

HARVARD UNIVERSITY



September 21, 2015

Dear President Faust,

I am writing on behalf of the Task Force on the Prevention of Sexual Assault to convey to you preliminary results from the sexual-conduct survey distributed to every degree-seeking student at Harvard last spring. Let me begin with the most fundamental point: The results underscore the existence of a serious and widespread problem that profoundly violates the values and undermines the educational goals of this University. As a community, we must redouble our efforts to address this problem with seriousness and persistence so that all Harvard students can pursue their studies in an environment free from sexual assault and other forms of sexual misconduct.

When you established the Task Force in 2014, you charged us to recommend preventive interventions that could significantly reduce the incidence of sexual assault at Harvard. In addition, you asked that we recommend ways to improve support for those who had experienced sexual assault. To develop such recommendations, it was critical for us to gain a far deeper understanding of the scope and nature of the problem at Harvard.

We took a three-pronged approach to gathering the information we needed. In the fall of last year we began comprehensive efforts to understand the experiences and views of students across all of Harvard's Schools, conducting 52 outreach sessions and dozens of individual discussions with students across the University. Secondly, we reviewed the existing research literature to identify well-designed and well-conducted studies of the incidence and risk factors for sexual assault within educational institutions. Finally, we sought to undertake a survey of all of our students. We quickly arrived at the view that a survey would be most valuable if we could collaborate in its design and implementation with peer universities so long as the survey questions remained well-suited to the Harvard context. As a result, we played a lead role in efforts by the Association of American Universities (AAU) to develop the survey that was administered in the spring of 2015 at Harvard and 26 other colleges and universities.¹ Our ability to compare Harvard's findings with those of other universities is extremely important, giving us confidence that our results are meaningful, permitting us to place our results in a broader context, and

¹ The 26 other institutions are: Brown University; California Institute of Technology; Case Western Reserve University; Columbia University; Cornell University; Dartmouth College; Iowa State University; Michigan State University; Ohio State University; Purdue University; Texas A&M University; University of Arizona; University of Florida; University of Michigan; University of Minnesota, Twin Cities; University of Missouri-Columbia; University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; University of Oregon; University of Pennsylvania; University of Pittsburgh; University of Southern California; University of Texas at Austin; University of Virginia; University of Wisconsin-Madison; Washington University in St. Louis; Yale University.

ultimately facilitating our ability to learn from other institutions about promising interventions aimed at decreasing the incidence of sexual assault and improving the reporting of assaults when they occur.

Harvard's survey was conducted from April 12 through May 2, 2015. As part of our commitment to understanding the experiences of our students, we engaged in a broad campaign to encourage high participation rates so that as many voices as possible were heard. Ultimately, 53.2 percent of the eligible Harvard students across all the Schools in the University completed the survey, which was the highest rate of any college or university that participated. The response rate was higher for females (58.3 percent) than males (48.5 percent), and higher for undergraduates (57.4 percent) than graduate and professional School students (51 percent). The highest response rate was among female undergraduates (62.8 percent). The comparable response rates across the 27 AAU institutions ranged from 7 percent to 53 percent, with an average response rate of 19.3 percent.

Westat, the research firm retained by the AAU, has now sent us two reports. The first report [aggregates results from all 27 institutions](#); the AAU is releasing this report to the public later today. It vividly demonstrates that sexual assault and other forms of sexual misconduct are profound problems that reach across institutions of higher education. The second report [focuses exclusively on the results of the Harvard survey](#). This report describes the Harvard results and includes a copy of the survey instrument and many pages of summary tables. The Task Force recommends that these documents be made public in their entirety. We think it important for members of our community to seriously engage with this extensive report and related material documenting the endemic nature of sexual assault at Harvard. The survey results have deepened our understanding of the situation and yield the inescapable conclusion that we as a community have a great deal to do if we are to significantly decrease the incidence of sexual assault on our campus. Our goal as a task force is to take what we have learned from our outreach efforts, our research, and the survey, and build on the strengths of the Harvard community to create broad sustainable change.

The following are among the most important points to emerge from the Task Force's initial review of the data:

- *The incidence of nonconsensual sexual contact by physical force or incapacitation affecting Harvard students is unacceptable and requires concerted action from the entire community.*
- *We need to better understand the experiences of the BGLTQ community at Harvard and to work in partnership to address risk factors for sexual assault that may be relatively specific to that community.*
- *Alcohol use emerges as a potent risk factor for sexual assault. Given the longstanding difficulty on this and other university campuses to decrease drinking, we must act now to find ways to minimize the harms associated with alcohol use.*
- *The survey shows a relationship between social spaces and sexual assault that must be better understood and then effectively addressed.*
- *The University should engender a culture in which positive bystander interventions become the norm, instead of the exception.*

- *Too many students are unaware of resources available to them in case of sexual assault, and report a lack of confidence that the University will respond to and support them when incidents are reported.*

Review of Survey Findings:

Prevalence of Nonconsensual Sexual Contact

The survey asked Harvard degree students to report various forms of sexual misconduct that they had experienced while enrolled at the University, regardless of where and when the conduct occurred and whether or not the perpetrator was a member of the Harvard community. The Westat report speaks powerfully about the scope of nonconsensual sexual contact² at Harvard, whether involving physical force, incapacitation or both. These results underscore the need for our entire community to make a concerted, comprehensive, and persistent effort to put an end to the terribly damaging, but all-too-common, behaviors documented in the data that follows and in the reports.

