Australian Human Rights Commission

University student sexual assault and sexual harassment survey

Notes on reading institutional-level data

This is a note on reading the institutional-level data from the Australian Human Rights Commission's *National university student survey on sexual assault and sexual harassment* (the National Survey).

The National Survey measured current Australian university student's experiences of sexual assault and sexual harassment in 2015 and 2016, including:

- whether students had been sexually assaulted or sexually harassed at university in 2015 and/or 2016
- where sexual assault and sexual harassment occurred at university
- the perpetrators of sexual assault and sexual harassment
- reporting of sexual assault and sexual harassment, and
- students' recommendations for change.

The findings contained in this report on institutional-level data should be read in the context of the Commission's national report.

Each Australian university has been provided with a report on their own institutional-data. Due to significant differences in response rates at each university, it is not useful to compare individual university results.

(a) The survey instrument

The overall objective of the National Survey was to identify the prevalence, nature and reporting of sexual assault and sexual harassment of Australian university students.

The survey instrument was developed in collaboration with Roy Morgan Research and other experts working in this field in Australia. It also draws from similar surveys conducted in Australia. The survey instrument is included in Appendix 1 of the Commission's national report.

Existing quantitative data and qualitative information about the nature of sexual harassment and sexual assault was drawn on to inform the content and structure of the survey instrument.

The National Survey focussed on sexual assault and sexual harassment which occurred 'in a university setting', including incidents which occurred on the university campus, while travelling to or from university, at an off-campus event organised by or endorsed by the university, at university employment, or, for technology-based

harassment, where some or all of the perpetrators were students, teachers or other people associated with the university.

Although the Commission acknowledges that some locations, in particular public transport to and from university, are not within the control of universities, this information has been included because travel to and from university were considered an important part of students' university experience.

Cognitive testing of the survey instrument was undertaken by Roy Morgan Research in August 2016 with 15 university students.[1] Upon completion of the survey, each respondent of the cognitive testing phase participated in an in-depth interview regarding their understanding and interpretation of the survey questions. Several key issues with the survey instrument were resolved through this process.

(b) Sample design and size

The population of interest for the survey was the Australian university student population aged 18 years and over. A total of 30,930 responses to the survey were received.

The sample was stratified to ensure that the survey responses were representative of the university student population in terms of: gender (male/female), year of study (commencing/continuing), residency (domestic/international) and level of study (undergraduate/postgraduate). This sample design ensured that each university strata was mutually exclusive (i.e. a student could only be selected in one stratum).

The selection of a student was based on a known and equal probability of selection, to be determined by the total population of students within each stratum at each university.

It was anticipated that response rate would be between 10 to 15 %. On that basis the sample drawn for each university was approximately 10,000 (1,500/0.15). For universities with smaller student enrolments, an equal sampling proportion of the university population was drawn.

Each university undertook the strict sampling of their student population and email invitation to the survey following set-up rules provided by Roy Morgan Research.

In total, survey invitations were sent to 319,959 students across the 39 universities via email from September 19, 2016. With a final response from 30,930 students, the overall response rate was 9.7% of issued sample.

[1] *The students were recruited from Roy Morgan Research's database of previous Roy Morgan Single Source participants who were known to be undertaking a university course of study. The Roy Morgan Research Single Source Survey is a face-to-face interview conducted 50 weeks a year with a weekly sample of approximately 1,000 people drawn from a national sample that is proportional to the Australian population in terms of age, gender and location. Respondents provide extensive detail on a broad range of demographic characteristics (including current and past attendance of university), social attitudes and values, their consumption of consumer goods, their finances and, media habits.*

(c) Weighting

Weighting of data was undertaken to account for known biases in the drawn sample.

Weighting targets were based on enrolment data obtained from each of the 39 universities about the proportion of:

- Male/female students
- Commencing/continuing students
- Domestic/International students
- Undergraduate/postgraduate students

Population figures provided by each university were used in the calculation of the weights. The gender data provided by all universities allocates students into 'male' or 'female'. However, the survey allowed respondents to respond to the gender question in ways other than 'male' and 'female', as follows:

- Male
- Female
- Indeterminate or unspecified
- Transgender
- Other
- Prefer not to say

Overall, 442 survey respondents (about 1.4% of total survey respondents) did not answer the gender question or provided a response other than 'male' or 'female'. In order to be able to include these 442 respondents in the weighted data, they were randomly allocated to a temporary category for weighting purposes only.

The random allocation was based on the proportion of respondents in their university who answered either 'male' or 'female' to the gender question in this survey. For example, if ten respondents from a particular university nominated a gender other than male or female or didn't answer the gender question, and the proportion of respondents from their university nominating male or female was 40% and 60% respectively, then four of these ten respondents would be temporarily classified as male for weighting purposes, and six temporarily classified as female for weighting purposes.

It is important to understand that this temporary allocation for weighting purposes did not involve changing anyone's data for reporting or analysis purposes. That is, those who selected a gender other than male or female appear in the data according to their original selection at every question, including the gender question. It is only the weight applied to each respondent that is affected.

