ATTITUDES TOWARDS SEXUAL INJUSTICE IN THE UNIVERSITY ENVIRONMENT REPORT

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SUPPORT SERVICES PAGE

If someone is in immediate danger please ring Emergency Services on 111 or Campus Security on 0800 3737 550.

If you are not in immediate danger but wish to contact the police, call **105 or phone/visit your nearest police station.**

Te Papa Manaaki | Campus Care is a free and confidential service on campus where students will be assigned a case manager who will create a treatment plan and support them through accessing various services. You can refer yourself, refer someone else or have someone refer you on your behalf by submitting a support request online

HELP is a private and confidential sexual support service. They are available on call 24/7 on **0800 623 1700.**

Safe to Talk is a free 24/7help service specialising in sexual harm. For immediate assistance please contact **0800 044 334**

Student Conduct Office support student to student conflict and disputes.

SUPPORT SERVICES

Safe to Talk | Kōrero mai ka ora: 24/7 helpline for sexual harm support. **Text 4334, email support@safetotalk.nz**, or visit [safetotalk.nz].

HELP: Sexual abuse support for Pasifika in Auckland. **Call 0800 623 1700, text 8236, or email gethelp@helpauckland.org.nz.**

1737: Free 24/7 helpline for anyone needing to talk. **Call or text 1737.** More info: [1737.org.nz].

Tautoko Tāne | Male Survivors Aotearoa: Support for male survivors of sexual abuse. **Call 0800 448 484 or visit [malesurvivor.nz].**

Shakti New Zealand: Support for Asian, African, and Middle Eastern women and youth facing abuse. **Call 0800SHAKTI or email crisisline@shakti.org.nz.** More info: [shaktiinternational.org].

OUTline NZ: Confidential LGBTIQA+ support. **Call 0800OUTLINE, chat online, or email info@outline.org.nz.** More info: [outline.org.nz] (https://outline.org.nz/).

Victim Support: Free 24/7 support for those affected by crime, suicide, or trauma. **Call 0800VICTIM or email contactservice@victimsupport.org.nz.** More info: [victimsupport.org.nz]

Toah-Nest | Te Ohaakii a Hine: A national network and directory of those providing specialist services for sexual violence prevention and intervention **https://toah-nnest.org.nz/**

Me Too NZ: Free information, advice and support for those facing sexual harassment in their workplace. **https://metoonz.co.nz/ / Email support@metoo.co.nz to set up a time to Zoom 24/7**

The Pohutukawa Clinic: A specialist medical service for adults of all genders who have been sexually assaulted or abused. Dedicated team specially trained in sexual assault care and forensic medicine. **https://www.adhb.health.nz/our-services/a-z-services/pohutukawa-clinic-akl/**

Korowai Tumanako: A Kaupapa Māori service dedicated to support iwi, hapu, and whānau who have been affected by sexual violence. The offer sexual violence prevention education and support ot whānau, supervision and training and treatment for young people and adults who have participated in harmful sexual behaviour **www.korowaitumanako.org**

Tautoko Tāne | Male Survivors Aotearoa: Counselling and social services assistance, peer support, and more information and resources to enable the well-being of male survivors of recent or past sexual abuse **https://malesurvivor.nz/for-survivors/get-help/ / 0800 448 484**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many thanks to the academics and student leaders for their valuable feedback and guidance in this report.

To the 2025 Mana Wahine Subcommittee clubs who supported the promotion of the survey, and everyone shared their experiences. Several student leaders and academics, including Dr Nicole Wegner, Dr Carrie Leonetie, Dr Barry Milne, and the QUANT-DARE team at UOA, have reviewed this report. Huge thanks for the guidance provided to ensure the quality of this report.

This report is dedicated to every survivor of sexual violence. Your stories have not gone unheard. We recognise the courage it takes to speak out and the weight many carry in silence. Your experiences matter, your voices matter, and you are not alone. We hope this report contributes to meaningful change and a safer future for all students.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A total of 183 students completed an anonymous survey consisting of quantitative and qualitative questions. It examines the prevalence, contexts, and impacts of sexual harm, as well as students' experiences with reporting processes and institutional responses.

The findings suggest that sexual harm may be widespread and underreported, with multiple barriers affecting disclosure and reporting including **low institutional trust, unclear and complex reporting pathways, fear of retaliation, and social stigma**. Nearly half indicated that they personally knew someone who had experienced sexual injustice. These findings suggest that sexual harm is not an isolated issue, and one that is visible across student communities.