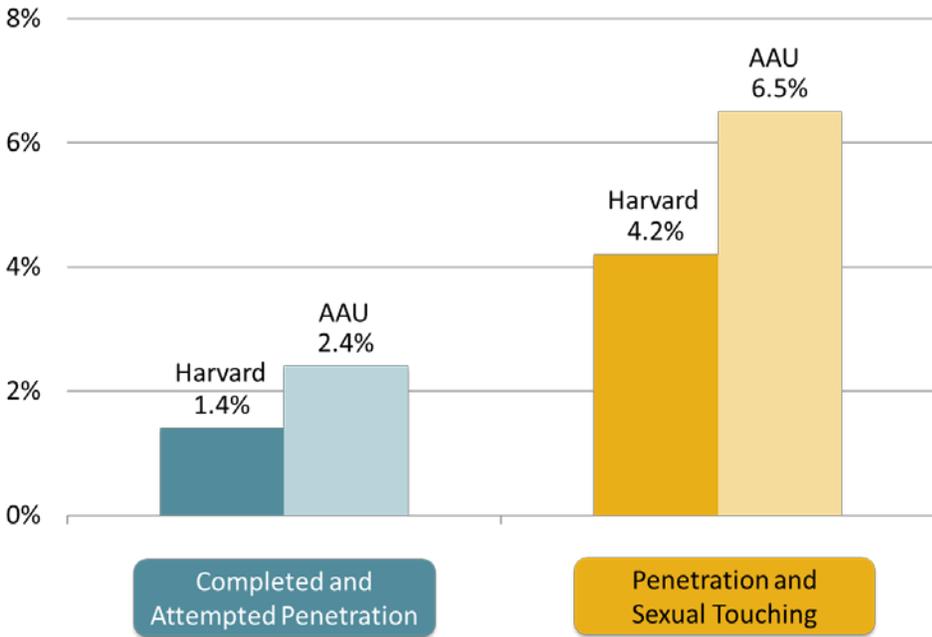
To begin to understand the prevalence³ of nonconsensual sexual contact at Harvard, we focus first on respondents reporting an incident within the current year.⁴

² To be consistent with the language used in the Westat reports, we will use the phrase “nonconsensual sexual contact” throughout this letter. It encompasses three forms of nonconsensual conduct involving the use of force, incapacitation, or both: penetration, attempted penetration, and sexual touching.

³ Valid interpretation of prevalence is highly dependent on using comparable definitions. Respondents could report more than one incident, and incidents can be categorized in more than one way, or take place in different time frames. For example, some prevalence definitions in previous studies have excluded attempted penetration, while others have included it, making comparisons of the two challenging and inexact. Similarly, in our view, it does not make sense to compare prevalence rates with one group of students who have had much more time on campus within which to experience an incident of sexual misconduct, such as a graduate student at the end of a six-year Ph.D. program, with those of other students who have had far less time on campus within which to experience an incident, such as freshmen with less than one year in college.

⁴ Because the survey was conducted in the spring of 2015, “current year” as used in this letter encompasses the time period from the beginning of the 2014-15 academic year until the completion of the survey by the student.

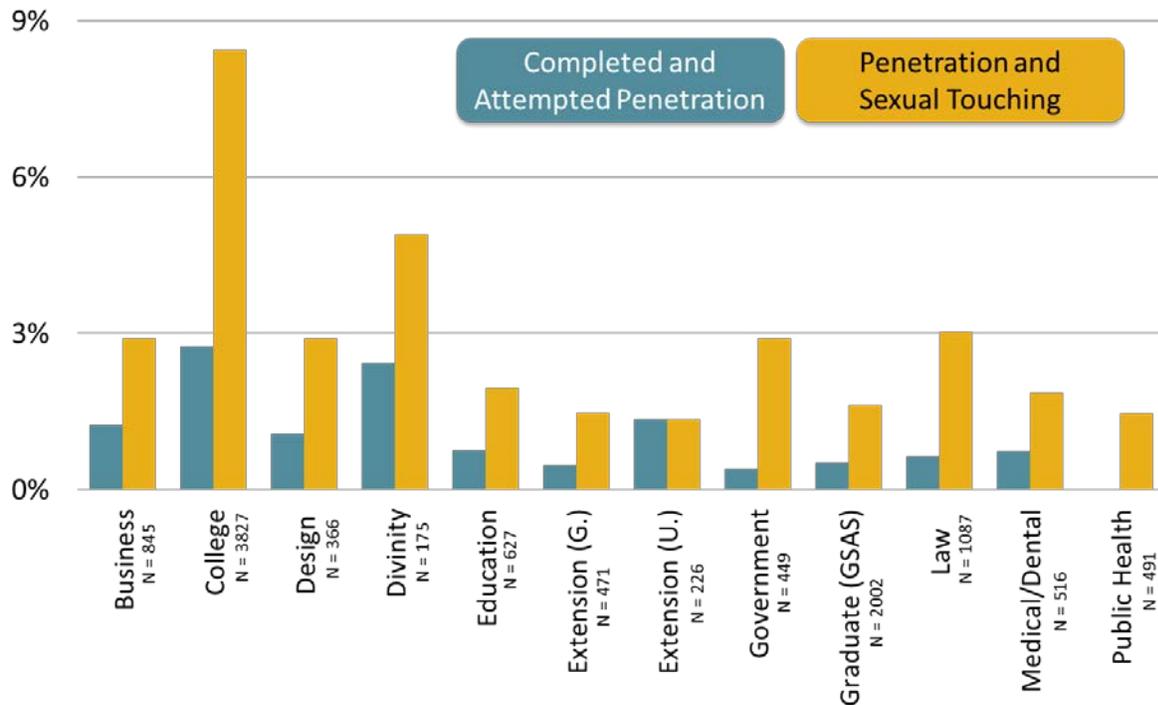
Figure 1. Percent of all students reporting nonconsensual sexual contact involving physical force or incapacitation in the current year.