It is also important to understand that without a process such as this, these 442 respondents would have been excluded from the weighted data.

(d) Reading and interpreting the data

(i) Rounded numbers

All numbers are rounded to the nearest whole number.

(ii) Statistical reliability of the results

The estimates derived for this study are based on information obtained from a sample survey and are therefore subject to sampling variability. That is, they may differ from results that would be obtained if all university students in Australia aged 18 years or older completed the survey or if the survey was repeated with a different sample of people.

One measure of the likelihood of any difference is the standard error (SE), which shows the extent to which an estimate might vary by chance because only a sample of people were interviewed. For example, and as discussed in more detail later in this report on institutional-level data, in this survey the results estimate that 26% of students were sexually harassed at university in 2016.

Based on a sample of 30,930 respondents, the results of the survey have a standard error of +/- 0.4% at a 95% confidence level. In other words, there is approximately a 95% chance (i.e. 19 chances in 20) that if the survey were repeated, the estimated number of respondents who were sexually harassed in a university setting would fall within the range of 25% and 27%.

(iii) Limitations

This report on institutional-level data refers to ‘percentage of students’: our weighting of this survey results to project the results to the student population was able to adjust for known biases which may occur in the final sample such as age, gender, level of study and residency.

However, weighting cannot account for unknown biases such as likelihood to respond to a survey about sexual harassment. In any survey there is a likelihood that response rates will be higher amongst people who are already engaged with the topic.

When reading this report on institutional-level data, it is important to remember that the survey results, even though weighted appropriately as described, can only reflect the views of those who responded.

(iv) Caveats

The following caveats apply to the National Survey results included in this report on institutional-level data:

1. The survey data has been derived from a sample of the target population who were motivated to respond, and who made an autonomous decision to do so. It may not necessarily be representative of the entire university student population.

2. People who had been sexually assaulted and/or sexually harassed may have been more likely to respond to this survey than those who had not. This may in turn have impacted on the accuracy of the results.

3. People who had been sexually assaulted or sexually harassed may have chosen not to respond to the survey because they felt it would be too difficult or traumatic. This may also have impacted on the accuracy of the results.

An independent analysis of the data was conducted in order to assess whether any 'response bias' existed in relation to the survey, by examining the relationship between university response rates and the extent to which people said they had experienced or witnessed sexual assault or sexual harassment.

'Response bias' can occur where people who had been sexually assaulted or sexually harassed are more likely to respond to the survey than those who had not. Conversely, 'non-response bias' can occur where people who had been sexually assaulted or sexually harassed choose **not** to respond to the survey because they felt it would be too difficult or traumatic. Either of these can impact on the accuracy of the results.

This analysis found that universities with a higher proportion of survey respondents who said they had witnessed sexual harassment at university in 2016 had higher response rates. This indicates that survey respondents who witnessed sexual harassment in 2016 may have been more likely to respond to the National Survey.

An examination of the responses from men and women revealed that for men, there was a positive association between response rates and experiencing or witnessing sexual assault or sexual harassment.

This indicates that men who had experienced or witnessed sexual assault or sexual harassment may have been more likely to complete the survey. Therefore, caution must be taken in relation to our results which are projected to the population of male students. These may be an overestimation of the rates of sexual assault and sexual harassment experienced by male university students.

No such 'response bias' was identified in relation to women and we are therefore more confident in projecting these results to the population of female university students.

(e) What data is included in this report on institutional-level data?

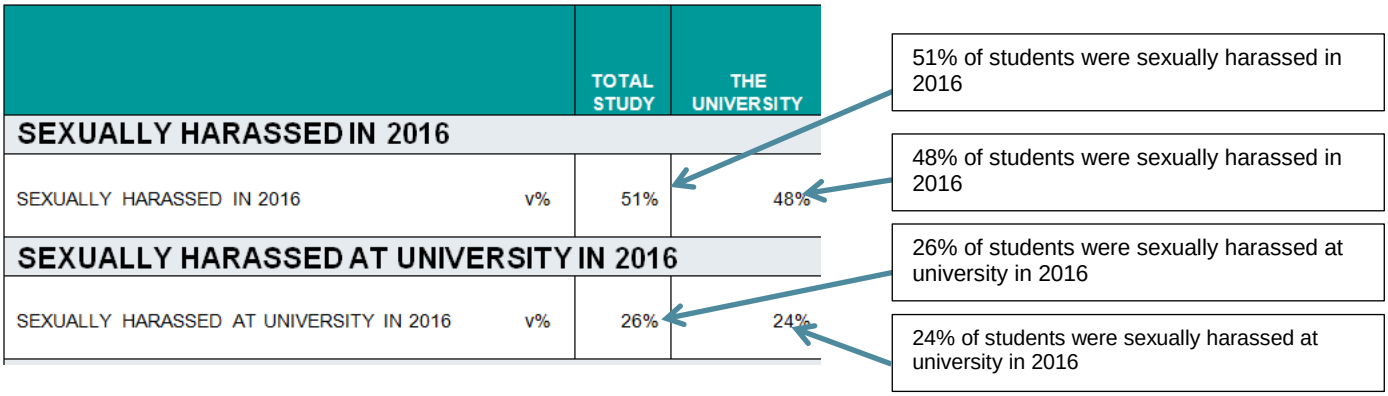
In this report on institutional-level data we have included data at the national level and for a specific university. In some cases, questions were based on sub-sample sizes that were too small to report at a university level and have therefore been removed from this summary report on institutional-level data.