The report further identifies **shortfalls in institutional responses and support**, including unclear reporting procedures (particularly for complaints involving staff), inadequate follow-up, and insufficient support offered to students after reporting. These gaps appear to contribute to ongoing reluctance to engage with formal university processes and undermine trust in the University's ability to meet its duty of care.

The recommendations outlined in this report seek to strengthen both the prevention of sexual harm and the University's capacity to respond effectively when harm occurs. They focus on improving student understanding of harmful sexual behaviour, strengthening prevention initiatives, and ensuring adequate support for those affected. The recommendations also aim to increase trust in institutional processes by clarifying reporting pathways and procedures and strengthening institutional accountability, transparency, and oversight.

INTRODUCTION & PURPOSE

The survey was created to collect data on attitudes towards sexual injustice **in the university environment and** to better understand the prevalence and impact of sexual harm on University of Auckland students. This initiative was led and written by the **Women's Rights Officer of AUSA 2025. The project was also** in collaboration with the **Mana Wāhine Subcommittee 2025**.

This report examines gaps in the University's policies and procedures in relation to sexual harm while contextualising both the prevalence of sexual harm and the ways in which it occurs. According to this survey nearly 50% of University of Auckland respondents did not report their experience of sexual harm because they lack trust in institutional processes. This aligns with wider patterns across Aotearoa New Zealand, where the New Zealand Crime and Victims Survey estimate that 94% of sexual assaults go unreported, highlighting the significant role that trust plays in reporting decision

By highlighting survivors' experiences of reported and unreported incidences of sexual harm, this report provides insight into the prevalence and impact of sexual harm and institutional barriers to reporting sexual harm.

Furthermore, this report aims to support the University in strengthening its policies and procedures to rebuild institutional trust. Although there has been an increased willingness
among students to report their experiences in recent years, a considerable level of distrust towards the University persists. As such, the University has a duty of care to ensure that appropriate processes and support mechanisms are in place for those affected.

METHODOLOGY

This survey was conducted from August 2025 to October 2025, and a total of 183 participants completed it. The survey was promoted primarily through **Instagram** and was further shared by various student clubs. Participants were recruited during on-campus petition days held across several locations, including the General Library, Engineering Building, Arts and Education Building (B201), Science Building, Grafton Campus, and the Law School.

General demographic responses were collected and contextual questions, such as participants' year of study and whether they were living in halls of residence. The question also included reporting, seeking support, and attitudes around the University of Auckland. A wide range of students was targeted to mitigate sampling bias across the student population.This survey was conducted anonymously, and no emails were collected. It was open to both current and past students. Respondents could skip any question they found uncomfortable because of the topic's sensitive nature.

The data template uses multiple-choice, Likert scale, and open-ended questions. This report, however, has some limitations, given that it is student-led. The response rate may be inconsistent due to different rates of response across the questions. While the findings should be interpreted as indicative rather than representative of the wider University of Auckland student population, some comparisons with university demographics are possible.

METHODOLOGY

This study has several methodological limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, participation was voluntary, creating the potential for **self-selection bias**. Students with personal experiences of sexual injustice, or greater interest in the topic, may have been more likely to participate. To minimise sampling bias, the survey was advertised broadly to both current and former University of Auckland students. Eligibility was not contingent on having experienced sexual harm or sexual injustice. This approach sought to capture views from a diverse range of participants across the student community. The full survey will be attached at the end of the report

Second, all survey questions were optional, and respondents were not directed to particular sections based on whether they had experienced sexual injustice. As a result, the number of responses varied across questions, leading to missing data. It is not always possible to determine whether a question was left unanswered because it was not applicable to a respondent or because they chose not to respond. The report identifies the number of respondents for each question and acknowledges that differing response rates may limit comparisons across questions

Finally, because respondents answered different questions, direct comparisons between percentages across survey items should be made with caution.