Across all of Harvard’s Schools and subpopulations, 1.4 percent of students report a nonconsensual completed or attempted penetration in the current year. Combining penetration incidents with incidents of sexual touching (and backing out multiple incidents),⁵ provides an estimate of nonconsensual sexual contact: 4.2 percent of Harvard students report experiencing at least one such incident within the current year (See Figure 1, and Harvard Westat report Tables 3.1a-3.1d, AAU Westat report Tables 3.1a-3.1d).

⁵ Percentages are at the person-level, not the incident-level, so though some respondents report multiple incidents, they are counted only once. The survey instrument asked: “When did this incident (of this type) occur?” For Figures referencing “current year,” respondents answered that question “since the beginning of the fall 2014 term.”

Figure 2. Percent of Harvard students reporting nonconsensual sexual contact involving physical force or incapacitation in the current year by Harvard School.



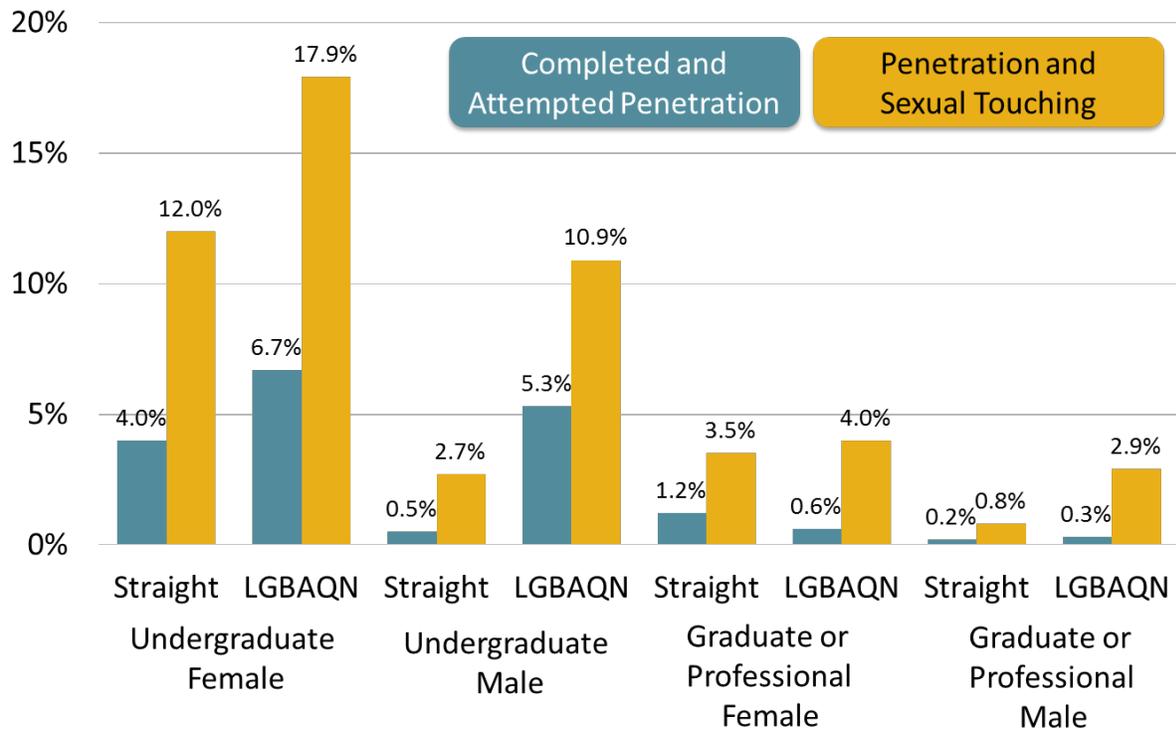
Prevalence rates are higher in the College than in the graduate and professional Schools (Figure 2). The only statistically significant difference in prevalence rates is between the College and the other Schools. Due to small numbers, the graduate and professional School prevalence rates are not significantly statistically different from one another.

Females have a higher prevalence than males, undergraduates higher than graduates, and students self-identifying their sexual orientation as LGBAQN⁶ higher than those self-identifying as “heterosexual or straight.” These general patterns of demographic prevalence rates are consistent with AAU-wide averages, as outlined in the AAU Westat report. The incidence of nonconsensual sexual contact experienced by members of the LGBAQN community at Harvard is not just higher but markedly higher, across all genders and student status, than the heterosexual population. This result is consistent with other studies, both at Harvard and elsewhere. It underscores the need for the University to work with the LGBAQN community and the Schools to obtain a full understanding of the realities of the LGBAQN student experiences on our campus. The Task Force will ask whether there are factors affecting these students that warrant special attention as we consider new approaches to the problem of sexual

⁶ LGBAQN includes response categories from the sexual orientation question on the survey: Lesbian or Gay, Bisexual, Asexual, Questioning, and Not Listed. Sexual orientations that were not the response category “Heterosexual or Straight” were combined to form the LGBAQN subpopulation given the relatively small numbers of some of these respondent types and our wish to reflect all self-identified orientations in the figures. LGBAQN respondents represent about 12 percent of the total Harvard student population (Gay/Lesbian = 5.8 percent). Respondents who chose “Decline to state” are excluded from Figure 3.