We have taken the approach of not displaying the results for any sub-sample (i.e. column) that includes fewer than 30 respondents in the base. In these cases, the sub-sample sizes were considered too small for results based on those sample sizes to be considered reliable.

In this report on institutional-level data, two asterisks (**) represent where the sample size was too small to display the results. A single hyphen (-) represents where there were no such responses to the question at the given university.

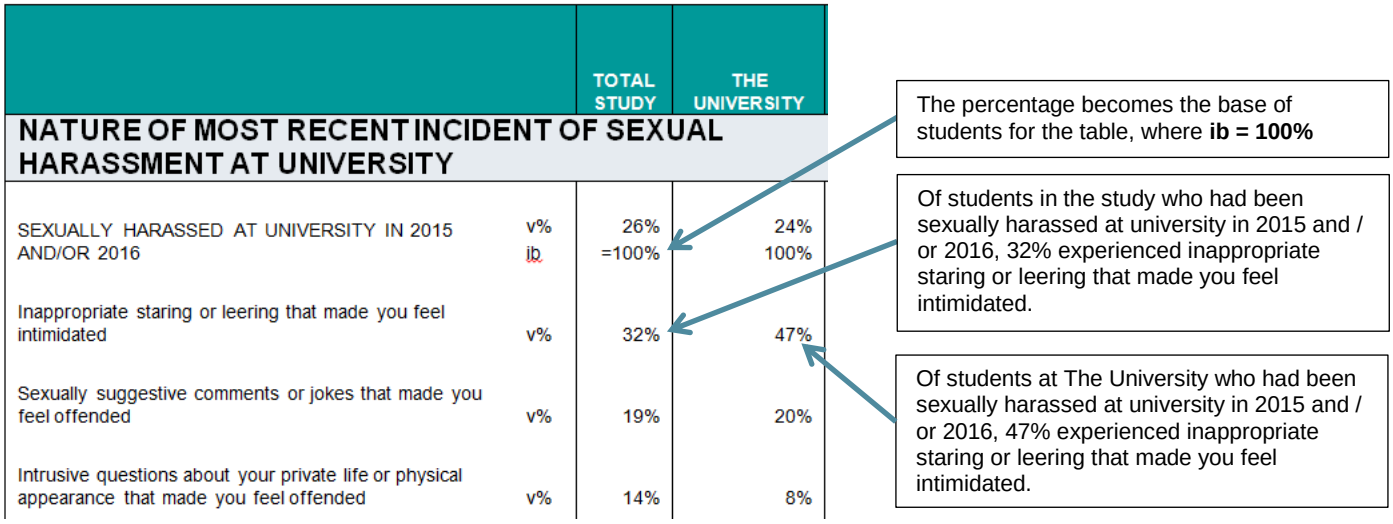
(f) How to read the tables

The data in this report on institutional-level data is displayed as a vertical percentage, that is, as a percentage measure of the column header. For example, the first finding in the below table is interpreted as 'Of total respondents in the study, 51% were sexually harassed in 2016'. The 'Total study' column is included within each of the tables so that a comparison can be made between university figures and the overall incidence.



		TOTAL STUDY	THE UNIVERSITY
SEXUALLY HARASSED IN 2016			
SEXUALLY HARASSED IN 2016	v%	51%	48%
SEXUALLY HARASSED AT UNIVERSITY IN 2016			
SEXUALLY HARASSED AT UNIVERSITY IN 2016	v%	26%	24%

Where questions were asked of a subset of respondents (e.g. only those that said 'Yes' to an earlier question), the data is displayed by using an index, indicated with 'ib'. It is critically important to note that the subsequent percentages represent a percent of the subset, **not the total population of students**. For example in the below table, only respondents who were sexually harassed at university were asked questions regarding the nature of the most recent incident of sexual harassment at university (i.e. 26% of the total).



		TOTAL STUDY	THE UNIVERSITY
NATURE OF MOST RECENT INCIDENT OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT AT UNIVERSITY			
SEXUALLY HARASSED AT UNIVERSITY IN 2015 AND/OR 2016	v%	26%	24%
	ib	=100%	100%
Inappropriate staring or leering that made you feel intimidated	v%	32%	47%
Sexually suggestive comments or jokes that made you feel offended	v%	19%	20%
Intrusive questions about your private life or physical appearance that made you feel offended	v%	14%	8%