force as by incapacitation.
- Victimization rates are higher among women who are members of or who participate in activities of Greek-life and/or athletic organizations.
- Most typically the offender is male, a Cornell student, and either a friend or an acquaintance.
- Most of the incidents occur on campus in residence halls and Greek-life houses.
- Most of the incidents involved prior use of alcohol by both offender and victim.

Discussion and Implications

Results from the Campus Climate Survey provide a better understanding of the correlates of risk for sexual violence within our campus environment.

Victims and Offenders

Consistent with existing research, the data in this report show that sexual violence against undergraduate women at Cornell is mainly perpetrated by other students, predominantly men, and who are known to the victims in some way.

Undergraduate women at Cornell who identify as LGBAQN, white or multi-ethnic, and those with a disability are more likely to experience sexual violence, as are women who are involved with Greek-life or athletic organizations, whether as members or participants in activities associated with these organizations. These findings raise questions about how these group affiliations elevate the risk of being sexually victimized.

The Context in which Sexual Violence Occurs

Undergraduate women's experiences of nonconsensual penetration are as likely to have involved the threat or use of physical force as they are to have involved incapacitation. The prominence of these two tactics calls into question the still-popular assumption that sexual violence primarily occurs because of a misunderstanding about consent between the individuals. Rather, the data suggest that many incidents of nonconsensual penetration reflect a disregard for consent, rather than a miscommunication about it.

Additionally, the data indicate that sexual assaults primarily occur in residential settings, more often in on-campus residence halls and fraternity/sorority houses, but also in

off-campus private residences and fraternity/sorority-affiliated apartments or houses. The data do not specify if these on- and off-campus locations were the primary residence of the offenders or victims, or if they were associated with a particular social event or activity.

The data also confirm that offenders and victims have often consumed alcohol before incidents of nonconsensual penetration, a finding that has long been established by existing research on campus rape.

Implications for Prevention and Reduction of Sexual Violence

Sexual violence prevention and response efforts need to be particularly directed to the most vulnerable communities of our students. Further, prevention efforts must go well beyond a focus on the role of consent in social or intimate interactions to be effective.

Efforts to prevent sexual violence need to carefully address the specific social and residential contexts that support or enable such violence. More research is needed to better understand the context of violence experienced at Cornell and to effectively inform a comprehensive, multi-faceted prevention strategy that includes not just attention to individual behavior, but also environmental change.

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