

# AAU Campus Climate Survey on Sexual Assault and Misconduct

Executive Summary of Boston University Results

October 2019

*Revised as of October 15, 2019*

## Background and Methodology

Boston University (BU) is committed to fostering a safe environment where all members of the University community can work, learn, and thrive. All forms of sexual misconduct and sexual harassment are violations of BU's policies, whether they happen on or off campus.

To better understand the campus climate, BU participated in the 2019 Association of American Universities (AAU) Campus Climate Survey on Sexual Assault and Misconduct with 32 other AAU member institutions and one non-AAU institution. The online survey included questions to assess student perceptions of campus climate regarding sexual assault and misconduct as well as student understanding of available University resources.

Administered during the spring 2019 semester by Westat, a social science research firm, the survey was emailed to 29,128 BU students. The survey closed in March 2019 with an overall response rate of 13.4%.<sup>1</sup>

The full report of BU's results can be found [here](#). The following is a high-level survey of outcomes in five key areas:

- Bystander Behavior
- Campus Environment
- Resources Related to Misconduct
- Nonconsensual Sexual Contact
- Sexual Harassment, Intimate Partner Violence, and Stalking

The full report further disaggregates the outcomes described here by student status (undergraduate or graduate/professional) and gender (women, men or TGQN) as categorized by Westat.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The data provided in this executive summary is adjusted or weighted to reflect non-responses. Gender, age group, year in school, and race/ethnicity were all considered in the weighting process. With a response rate of 13.4%, the survey sample may not represent the overall student body, and results should be interpreted with some caution.

<sup>2</sup> Students self-identified into eight gender categories provided by the survey. To maintain an adequate sample size in this analysis, students were aggregated into one of three categories: 1) women, 2) men, and 3) trans men or women, genderqueer or nonbinary, questioning, or not listed (TGQN).

## Summary Findings – Bystander Behavior

The survey asked students to reflect on incidents of sexual misconduct they had witnessed while at BU. 22.2%<sup>3</sup> said they had witnessed inappropriate behavior that they believed made others feel uncomfortable or offended; of those, 67.4% took some sort of action in response (including intervening, interrupting, confronting, expressing concern, or seeking help from someone else).

6.1% reported witnessing ongoing sexual comments or behaviors that made them concerned that a fellow student was experiencing sexual harassment; of those, 79.1% took some type of action. Additionally, 12.0% of responding students witnessed situations that they believed could have led to a sexual assault; of those, 72.4% took some kind of action.

62.2% felt it 'very' or 'extremely' likely that campus officials to whom a sexual assault or misconduct was reported would take the report seriously. Just over half (52.1%) of the responding students indicated that it was 'very' or 'extremely' likely an investigation in response to a report of sexual assault or misconduct would be fair.

## Summary Findings – Campus Environment

The survey included questions that asked students to reflect on their overall experience with the BU campus community. 22.0% reported that they feel 'very' or 'extremely' connected to the campus community. Undergraduate women (30.3%) and men (24.0%) were more likely to report feeling 'very' or 'extremely' connected than graduate/professional women (11.7%) and men (17.7%). Among all TGQN responding students, 16.7% reported feeling 'very' or 'extremely' connected to the campus community.

18.5% reported that sexual assault or other misconduct is 'very' or 'extremely' problematic at BU. Undergraduate women (25.0%) and men (17.2%) were more likely to report feeling this way than graduate/professional women (14.9%) and men (9.9%). Of the TGQN responding students, 38.9% perceived sexual assault as 'very' or 'extremely' problematic at BU.

6.8% thought it 'very' or 'extremely' likely they will experience a sexual assault or other misconduct in the future while enrolled at BU. Women undergraduate (12.9%) and graduate/professional (4.4%) students were more likely to report this perception than undergraduate (3.6%) and graduate/professional (1.2%) men. Of the TGQN responding students, 15.2% indicated they consider it 'very' or 'extremely' likely that they will experience a sexual assault in the future while enrolled at BU.

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<sup>3</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all references to results refer to the averages of students responding to the survey, weighted to reflect the total student population.

Several additional questions about campus environment and community were included in the survey. Results include the following:

- 25.9% reported being 'very' or 'extremely' comfortable approaching faculty or staff for advice.
- 33.9% reported that they perceive faculty and staff at BU to be 'very' or 'extremely' concerned about their well-being.
- 23.1% reported that they perceive school officials at BU to be 'very' or 'extremely' concerned about their well-being.

### **Summary Findings – Resources Related to Misconduct**

The survey sought to gauge student knowledge about available resources related to sexual assault and misconduct at BU, including services, policies and procedures, and training and informational sessions. The results suggest that students are generally aware of services and resources provided by BU, including Student Health Services (89.4%), the BU Police Department (84.9%), and the Sexual Assault Response & Prevention Center (SARP) (79.3%). Just 4.7% reported they were not aware of any services or resources provided by BU or the local community. 50.2% of responding students reported they were 'very' or 'extremely' knowledgeable about where to get help at the University if they or a friend were victims of sexual assault or misconduct, and 43.2% reported they were 'very' or 'extremely' knowledgeable about how BU defines sexual assault and other misconduct.