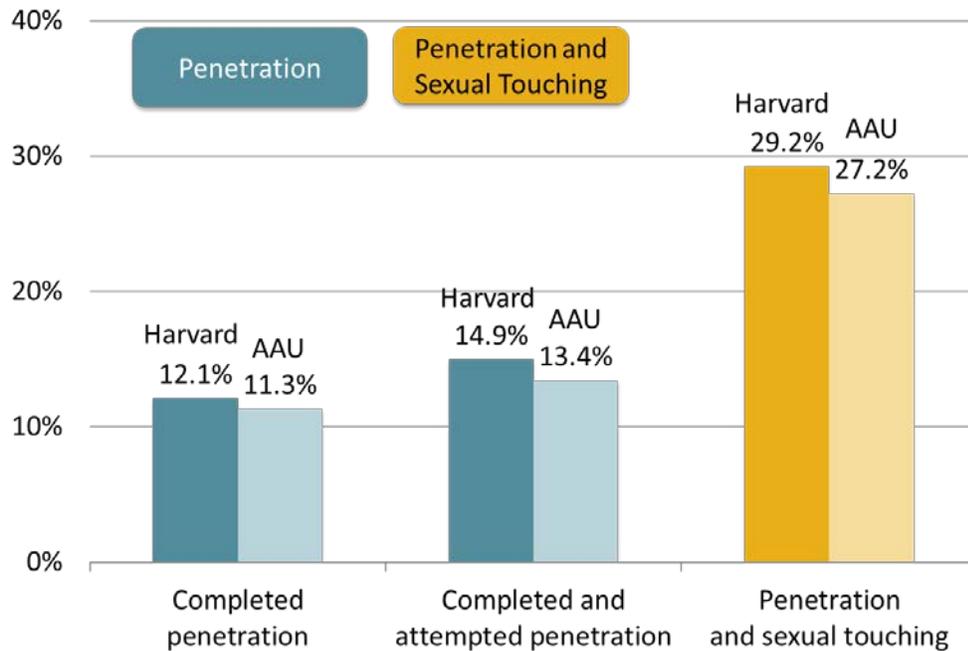
misconduct. In doing so, we expect to draw upon the wisdom and experience of the College’s Office of BGLTQ Student Life as well as engaging the LGBQAN student communities within the graduate Schools to build on educational, outreach and other activities.

Figure 3. Percent of Harvard students reporting nonconsensual sexual contact involving physical force or incapacitation in the current year by gender, undergraduate/graduate affiliation, and sexual orientation.



Female undergraduates also have relatively high prevalence rates. We change our frame of reference to examine this group in greater detail. In addition to current year, we have looked at incidents experienced by seniors since entering college — that is, the cumulative experiences of undergraduates who are nearing the completion of their studies.

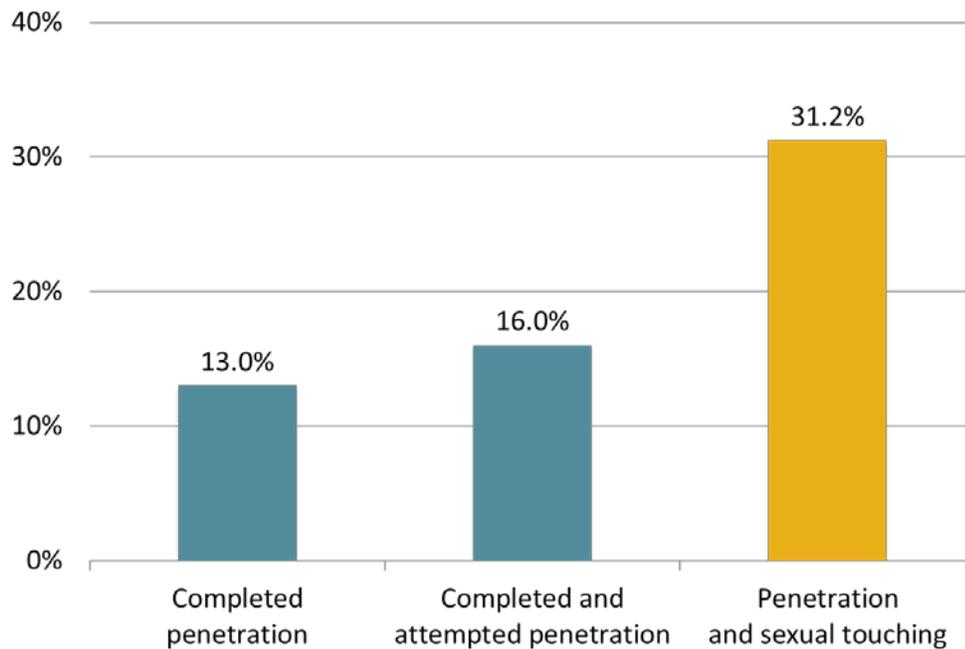
Figure 4. Percent of female undergraduate seniors reporting nonconsensual sexual contact involving physical force or incapacitation since entering college.