KEY TERMS

These definitions are informed by Te Whare Tawharau and the University of Auckland. This ensures there is a consistent understanding of the concepts in the report. While several definitions are provided for contextual purposes, only the definition of sexual injustice was presented to respondents during the survey. This definition was provided to ensure respondents had a common reference point when answering survey questions

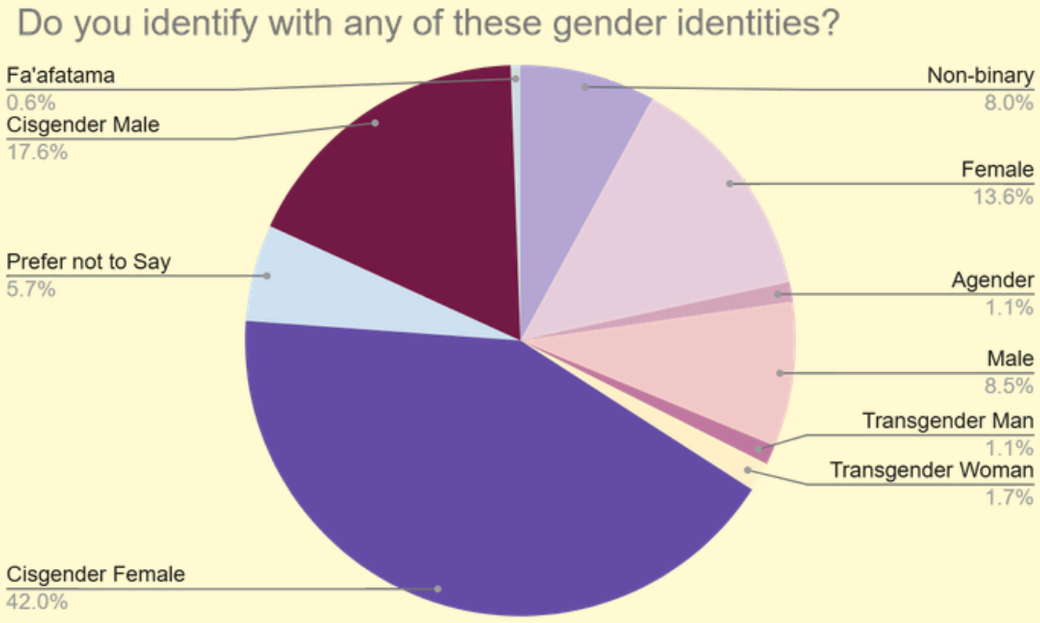
Sexual Injustice: For this project, sexual injustice may include sexual assault or harassment, sexual harm, inappropriate and/or sexual comments, non-consensual physical contact, or other events where you felt sexualised, objectified or uncomfortable due to another person's actions.

Sexual Harm/Sexual Violence: Any non-consensual, unwanted sexual behaviour, act, or attempt

Consent: A freely given, informed, ongoing, and enthusiastic agreement to engage in sexual activity. Consent should never be implied or assumed. Silence should not be taken as an assumption. Consent can be withdrawn at any point in the sexual act.

FINDINGS - PREVALENCE & PATTERNS

Figure A: Gender distribution of respondents who completed the Survey (177 Responses)



**Some respondents may have selected "male" or "female" because they did not understand terms such as "cisgender" or "transgender".*

Figure A shows an uneven gender distribution among respondents, with the majority identifying as **female**. Smaller proportions identified as **male**, while others identified with another gender identity, preferred not to disclose their gender, or did not identify with a gender category. This distribution provides important context for interpreting the findings, particularly given that experiences of sexual harm and attitudes towards reporting may vary across demographic groups.

However, the responses also highlight that sexual violence affects individuals across a range of gender identities.The gender composition of the sample should be considered when interpreting the findings, as some groups were more strongly represented among respondents than others.

FINDINGS - PREVALENCE & PATTERNS

Figure B: Respondents by years of enrolment at the University of Auckland (181 responses)

