

University of Mary Washington 2018 Campus Climate Survey: Perceptions, Attitudes, and Prevalence of Interpersonal Violence

A Summary and Comparison to 2016 Survey Results

Britnae A. Purdy, MA
University of Mary Washington

Purpose: This study marks the second in a series on biennial campus climate surveys of University of Mary Washington students. This survey is meant to capture perceptions, attitudes, and prevalence of interpersonal violence, in particular sexual and gender-based violence, affecting students. The findings of these ongoing studies will inform prevention, intervention, and response efforts on campus.

Methods: The University utilized a modified version of the Administrator-Researcher Campus Climate Collaborative (ARC3) survey, sent to all undergraduate, graduate, part-time and full-time students enrolled as of March 2018.

Results: Overall, 81% of respondents indicated feeling safe on campus. Perceptions of the severity of sexual violence is split, with 31% indicating that sexual violence was not a problem on campus, 29% reporting that it is a problem, and 40% neutral on the subject. Forty-three percent of respondents reported that they had experienced some form of sexual or gender-based violence, harassment, or prohibited sexual conduct. Of students who reported experiencing violence or harassment while enrolled, 76% said that UMW created an environment where they felt safe to discuss their experiences, 60% said that they felt supported either through formal or informal resources, and 54% said that UMW met their needs for support and accommodations.

Conclusion: The findings of this survey indicate that rates of interpersonal violence at the University of Mary Washington are on par with national averages. The majority of respondents felt happy and safe during their time at UMW and reported a low tolerance level for harassment and moderate rates of bystander intervention. The percent of respondents who reported they had experienced some form of sexual or gender-based violence while enrolled decreased by 13% from the 2016 report. Compared with the 2016 survey, there was a slight increase in students' perception of the University's ability or inclination to appropriately handle cases of interpersonal violence or address its contributing factors. Thus, these results provide some promising indicators for success in decreasing gender-based violence on campus as well as highlight areas for improvement on part of the University.

Abstract

Implications and Contribution

These findings show that the University can improve in garnering student trust and increase education and awareness efforts on sexual and gender-based violence and harassment. This survey, conducted every two years, will be a vital tool to track progress in changing student perceptions about safety on campus, ability of the University to appropriately respond to complaints, and the prevalence of gender-based violence on campus.

Introduction

National studies have found that 81% of women and 43% of men in the United States have experienced some form of sexual or gender-based harassment or assault across their lifetime [1]. This includes verbal sexual harassment (77% of women, 34% of men), unwanted sexual touching (51% of women; 17% of men), stalking (34% of women, 12% of men), and sexual assault (27% of women; 7% of men) [1]. One in five women and one in sixteen men are sexually assaulted while in college, and a traditional college-aged student is at higher risk of gender-based violence than the wider population, with 37.4% of adult-aged female rape victims reporting that they were first assaulted between 18 and 24 years old [2][3]. In general, a vast majority of these incidents (90%) are never reported to authorities [4]. The University of Mary Washington is committed to taking a stand against all forms of interpersonal violence as well as providing support, resources, education, and preventative awareness to our campus community. UMW understands that sexual and gender-based violence can greatly impede a student's opportunities for

academic and personal success; as such, UMW is committed to reducing risk and enhancing resources on campus for all of our students. This study is the second in a series of biennial campus climate surveys of University of Mary Washington students. This survey is meant to capture perceptions, attitudes, and prevalence of interpersonal violence among students. The findings of these ongoing studies will inform prevention, intervention, and response efforts on campus.

Methods

The University utilized a modified version of the Administrator-Researcher Campus Climate Collaborative (ARC3) survey, sent via email to all 4,808 undergraduate, graduate, part-time and full-time students enrolled as of March 2018. The raffling of incentives, including an Apple Watch and University bookstore merchandise, was used to encourage participation. Due to the sensitive nature of this survey, all questions were optional, and students were allowed to skip questions they did not wish to answer. If a student provided five or more responses within

Module 1 of the survey, they were included in the final analysis. The survey remained open for a period of five weeks, after which responses were recorded and data was analyzed. To reduce risk of response bias and encourage greater participation, responses were kept strictly anonymous and access to responses were limited to the principle investigator and editors.

Results

A total of 866 students were included in the survey, indicating an 18% participation rate. This represents a 5% increase in participation from 2016, in which 590 of the University's 4,376 students participated (13%).

Safety on Campus

Overall, 81% of students indicated feeling safe on campus, showing little change from the 2016 survey (82%). A majority of students responded that they would both re-attend (70%) and recommend UMW to a friend (82%). Perceptions of the problem of sexual violence on campus was split among students, with 31% indicating that sexual violence is not a problem on campus, 29% reporting that it is a problem, and 40% neutral on the subject. When compared to 2016 results, more students indicated that they felt neutral on the subject (34% in 2016).

Broken down by type of violence, 77% of students responded that they felt safe from dating violence (80% in 2016), 69% felt safe from sexual harassment (76% in 2016), 72% felt safe from sexual violence (76% in 2016), and 67% felt safe from stalking (69% in 2016). These numbers show a slight decrease in perceptions of safety ranging from -1% to -7%. In both the 2016 and 2018 surveys, the vast majority (92%) of respondents indicated safe and healthy perceptions of their friends' attitudes regarding a variety of interpersonal behaviors, such as "my friends tell me it is alright to physically force a person to have sex under certain circumstances" (99% disagree or strongly disagree) and "my friends approve of using physical force, such as hitting or beating, to resolve conflicts with dates" (99% disagree or strongly disagree).

