



## AAU CAMPUS CLIMATE SURVEY ON SEXUAL ASSAULT AND SEXUAL MISCONDUCT

### Fact Sheet

- More than 150,000 students at 27 universities participated in the [AAU Campus Climate Survey on Sexual Assault and Sexual Misconduct](#). It is one of the largest surveys on sexual assault and sexual misconduct to provide insight into students' perceptions of campus climate in terms of both number of schools and number of students.
- The primary goal of the survey is to help participating universities better understand the attitudes and experiences of their students with respect to sexual assault and sexual misconduct. University leaders want to make their campuses safe places for students to learn and succeed.
- The data from the individual institutional surveys will help university administrators formulate additional policies and practices intended to reduce sexual assault and sexual misconduct on campus, and further ensure that reports of sexual assault and sexual misconduct are handled with care, compassion, and a commitment to fair and prompt review and resolution.
- The aggregate survey results are generally consistent with other campus surveys on sexual assault and sexual misconduct. There are wide variations across the 27 institutions that implemented the survey.
  - Overall, 11.7 percent of student respondents across 27 universities reported experiencing nonconsensual sexual contact by physical force, threats of physical force, or incapacitation since they enrolled at their university. The incidence among female undergraduate student respondents was 23.1 percent, including 10.8 percent who experienced penetration.
  - Overall rates of reporting to campus officials and law enforcement or others were low, ranging from five percent to 28 percent, depending on the specific type of behavior. The most common reason for not reporting incidents of sexual assault and sexual misconduct was that it was not considered serious enough. Other reasons included because they were “embarrassed, ashamed or that it would be too emotionally difficult,” and because they “did not think anything would be done about it.”
  - The survey revealed that more than six in ten student respondents (63.3 percent) believe that a report of sexual assault or sexual misconduct would be taken seriously by campus officials. Fifty-six percent said it was very or extremely likely that the safety of those reporting incidents of sexual assault and sexual misconduct would be protected by university officials.

- Because of the wide variation among campuses, the survey analysis suggests that results from a single survey of a limited number of schools may not accurately portray the experiences of all students in the country.

## **The Survey**

- The AAU Climate Survey on Sexual Assault and Sexual Misconduct was carried out during April and May of 2015 at 26 (10 private, 16 public) AAU member universities plus one private non-AAU institution.
- Participating AAU universities were Brown University; California Institute of Technology; Case Western Reserve University; Columbia University; Cornell University; Harvard University; Iowa State University; Michigan State University; The Ohio State University; Purdue University; Texas A&M University; The University of Arizona; University of Florida; University of Michigan; University of Minnesota, Twin Cities; University of Missouri-Columbia; The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; University of Oregon; University of Pennsylvania; University of Pittsburgh; University of Southern California; The University of Texas at Austin; University of Virginia; The University of Wisconsin-Madison; Washington University in St. Louis; and Yale University. The non-AAU institution was Dartmouth College.
- AAU initiated the survey at the request of university presidents who wanted to obtain more data on their own institutions.
- The survey was conducted by Westat, a leading social science research firm.
- The survey was developed by Westat and a multi-disciplinary design team created by AAU and composed of recognized experts on survey design and methodology, as well as campus leaders directly responsible for dealing with sexual assault, issues of gender, health, and student affairs.
- Dr. Bonnie Fisher, a nationally recognized expert on sexual assault, was hired by Westat to work closely with the AAU-Westat team to develop the content and analysis of the sexual assault climate survey.
- The AAU team was led by Sandra Martin, Professor and Associate Chair for Research, Department of Maternal and Child Health, Associate Dean for Research, Gillings School of Public Health, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.
- The starting point for the survey design team was the survey instrument developed by the White House Task Force to Protect Students from Sexual Assault, which was included in the April 2014 [www.notalone.gov](http://www.notalone.gov) report.
- The survey is not proprietary. It will be available for use by other researchers. It will be followed by documentation providing significant background for each of the questions. The aggregate data will be made available later in the year to researchers.

## **Goals**

- The primary goal of the AAU climate survey is to help universities better understand the attitudes and experiences of their undergraduate, graduate, and professional students with

respect to sexual assault and sexual misconduct. University leaders want to make their campuses safe places for students to learn and succeed.

- The data from the individual institutional surveys will help university administrators formulate additional policies and practices intended to reduce sexual assault and sexual misconduct on campus, and further ensure that all reports of sexual assault and sexual misconduct are handled with care, compassion and a commitment to a fair and just review and resolution.
- In addition to the survey's value to participating universities and their students, the aggregate data and analysis will provide useful information to policy makers as they work on possible legislative and administrative initiatives. Researchers will also benefit from the important contribution this survey will make to the body of research on this critical and complex issue.

## **Participation**

- Undergraduate, graduate, and professional students were eligible to take the AAU survey. The overall participation rate among eligible students was 19.3 percent, including 17.4 percent for undergraduates and 23.2 percent for graduate and professional students. Some factors affecting the overall participation rate were differences in gender balance at institutions and incentives for participation. Individual institutional participation rates varied across the types and sizes of institutions participating in the survey.
- 150,072 students participated in the survey, including 92,306 undergraduate students and 57,776 graduate and professional students. The total potential sample size at the 27 institutions was 779,170.
- The survey was anonymous. No personally identifiable information was collected from participating students. Westat obtained a Certificate of Confidentiality issued by the National Institutes of Health to protect the investigators on this study from being forced to tell anyone about a student's participation in the study, even under a subpoena.
- As is common with such surveys, modest material incentives were offered to encourage student participation in the survey, including a drawing and a modest direct incentive, in most cases.

## **ADDITIONAL FINDINGS**

- Rates of sexual assault and misconduct were highest among undergraduate females and those identifying as TGQN (Transgender, Genderqueer or non-conforming, Questioning, Not Listed).
- The risk of the most serious types of sexual assault, due to physical force or incapacitation, decline from freshman to senior year. This decline is not as evident for other types of sexual assault and misconduct.
- Incidents involving use of drugs and alcohol as tactics constituted a significant percentage of assaults and other misconduct.
- When asked what might happen when a student reported an incident of sexual assault or misconduct, about half of respondents said that it was very or extremely likely that the university would conduct a fair investigation. The percentage was lower for those groups most likely to report victimization (i.e. females and those identifying as TGQN). Similar

percentages were evident for opinions about other types of reactions by the university (e.g., officials would take the report seriously; protect the safety of the student; take action against the offender).

- A relatively small percentage of student respondents believed it was very or extremely likely they would experience sexual assault or misconduct. A much larger percentage of student respondents believed sexual assault and misconduct were very or extremely problematic for the college or university.
- About a quarter of the student respondents generally believed they were knowledgeable about the resources available related to sexual assault and misconduct.