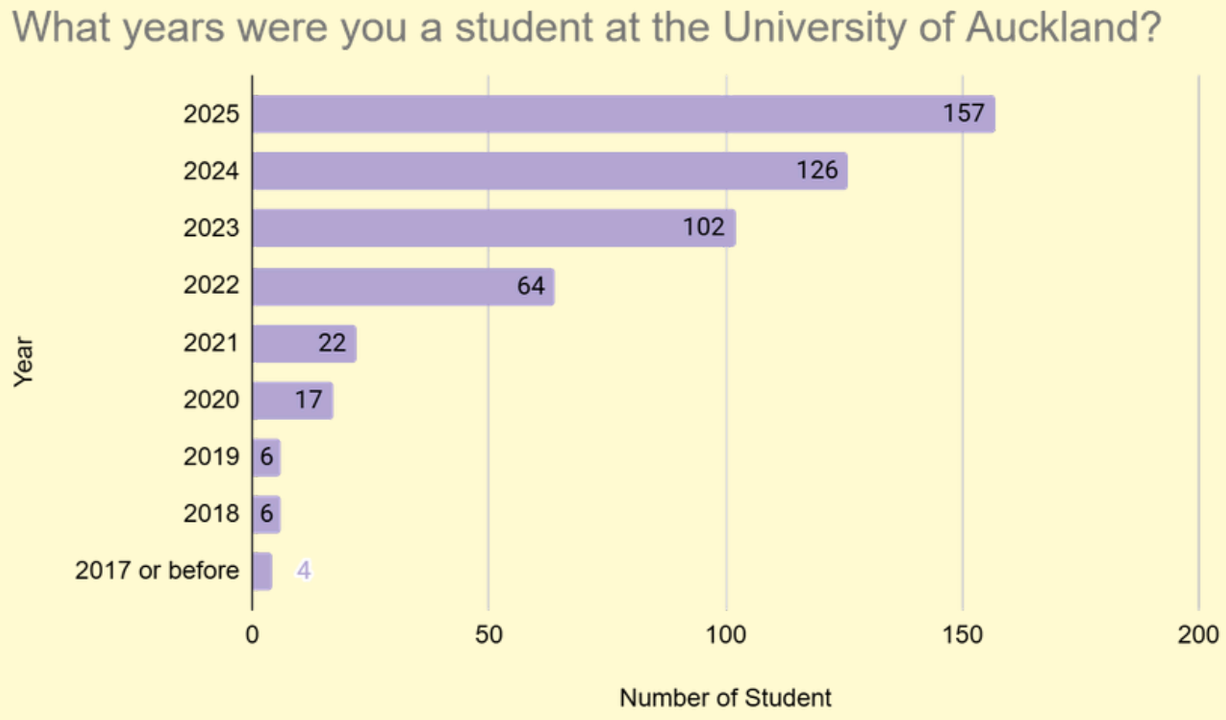


Figure B indicates a higher concentration of responses from students enrolled in more recent years, with 86.7% of respondents indicating that they were students at the University during 2025. As respondents were able to select multiple enrolment years, the percentages reflect all years in which respondents were enrolled at the University

This suggests that the findings largely reflect **the experiences and perceptions of students enrolled during this period,** particularly regarding current University policies, processes, and campus culture.

FINDINGS - PREVALENCE & PATTERNS

Figure C: Rate of respondents living in student accommodation (179 responses)