Among female seniors, 12.1 percent report experiencing nonconsensual completed penetration during their time at Harvard. When attempted penetrations are combined with completed penetrations (and multiple incidents backed out), that rises to 14.9 percent. The Harvard Westat report notes that of the incidents that involved physical force, about half were completed and half were attempted (p. 14). When sexual touching is added to the penetration incidents (again, adjusting for double counting), the overall prevalence rate of nonconsensual sexual contact is 29.2 percent. (See Figure 4, and Harvard Westat report Table 3.2, AAU Westat report Table 4.8.) Harvard’s prevalence rates are generally in line with the average of the AAU private schools in the study (e.g., the AAU private school average prevalence rate for penetration and sexual touching reported by seniors since entering college is 31.0 percent).

Westat has combined all students seeking undergraduate degrees, regardless of internal institutional organizational structure. In our case, this means that the undergraduate averages include students enrolled in either Harvard College or the Harvard Division of Continuing Education (DCE). The prevalence rates in Figure 4 are those used in the Harvard Westat report and they are the most comparable to AAU averages, since the same methodology was used at other institutions that also have extension school undergraduates. We know, however, that DCE undergraduates are older and less likely to live on campus than our Harvard College population, meaning that their experiences are not typical of the Harvard College population.

Figure 5. Percent of female Harvard College seniors reporting nonconsensual sexual contact involving physical force or incapacitation since entering college.



If DCE undergraduates are removed, the prevalence rates increase. Among female survey respondents reporting an incident of nonconsensual penetration, both by force and incapacitation, the vast majority of perpetrators are reported to be male (98.0 percent and 99.2 percent, respectively). This is also true of nonconsensual sexual touching reported by females (99.3 percent). Males reporting nonconsensual sexual touching identify female perpetrators 44.5 percent of the time for forcible touching and 74.4 percent for incapacitation. (Harvard Westat report Tables 3.6a-3.6c.)

We have only begun to examine prevalence rates of other forms of sexual misconduct included in the survey — harassment, stalking, and intimate partner violence.

Sexual harassment⁷ is reported frequently among students of all degree levels and genders. Among Harvard undergraduate females, 72.7 percent report some kind of harassment while at Harvard (AAU average: 61.9 percent). For all groups, other students are the most common perpetrators of harassment. Among the 49.6 percent of female graduate and professional School students reporting harassment, 21.8 percent report that the harassment came from a faculty member (AAU average: 22.4 percent). (Harvard Westat report Table 5.1a, AAU Westat report Table 5.1a.)

⁷ Sexual harassment was broadly defined in the survey situations as involving sexual comments or conduct that “interfered with [the student’s] academic or professional performance, limited [the student’s] ability to participate in an academic program, or created an intimidating, hostile or offensive social, academic or work environment.”

Risk Factors

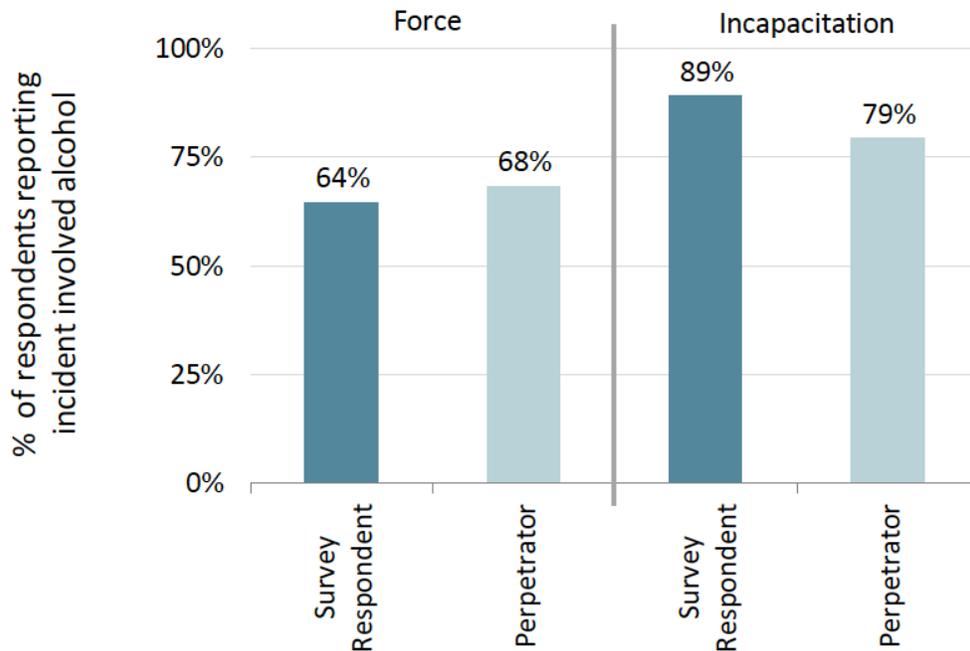
Creating successful interventions aimed at preventing sexual assault requires us to examine those factors that increase the risk of sexual assault with a view to changing them or managing their effects. Risk appears to be increased by certain social and work spaces, by social and cultural factors, and by alcohol use.

If a student reported having experienced sexual assault, a series of detailed questions about that incident followed. Two factors stand out from our preliminary analysis of the survey data: alcohol consumption and incident location.

