

# UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA *SEXUAL VIOLENCE SURVEY SUMMARY*

The University of Manitoba is committed to fostering a work and learning environment that embraces the principles of equity, diversity, and inclusion. Creating a culture in which sexual violence is not tolerated – and where those who do experience it are adequately supported – is an important step toward achieving this goal. While considerable work has been done over the past several years to address concerns about sexual violence, it is evident that a comprehensive sexual violence prevention, education and response strategy would benefit the University. As part of the consultation process to inform development of such a strategy, a survey of all UM students was commissioned to explore their perceptions of sexual violence on campus.

The survey was designed to gain insight into students' attitudes and experiences regarding sexual violence, including the nature of any incidents, their knowledge and perceptions of resources, preferences for receiving information and supports, and beliefs about the safety and values of the University in responding to sexual violence. The intention of the survey was to identify areas of greatest risk, determine gaps in services, and collect information helpful to the development of a comprehensive sexual violence prevention, education, and response strategy.

## Definitions

For survey purposes, the following definitions were used:

*Sexual violence* – Defined as any violence (physical, emotional, or psychological) of a sexual nature.

*Sexual harassment* – Defined as unwanted sexual attention, including physical (e.g., slapping or pinching), verbal (e.g., unwanted sexual comments) and non-verbal conduct (e.g., gestures or posting pictures of a sexual nature).

*Sexual assault* – Defined as any of the following acts without consent/permission:

- Touching in a sexual way;
- Forced kissing or fondling;
- Forced oral, anal or vaginal penetration (rape)

## Who participated in the survey?

An invitation to participate in the *Sexual Violence Survey* was distributed via email to all students of the University of Manitoba in the spring of 2018. Approximately 1500 students responded to the survey, which represents about 5% of the student population. About two-thirds of the respondents identified as female, 30% identified as male, and about 2% expressed another gender identity. While female students are overrepresented, the demographic profile of the respondents is otherwise roughly comparable to that characterizing the overall student

population. *However, it is important to note that because we had a very low participation rate, and the respondents were not randomly selected, we cannot generalize the findings to all students.* In other words, the findings are illustrative of the perceptions and experiences of the students who responded but do not necessarily reflect the perceptions and experiences of the student body as a whole. As a result, we limited our reporting of percentages or proportions since they do not represent actual prevalence data. Despite these limitations, we believe that much important and helpful information was nevertheless gleaned through the survey.

## What did we learn?

### General perceptions

More than 80% of participants reported being happy and feeling safe at the UM. Sexual and gender minority participants reported being less happy, as did participants with mental health disabilities. Male participants felt safer on campus than other participants, while participants at the Bannatyne campus felt less safe than those on the Fort Garry campus.

### University response to crisis situations

Overall, more than two-thirds of participants agreed that UM administrators would handle a crisis situation well. Sexual and gender minority participants were less likely to agree with this statement. Perceptions of support for students going through a difficult time were most favorable among males and first-year participants and least favorable among gender minority and upper-year participants.

### Perceptions of sexual violence risk

Female and gender minority participants were more likely than male participants to perceive a risk of sexual violence on campus. Perceptions of risk of sexual violence were also higher among sexual minority participants, participants with disabilities, upper-year participants, and Black African or Caribbean participants.

### Incidents of sexual violence

*Owing to limitations in the survey sample, reports of incidents should not be viewed as a reliable index of prevalence rates for sexual violence, although the patterns described are more likely to be valid.*

More than half of the participants experienced some form of sexual harassment on or off campus. Female and gender minority participants were twice as likely as male participants to have experienced uncomfortable sexual comments or gestures. Indigenous and Black African or Caribbean participants were the most likely racialized groups to experience sexual harassment.

Almost three-quarters of participants from professional programs<sup>1</sup> experienced sexual harassment. Many participants experienced harassment by multiple sources, with the greatest number committed by people who were neither UM students nor faculty/staff. Less than half of the participants experienced sexual harassment by other students. Older participants and participants who were graduate students were most likely to experience sexual harassment by faculty/staff members.

Almost half of the participants experienced some form of sexual assault prior to attending UM, most often in the form of unwanted touching. Nearly one-third of participants experienced some form of sexual assault while attending UM, again most often in the form of unwanted touching. Female participants, gender minority participants, and male sexual minority participants were considerably more likely to experience sexual assault than heterosexual male participants. Almost 80% of the sexual assaults were committed by somebody who was not known to be a UM student or staff/faculty member. Most assaults occurred off campus at an event not associated with UM (e.g., party, club, social). Almost half of the assaults on campus occurred outdoors on UM property. A combined total of almost 40% of assaults occurred either in student residences or at the campus pub.