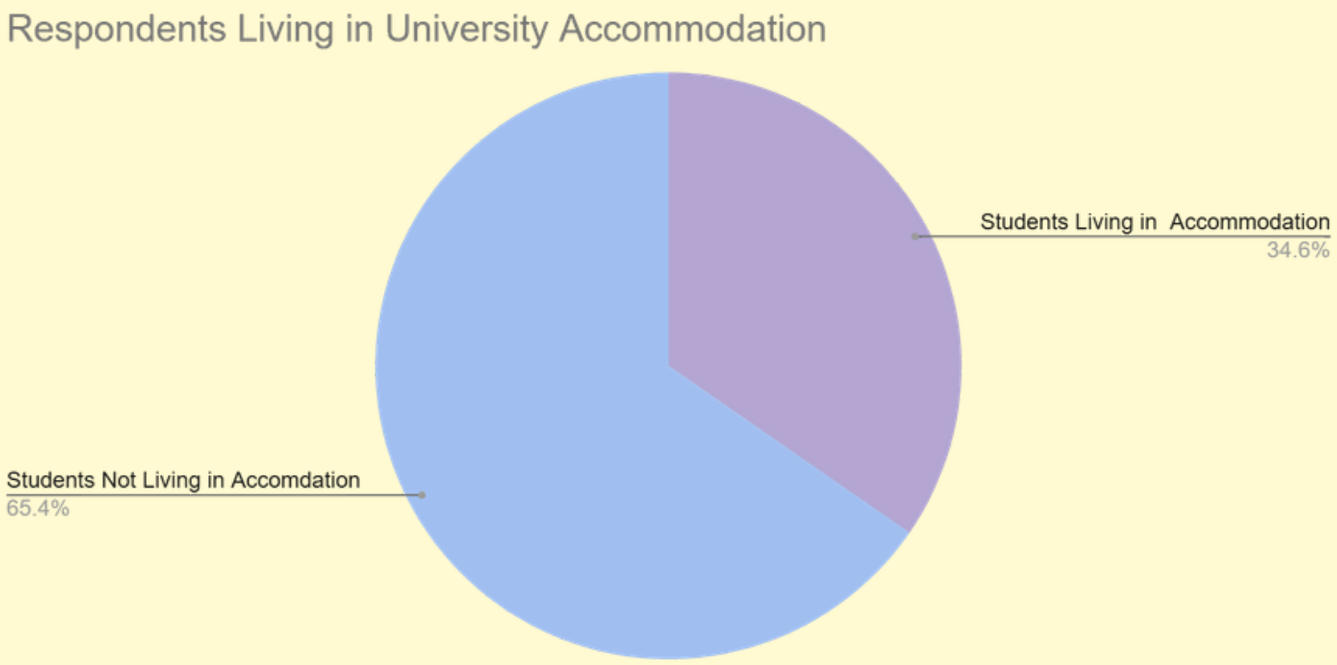


Figure C illustrates that approximately 66% of respondents reported never having lived in university accommodation at the time of their enrolment. This is relevant because students living in university accommodation may have different experiences of campus life, including greater interaction with residential staff, University oversight, and accommodation-based support services. As most respondents had not lived in university accommodation, the findings primarily reflect the perspectives of students whose experiences occurred outside these residential settings.

PREVALENCE OF SEXUAL HARM

The following questions assess the prevalence of sexual harm among University of Auckland students by capturing both direct experiences and awareness within student communities. However, prevalence estimates may be influenced by self-selection bias, as the students who choose to participate in sexual violence surveys may not be fully representative of the wider student population. These measures provide a more comprehensive understanding of the scale and visibility of sexual harm, recognising that many incidents are not formally reported to University.

Figure D: Reported Experiences of Sexual Injustice Among Respondents (183 Responses)

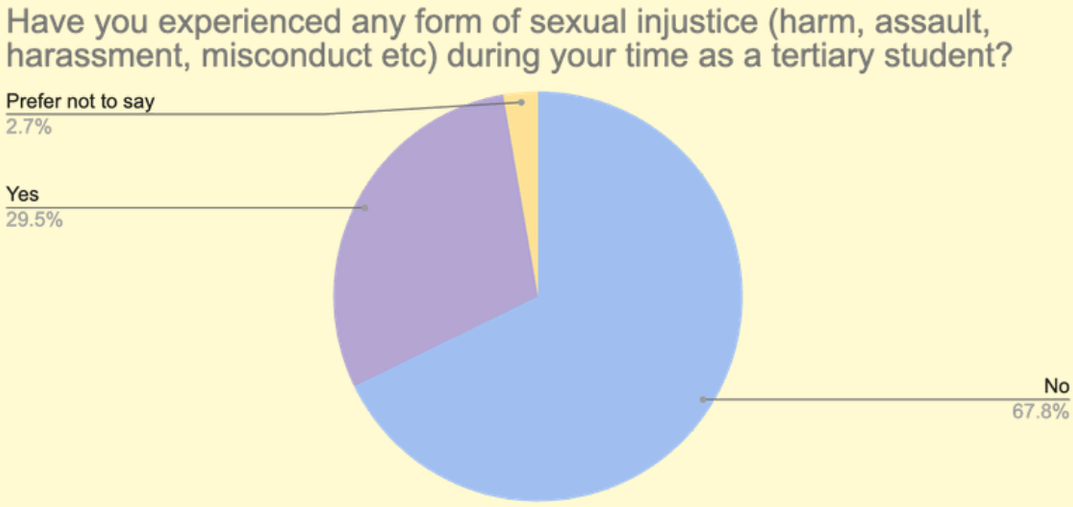


Figure D shows that 29.5% of respondents reported having experienced some form of sexual injustice during their time at the University of Auckland, suggesting that experiences of sexual harm are relatively common among respondents. However, the prevalence estimate should be interpreted with caution. Known barriers in to disclosure and reporting in Aotearoa NZ may result in some experiences not being captured. Self-selection bias may have influenced participation, as students with particular experiences or concerns about sexual violence may have been more likely to complete the survey.