Across all Harvard students who reported incidents of completed or attempted penetration, high percentages of respondents indicate that the incident(s) involved alcohol consumption by both the person who experienced the assault and the perpetrator.⁸ As expected, that percentage is higher if the incident was characterized by the survey respondent as due to incapacitation. The percentages of incidents involving alcohol is similar across graduate and undergraduate students, and are generally similar to AAU-wide averages (see Figure 6, and Harvard Westat Report Tables 3.7a-3.7c, AAU Westat report p.14). These data indicate that alcohol use by all members of the student community contributes significantly to the problem of nonconsensual sexual contact. We say this without suggesting that a student who has consumed alcohol is in any way at fault if he or she is subsequently a target of such contact. Given, however, that the percentage of assaults involving alcohol is so high, prevention efforts are not likely to succeed if we do not, as part of our final report, suggest approaches to decreasing the harm associated with student drinking.

⁸ The survey instrument asked about alcohol use in two questions: "Just prior to the incident, was the person/any of the persons who did this to you drinking alcohol?" and "Just prior to the incident were you drinking alcohol? Keep in mind that you are in no way responsible for what occurred, even if you had been drinking."

Figure 6. Percent of Harvard students reporting an incident of nonconsensual completed or attempted penetration who reported that it involved alcohol drinking.

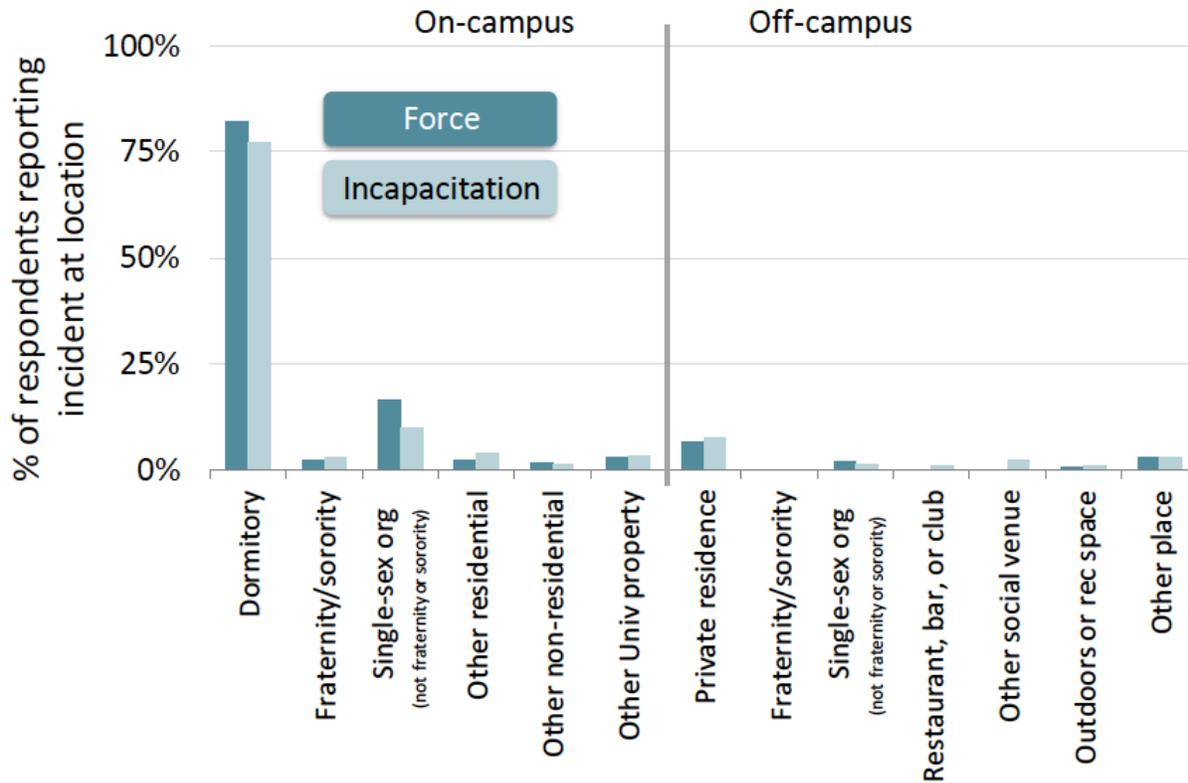


Consistent with a residential campus such as at Harvard College, a high percentage of incidents of attempted or completed penetration by both force and incapacitation take place on campus, and in particular in dormitories.⁹ The next-most-frequently reported location is “single-sex organizations that are not fraternities or sororities,” accounting for at least 15 percent of these incidents (see Figure 7, Harvard Westat Report Tables 3.5a-3.5c).

Because the survey was constructed to be effective across the range of participating institutions, its questions about the physical locations involved in the sequence leading to nonconsensual sexual contact were necessarily general. For example, the survey focused on the physical locations where nonconsensual sexual contact was completed; it did not ask where the incidents originated, a relevant factor if prevention efforts are to be successful. We therefore recommend that the Task Force work with the Schools, and especially the College, to gain more concrete information about the role of physical spaces, including the Houses and recognized and unrecognized social organizations, in this area.

⁹ To determine location, the survey instrument employed a branching line of questioning. First “Did this incident occur on campus or on university affiliated off-campus property?” If “Yes,” students were asked where the incident occurred, with a series of response categories; if “No,” where the incident occurred, again with a series of response categories. Some of the response categories for the “on campus” branch were the same for the “off campus” branch of the question, while others differed, as shown in Figure 7.

Figure 7. Location of incidents of nonconsensual completed and attempted penetration reported by Harvard College females.