Bystander Intervention

Between 33 – 56% of respondents indicated that they participated in bystander intervention "at least most of the time" when witnessing a variety of events, including asking someone who was upset at a party if they needed help (56%; 52% in 2016), talking with the friends of a drunk person at a party to make sure they got home alright (55%; 49% in 2016), walking home a friend who had had too much to drink (51%; 45% in 2016), intervening if they witnessed a friend verbally (50%) or physically (45%) abusing another person (45% and 46% in 2016, respectively), speaking out against sexist jokes (38%; 32% in 2016), or trying to distract someone who was attempting to take a drunk person to another room or trying to get them to do something sexual (33%; 30% in 2016). With the exception of intervening when a friend was physically abusing another person, which had a similar percentage in 2016, each category of

bystander intervention increased between +3% to +6%, with the greatest increase in the number of students willing to speak up against sexist jokes.

Prevalence

Forty-three percent of all respondents reported that they had experienced some form of gender-based violence, harassment, or prohibited sexual conduct, a decrease from the 2016 survey where 56% percent reported that they had experienced some form of gender-based violence, harassment, or prohibited sexual conduct. Fourteen percent of all students reported that they had experienced some form of sexual/gender harassment as a student, a decrease from 19% in 2016. Other reported forms of prohibited conduct included experiencing sexual assault as a student (10% in both 2016 and 2018), experiencing stalking (7% in 2018; 8% in 2016), rape (4% in 2018; 5% in 2016), sexual exploitation (4% in 2018; 5% in 2016), retaliation (2% in 2018; 5% in 2016) and dating violence (3% in 2018; 4% in 2016).

Perceived Response of the University

A majority of students indicated that they believed the University would respond appropriately in a variety of ways to a report of sexual misconduct. Eighty percent felt their privacy would be maintained (76% in 2016) and 74% felt that their report would be taken seriously (71% in 2016). However, 17% of students believed that UMW would not address factors that led to the prohibited sexual conduct (20% in 2016), 14% did not believe the University would provide accommodations for the person reporting misconduct (16% in 2016), 13% believed it would be hard for UMW to support the person making the report (16% in 2016), and 12% thought the university might not handle the situation fairly (13% in 2016). These responses indicate a modest improvement of between 1-4% from 2016 responses.

Response and Services

In considering from whom a respondent would seek help after experiencing a *hypothetical* incident of sexual misconduct, 71% of respondents indicated they would report to Campus Police, down from 79% in 2016. The next four most-indicated resources were the Office of Title IX (59%; up from 47% in 2016), the Talley Center for Counseling Services (52%; up from 46% in 2016), Mary Washington Hospital (41%; not asked in 2016), and Student Health Center (34%, down from 40% in 2016).

Of respondents who indicated that they *had* experienced a form of interpersonal violence while enrolled, only 8% reported the incident to Campus Police (up from 6% in 2016), 8% to the Office of Title IX, (not asked in 2016), 18% to an on-campus counselor/therapist (up from 16% in 2016), 2% to the Student Health Center (down from 3% in 2016) and 7% to a doctor or nurse (up from 5% in 2016). The majority of students who experienced interpersonal violence told a close friend (84%) or roommate (50%) about the experience; these numbers are nearly identical to 2016 numbers (85% told a close friend, 51% told a roommate). Overall, 42% of survivors indicated that they had

reported or told someone, whether a friend, authority figure, or resource, about their experience prior to participation in this survey, up from 33% in 2016.

Of students who reported experiencing violence while enrolled, 76% said the University created an environment where they felt safe to discuss their experiences (up from 70% in 2016), 60% said that they felt supported either through formal or informal resources (down from 64% in 2016), and 54% said that the University met their needs for support and accommodation (53% in 2016).

Discussion

For a problem as multi-faceted as interpersonal and sexual violence, it is not realistic to expect dramatic changes in perception or experience over a two-year period. However, this second campus climate survey points to many hopeful variables. Foremost, the fact that an additional 5% of students were willing to dedicate their time to this extensive survey indicates an increased awareness and willingness to engage in conversation surrounding these issues.

Further, compared to 2016, incidents of gender-based violence, harassment, and prohibited sexual conduct are down (43%, compared to 56% in 2016), while the percentage of reporting or telling someone about their experience increased. Students are indicating a greater willingness to share their experiences, with 42% indicating that they reported or told someone about their experience involving gender-based violence prior to this survey, up from 33% in 2016. Rates of bystander intervention increased slightly from 2016 with more students indicating they were willing to intervene in potentially risky scenarios. Finally, the results indicate that students are expressing a greater awareness of and trust in institutional services such as the Talley Center for Counseling Services and the Office of Title IX.

The positive changes in these numbers, could be, in part, due to an increase in educational and awareness programs and bystander intervention training over the last two years as a result of the grants from the Office on Violence Against Women and Futures Without Violence, as well as the establishment of the Coordinated Community Response Team and the creation of and additional resources dedicated to the Office of Title IX.

It is difficult to draw definitive conclusions from these results given a multitude of factors. As the participation rate increased from the 2016 survey, these numbers may be a more accurate

representation of the student body as a whole, though there remains a potential for selection bias. It is also hard to quantify the effects that the “#MeToo” movement, which started spreading virally in October of 2017, may have had on students’ willingness to participate, discuss, and identify their own experiences. This increased public discourse around gender-based violence may have contributed to this survey’s findings that, although incident rates decreased, the percentage of students indicating that they did not *feel* safe from a variety of sexual and gender-based violence or harassment increased.

Conclusion

These findings show that the University should continue to improve efforts to garner student trust and reduce barriers in reporting. The University should increase education and awareness initiatives on campus, including more effective bystander intervention training and education regarding resources the University can provide to survivors of interpersonal violence. This survey provides some promising indicators for success in decreasing gender-based violence on campus as well as highlights areas for improvement on the part of the University. However, the greatest value of these survey results may remain to be seen through additional surveys that will provide data for a cross-comparative analysis across time.

References

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