FINDINGS - PREVALENCE & PATTERNS

Figure E: Awareness of Sexual Injustice Within Student Communities (181 Responses)

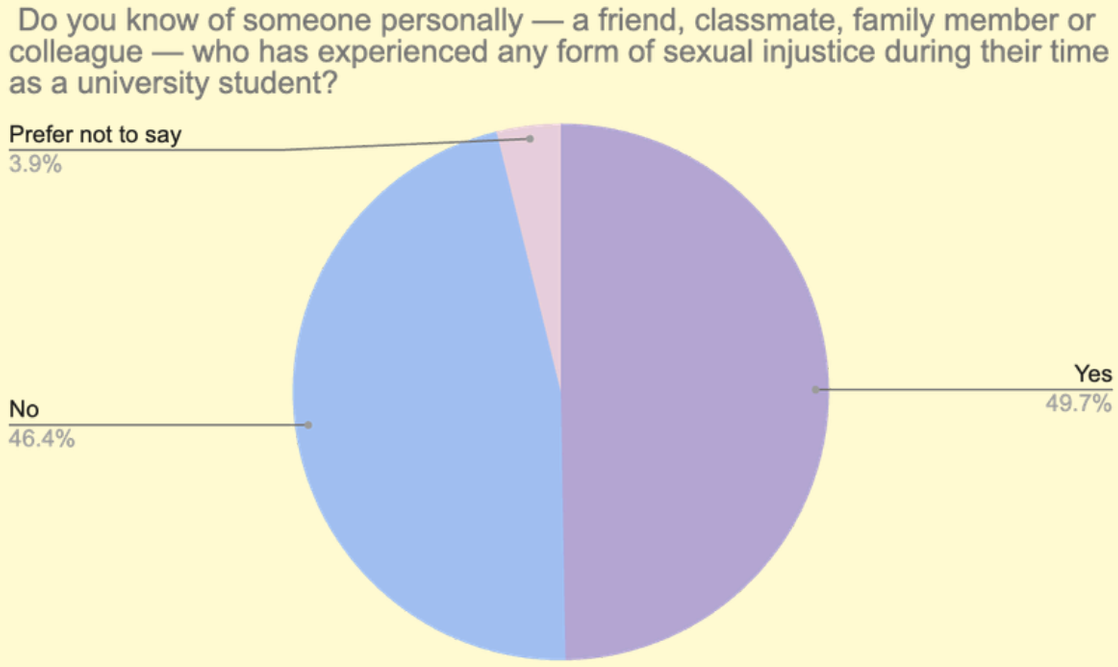


Figure E indicates that almost half of respondents reported knowing someone who has experienced sexual injustice, demonstrating that sexual harm is visible within many students' immediate social networks.

FINDINGS - PREVALENCE & PATTERNS

Figure F: Rate of Students Who Reported Personal Experiences of Sexual Injustice on Campus (180 Responses)