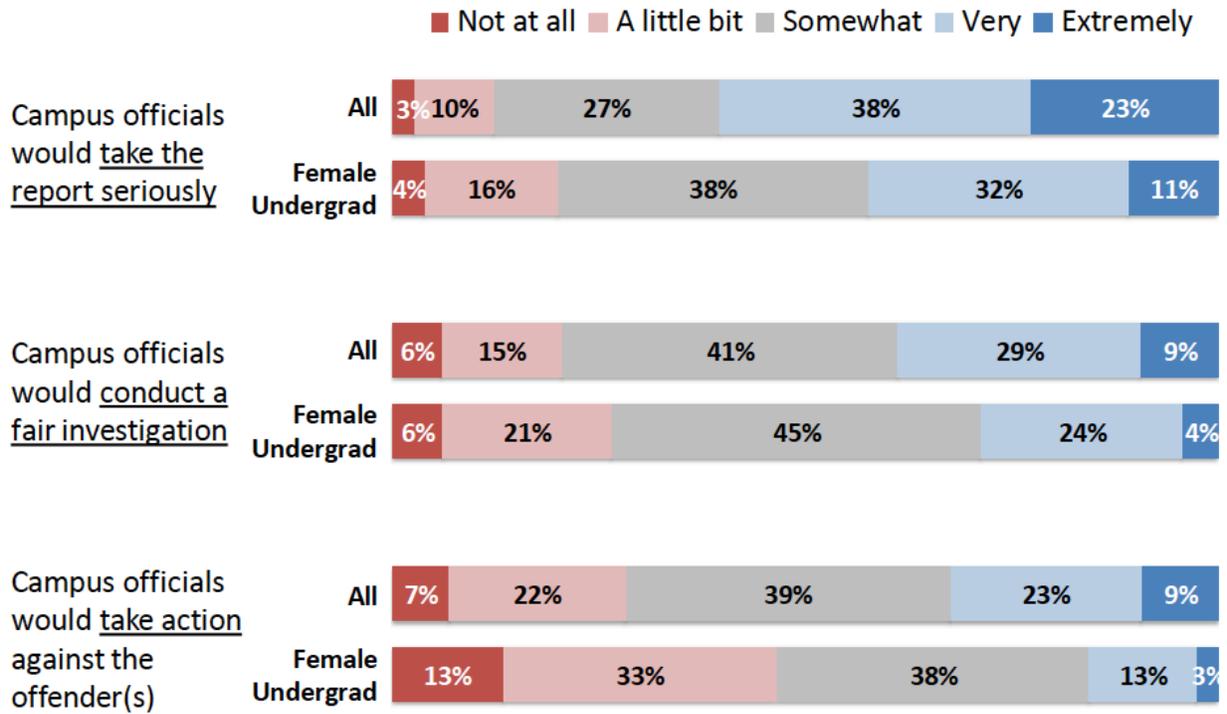
Climate and Reporting

The survey asked students for their opinions and perceptions about how sexual misconduct is handled on campus as well as their knowledge about the University’s policies and procedures, including how sexual misconduct is defined at Harvard and what happens if an incident is formally reported. These attitudinal questions can be looked at in conjunction with some other questions, such as whether students formally reported an incident they had experienced, or had intervened when they were a bystander in a situation that appeared likely to result in nonconsensual sexual contact. Taken together, these kinds of variables may provide a general sense of the climate on campus for preventing and dealing with misconduct.

Overall, 61 percent of Harvard students indicated that it is very or extremely likely that the report would be taken seriously by campus officials. Female undergraduates are less likely to believe that campus officials would take a report seriously, conduct a fair investigation, or take action against an offender relative to the full set of students. Taking a closer look at the last of these items, only 16 percent of female undergraduates at Harvard believe it very or extremely likely that campus officials would take action against the offender(s). By comparison, AAU-wide, 37 percent of female undergraduates believe it very or extremely likely that campus officials would take action, and the average in the subset of private

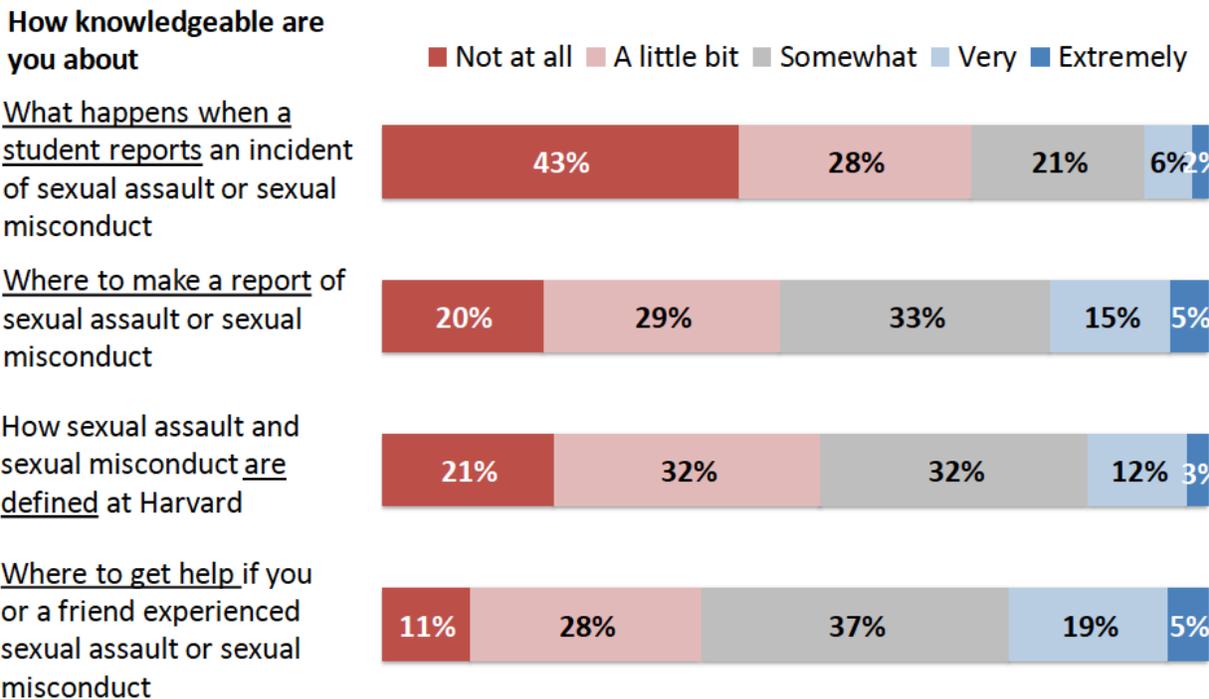
institutions in the study is 25 percent (Figure 8 and Harvard Westat report p.8-10, AAU Westat report p.36-41).