More than half of the participants experiencing sexual assault at UM disclosed the incident to a close friend. Almost one-third of the participants, however, did not disclose the incident to anybody, with about 10% not reporting their assault on campus because they did not know how to do so. Other common barriers to disclosing assaults included minimization of the experience, a wish to forget the experience, and a concern that reporting would reduce the energy to meet school and work demands. Participants who experienced an assault involving oral, anal, or vaginal sex were twice as likely to report the incident to a UM staff member than participants who experienced unwanted touching. Incidents committed by a UM student or staff/faculty member were also more likely to be disclosed to UM staff members than assaults committed by people who were unknown or not associated with UM. Despite this, almost half of the participants assaulted by a staff/faculty member indicated that they did not report the assault because they did not think anything would happen if they did so. A smaller proportion of participants assaulted by a staff/faculty member indicated that they did not disclose the incident due to fears of being blamed, negative reactions by others, or retaliation.

### Sexual violence myths and misconceptions

Several survey items covered myths and misconceptions about sexual violence. While the content of these survey items is distasteful and possibly distressing, it was important to explore patterns of endorsement within our campus community. Overall, myths and misconceptions were more strongly endorsed by first-year participants, male participants, and participants who were international students. More than half of the participants agreed with statements suggesting women are to blame for sexual harassment and sexual assault if they are dressed

---

<sup>1</sup> To enhance privacy, participants were not asked to report their faculty or program. Instead, they were asked to simply indicate whether they were in an undergraduate, graduate, professional, or other program.

‘suggestively.’ About half of the male international student participants agreed with the statement that ‘men can get too carried away sexually and force sex on a woman.’ About 40% of the male participants agreed that ‘sexual assault accusations are often used as a way of getting back at men,’ with almost two-thirds of male international student participants endorsing this statement. In contrast to these endorsements, almost three-quarters of all participants strongly disagreed that ‘a woman who is drunk is at least somewhat responsible for being sexually assaulted.’

#### Services for sexual violence at the University

Two-thirds of the participants overall did not know if the University supports for people who experience sexual violence are adequate. Despite this, participants who experienced sexual harassment were much more likely to feel that the services are inadequate, even more so when they experienced harassment by a faculty/staff member. Almost half of the participants who disclosed their experience of sexual assault to a faculty/staff member felt that the services were inadequate. When asked what services were needed at the University, there was strong overall endorsement for mandatory training for staff/faculty on responding to disclosures, awareness training on supports and reporting processes for students, and establishment of a ‘one-stop’ sexual assault centre on campus. Less than half the participants favored mandatory training for students on consent and responding to disclosures.

#### Sexual violence reporting at the University

About 80% of participants overall felt that UM would take a report of sexual violence seriously. However, less than two-thirds of female Indigenous participants agreed with this view. Participants who had experienced or observed sexual violence on campus also had lower rates of agreement that reports of sexual violence would be taken seriously. Participants who disclosed their experiences of sexual harassment or assault to a faculty/staff member held the most negative perceptions of how UM would respond to a report of sexual violence, even more so when a faculty/staff member committed the sexual violence. In line with this, three out of five participants overall indicated that they would fear retaliation when reporting sexual violence. Female participants in professional programs held the most negative perceptions related to reporting sexual violence.

#### Sexual violence prevention

Over two-thirds of the participants agreed that there are things they can do about sexual violence at UM. About half of the participants overall indicated that they would be likely to take a class to learn more about sexual violence, participate in a rally against sexual violence, or join an organization that works to stop sexual violence. Despite this, very few participants reported any involvement in current sexual violence prevention initiatives on campus, including *Consent Culture Workshops* and *Bringing in the Bystander* training. However, even without formal training, participants indicated that they would take steps to help a friend who disclosed a

sexual assault to them, report a student who was sexually harassing others, and confront a student who makes inappropriate sexual comments/gestures.

### Where do we go from here?

Although the survey results are illustrative rather than inclusive of the entire student population, the following observations should be helpful to the Sexual Violence Steering Committee as part of its strategic planning process to address sexual violence on campus:

- Participants hold a favorable perception of the University overall
- Participants have a less favorable perception of the University with respect to how it responds to sexual violence
- Perceptions of sexual violence risk vary across sexual and gender identities as well as racialized identity, age, and disability status
- Sexual harassment occurs frequently on and off campus, with higher levels reported by female and gender minority participants as well as Indigenous and Black African or Caribbean participants
- A large number of participants have experienced some form of sexual assault prior to or while attending the University, mostly in the form of unwanted touching
- Most of the assaults our students experience are committed by people who are not part of the University community and occur off campus at events not associated with the University
- Many of the assaults on campus occur outdoors, but incidents also occur in student residences and the campus pub
- Myths about sexual violence are more likely to be endorsed by male participants and international student participants
- Participants are not aware of the sexual violence supports and resources on campus
- Participants are not aware of the sexual violence reporting process
- Most participants who experience sexual assault do not report this to the University
- Participants who report sexual assaults to the University often have negative experiences
- Participants fear a range of negative consequences if they report sexual violence on campus, particularly if the incident was committed by a staff/faculty member
- Participants are motivated to take steps to prevent sexual violence
- Targeted educational programming and supports are necessary to respond to the needs of specific groups on campus