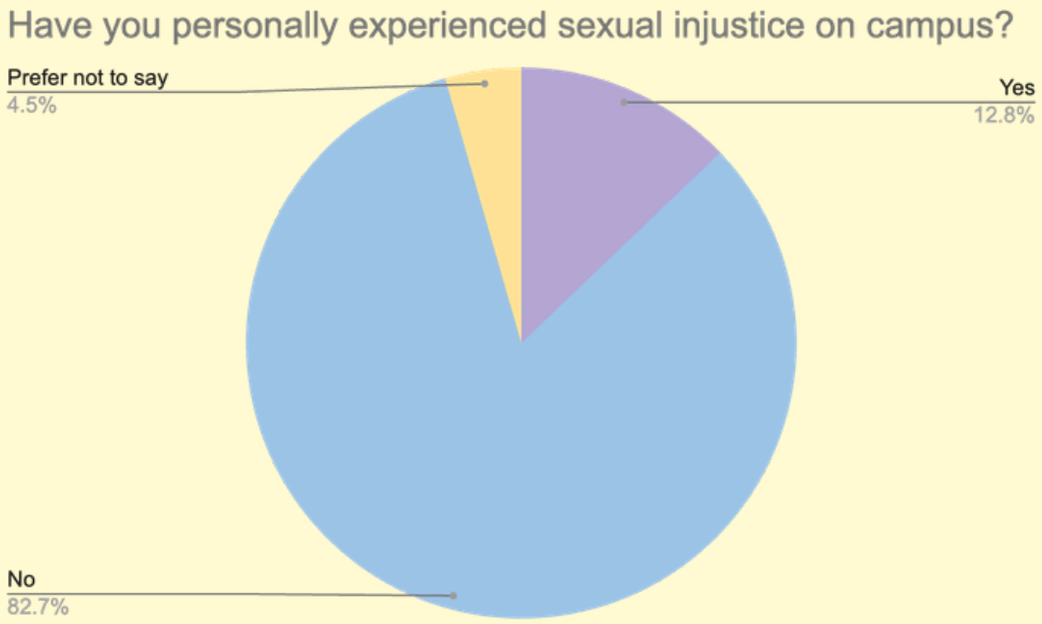
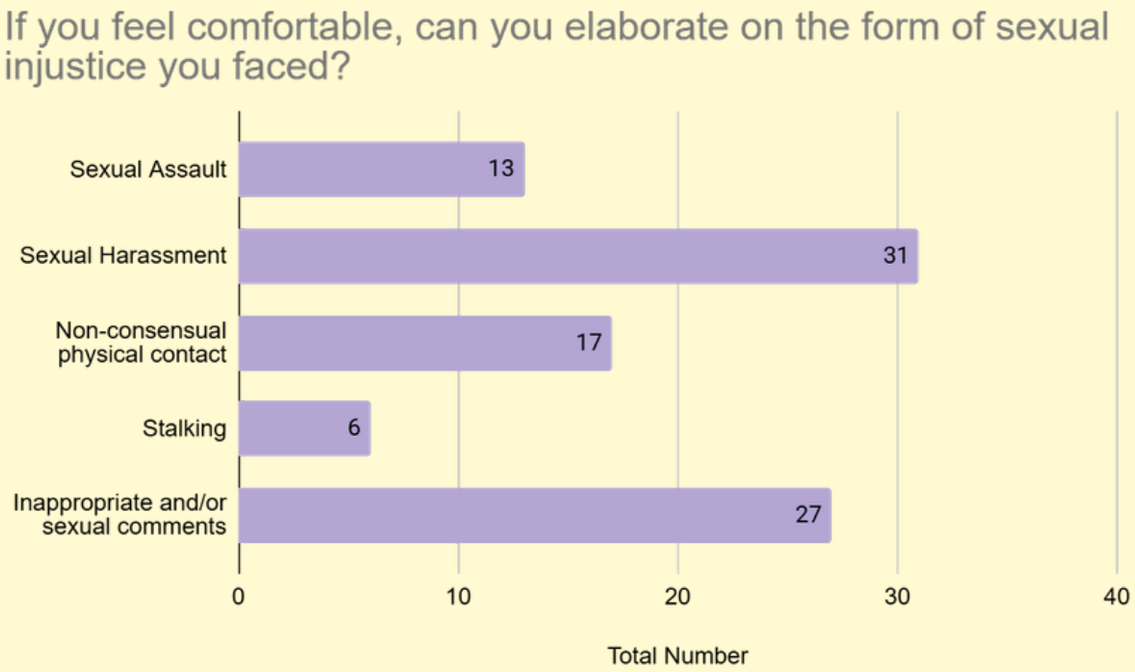


Figure F shows 12.8% of reported prevalence of personal experiences of sexual injustice occurring on campus, compared with overall experiences. This may suggest that a smaller proportion of harm occurs within the physical or institutional campus setting.

Taken together, these results distinguish between overall prevalence, social awareness of harm, and on-campus experiences of sexual injustice. These patterns reinforce the need for robust, transparent, and trusted institutional responses that address both prevention and accountability in fulfilling the University's duty of care. Although reported on-campus experiences were less common than overall experiences, the findings indicate that some students do experience sexual injustice within the University's sphere of responsibility. For these students, the availability of trusted reporting mechanisms, timely support, and transparent institutional processes is essential. This highlights the importance of ensuring that those affected can access effective institutional responses when harm occurs.

TYPES OF HARM

Figure G: Types Of Sexual Harm Respondents Experienced (46 Responses)