Figure 8. Perceptions of responses to a report of sexual assault or misconduct.



Harvard students seem to be less knowledgeable about the University’s policies and procedures than students in the AAU comparison averages. The percent of Harvard students who are very or extremely knowledgeable about what happens when a student reports an incident, 8 percent, is lower than the AAU-wide average (11 percent) and AAU-private average (11 percent). This pattern continues with “where to make a report” (Harvard=20 percent, AAU-wide=26 percent, AAU-private=24 percent); “definition of sexual misconduct” (Harvard=15 percent, AAU-wide=24 percent, AAU-private=22 percent); and “where to get help” (Harvard=24 percent, AAU-wide=30 percent, and AAU-private=29 percent). (Figure 9, Harvard Westat report p.11-13, AAU Westat report p.45-47.)

Figure 9. Knowledge about University sexual assault policies and procedures



In keeping with other studies, and the respondents across the AAU sample, Harvard students indicate that they report few of the incidents of misconduct that they have experienced. For example, 69 percent of female Harvard College students who indicated they experienced an incident of penetration by force did not formally report it, and 80 percent of female Harvard College students who indicated they experienced an incident of penetration by incapacitation did not formally report it. The most frequently cited reason for not reporting was a belief that it was not serious enough to report.

Also in keeping with other studies and a pattern that holds in the AAU averages, more than half (54 percent) of the Harvard survey respondents who indicated they had “seen or heard someone who was acting in a sexually violent or harassing way” indicated that they had not taken any action. Eighty percent of those who “witnessed [a] drunk person heading for sexual encounter” reported not taking any action. (Harvard Westat report Table 1.2, AAU Westat report Table 1.3).

Concluding thoughts

The Task Force will send its final report to you in January 2016. We will build on the many steps that you have taken to date in response to our two sets of interim recommendations and, apart from this task force, on the recent comprehensive re-examination of Harvard’s policies and procedures concerning sexual assault and other forms of sexual misconduct. Based on our interim recommendations, the University established [SHARE](#), a website that identifies in one place the resources available to members of the Harvard community who have experienced sexual assault. Based on our recommendation you also provided the resources to increase the size and scope of the Office of Sexual Assault Prevention and

Response (OSAPR) established in 2003. In addition, the University reviewed and improved its Title IX infrastructure and training programs. Likewise, there have been numerous actions undertaken at local levels within Harvard's Schools, including a mobile application at Harvard College, Harvard Business School, and Harvard Law School that puts information about how to find immediate help and support — combined with other information, such as dining hall menus and gym times — in students' hands. We thus have strengths from which to build. However, as we have learned from our work, and most notably from the survey, these and other initial actions fall far short of what will prove necessary. Based on the high prevalence of assault and other forms of sexual misconduct, it is clear that the University must achieve inclusive and authentic engagement of our students, and indeed the entire community. We should begin such conversations across the University this semester, even as we work to complete our final recommendations. Similarly, we propose that Harvard take a lead role in convening a broader conversation, inviting all of our AAU peers, scholars who can help us to consider better ways of making change, and perhaps government officials.

On a personal note, as a member of the faculty, a former Harvard provost, and a Harvard parent, I have a special affection for this University that underscores my commitment to help find effective solutions to a problem that sits in stark contrast to our fundamental mission and values. The fact that the Harvard data is quite similar to that of other private universities within the AAU gives little comfort. Indeed, the widespread and pervasive nature of the problem across universities reminds us of how deeply ingrained it is. It reminds us that we cannot simply make and implement a series of recommendations and consider that we have done our work. Rather we must plan and put in place interventions potent enough to meet the serious challenges documented by the survey and by our listening sessions — and then as a University we must measure outcomes at appropriate intervals and improve interventions that do not appear effective or that lose their benefits as culture changes. We must commit ourselves to an intelligent, focused, long-term effort that involves students, faculty, and staff if we are to make the progress that our mission and values demand of us.

Very truly yours,



Steven E. Hyman

Reports:

[AAU Campus Survey on Sexual Assault and Sexual Misconduct](#)

[Companion Report on Harvard's sexual conduct survey results](#)