The survey divided the student population into new students (initial enrollment in Academic Year 2018-2019) and returning students for purposes of aggregating results regarding awareness of training materials. 86.1% of new students and 89.7% of returning students reported completing at least one training about sexual assault and other misconduct since arriving at BU. Students recalled receiving training that included material on:

- How sexual assault is defined on campus: 97.0% new; 93.9% returning;
- How to prevent sexual assault: 94.6% new; 94.3% returning;
- Additional training programs on prevention: 70.6% new; 63.8% returning; and
- Where to seek help: 93.8% new; 91.2% returning.

### **Summary Findings – Nonconsensual Sexual Contact**

#### **Nonconsensual Sexual Contact by Physical Force or Inability to Consent**

The survey asked questions to determine the prevalence and characteristics of incidents of nonconsensual sexual contact that occurred as a result of either physical force or the inability to consent or stop what was happening. Undergraduates (23.7% of women and 8.1% of men) reported more of this type of victimization than graduate/professional students (7.4% of women

and 2.1% of men). Among students identifying as TGQN, 14.1% reported being a victim of this type of nonconsensual sexual contact.

4.7% of women reported experiencing penetration by physical force or inability to consent once since entering college and 2.9% reported two or more incidents. 4.6% of women reported experiencing sexual touching by physical force or inability to consent once since entering college and 8.3% reported two or more times. Among victims of nonconsensual sexual conduct involving women, 46.1% of those who experienced penetration as a result of physical force or inability to consent contacted a program or resource, while only 17% of those who experienced sexual touching by physical force or inability to consent contacted a program or resource. Of those women who experienced penetration by physical force or inability to consent that chose not to officially report an incident, 48.7% said they chose not to do so because they thought they could handle the incident themselves; 45.4% said the incident was not serious enough; and 37.3% reported being embarrassed, ashamed, or felt it would be too emotionally difficult. Of those women who experienced sexual touching by physical force or inability to consent, 49.6% of women did not contact a program or resource because they thought they could handle the incident themselves; 63.1% said the incident was not serious enough; and 18.7% reported being embarrassed, ashamed, or felt it would be too emotionally difficult

### **Nonconsensual Sexual Contact by Coercion and Without Active, Ongoing Voluntary Agreement**

The survey included questions about the prevalence of nonconsensual sexual contact as a result of coercion and that occurred without active, ongoing voluntary agreement. 0.4% of responding students reported being victims of penetration or sexual touching involving coercion since entering BU. 6.2% reported incidents of penetration or sexual touching without active, ongoing voluntary agreement since entering BU.

### **Total Experience with Nonconsensual Sexual Contact**

The survey included questions about students' experiences with nonconsensual penetration and sexual touching. Overall, 15.6% of responding students reported experiencing nonconsensual sexual contact since entering BU. Among undergraduate students, 28.9% of women and 9.3% of men reported some type of nonconsensual sexual contact. 10.4% of women and 3.7% of men in the graduate/professional student category reported this type of nonconsensual sexual contact. 22.6% of TGQN responding students reported nonconsensual sexual contact.

## **Summary Findings – Sexual Harassment, Intimate Partner Violence, and Stalking**

The survey also asked students about their experiences with other forms of misconduct, including sexual harassment, intimate partner violence, and stalking. The survey included follow-up questions for responding students who reported experiencing one or more of these behaviors.

## Harassment

Overall, 36.5% of responding students indicated that they experienced at least one type of harassing behavior since starting at BU. The most common experiences reported included hearing inappropriate comments about their or someone else's body, appearance, or sexual activities (28.7%) and hearing insulting or offensive sexual remarks or jokes (24.9%). Women (29.8% undergraduate; 14.2% graduate/professional) reported more harassing incidents than men (10.6% undergraduate; 6.9% graduate/professional). Among TGQN responding students, 41.6% reported experiencing harassing behavior. Overall, the most commonly reported harassers were individuals with whom the students were familiar but not friends (39.4%), friends (34.8%), and classmates (34.2%).

## Intimate Partner Violence

Of the 57.9% of responding students that indicated they were in a partnered relationship since entering BU, 9.0% indicated experiencing some form of intimate partner violence, including controlling behavior by their partner (6.2%), threats of physical harm to them, someone they loved, or him/herself (4.3%), and use of physical force or injury (2.4%). Undergraduates (12.8% of women and 9.8% of men) were more likely to report incidents than graduate/professional students (5.6% of women and 5.5% of men). Among TGQN responding students, 11.4% reported intimate partner violence.

## Stalking

Of all responding students, 14.2% reported experiencing an incident of stalking, with the most frequent incidents including unwanted phone calls, emails, texts, or unwanted messages, pictures, or videos posted online (8.2%) and having someone show up uninvited or waiting for them (7.4%). Undergraduate women who reported being stalked identified the perpetrators of this behavior as a friend (31.1%), someone they recognized but not a friend (27.6%), or a classmate (22.3%).

## The Path Forward

In recent years, BU has taken a number of steps intended to raise awareness of and decrease the incidence of sexual misconduct on campus. These include: (i) establishing SARP; (ii) expanding the Equal Opportunity Office; and (iii) implementing required on-line training for the entire community.

The results of the survey reiterate the need for continued work in this area. Further analysis is needed to fully understand the results, but it is clear that there are several areas where Boston University has room for improvement. Please join us at one of the [panel discussions](#) on October 16 to discuss the survey and begin the conversation about the way forward.

**Note:** Executive summary was amended for clarity on October 15, 2019.