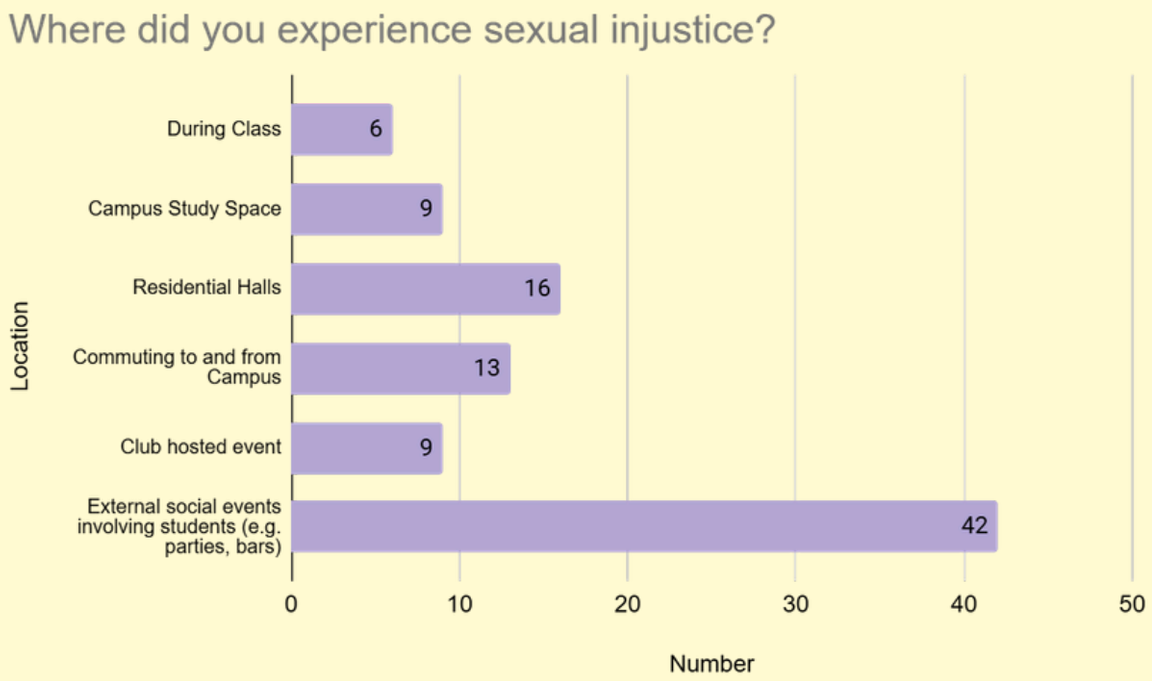
This finding highlights the varied ways in which sexual harm is experienced within the student community and support Liz Kelly's concept of a continuum of sexual violence, which recognises that sexual harm encompasses a range of behaviours, from seemingly less severe but harmful experiences such as harassment and unwanted sexualised comments, through to serious offences such as sexual assault

The most frequently reported forms were **sexual harassment (22.2%)** and **exposure to inappropriate and/or sexual content (21.4%)**, suggesting that non-physical and behaviour-based forms of harm are particularly prevalent. **Sexual assault accounted for 10% of responses**, representing a lower proportion compared to other forms of harm but nonetheless indicating serious incidents with significant impact.

The distribution of responses reinforces the need for the University's reporting processes and support mechanisms to respond appropriately across different levels of severity. These findings highlight the need for prevention strategies that extend beyond addressing only the most extreme forms of harm and instead adopt a comprehensive approach to sexual harm prevention and response.

CONTEXT OF HARM

Figure H: Locations where Sexual Harm was Reported (65 Responses)



The location question was answered by 65 respondents, which is greater than the 54 respondents who reported experiencing sexual injustice elsewhere in the survey. As the survey did not restrict this question to respondents who had experienced sexual injustice, some respondents may have answered based on their awareness of incidents rather than direct personal experience. Consequently, these findings should be interpreted with caution.

The most commonly reported setting where sexual harm was reported was **external social events**, which may include student nights, social gatherings with friends, or externally hosted club events. This highlights that much of the reported harm occurs in environments **adjacent to**, rather than formally controlled by, the University. Within university-associated contexts, **residential halls were reported by 24.6% of respondents**, representing the highest proportion of harm reported across University-managed environments.

Given that **66% of respondents have never lived in university accommodation**, this finding may partly reflect the high proportion of residential students within the survey sample. Nevertheless, it highlights residential halls as an important context in which sexual harm occurs

Although not explicitly captured as response options, incidents may occur **with staff** who point to potential risks within academic relationships that warrant further attention. This can also be seen in a recent high-profile case regarding University of Auckland staff members. Overall, the data demonstrate that sexual harm is experienced across **academic, residential, social, and transitional contexts**. These findings suggest that response and prevention strategies should address the full range of environments in which students engage with university life, including formal and informal academic interactions.

REPORTING BARRIERS

Figure I: Rate of Respondents Who Chose to Report Experiences of Sexual Harm (108 Responses)

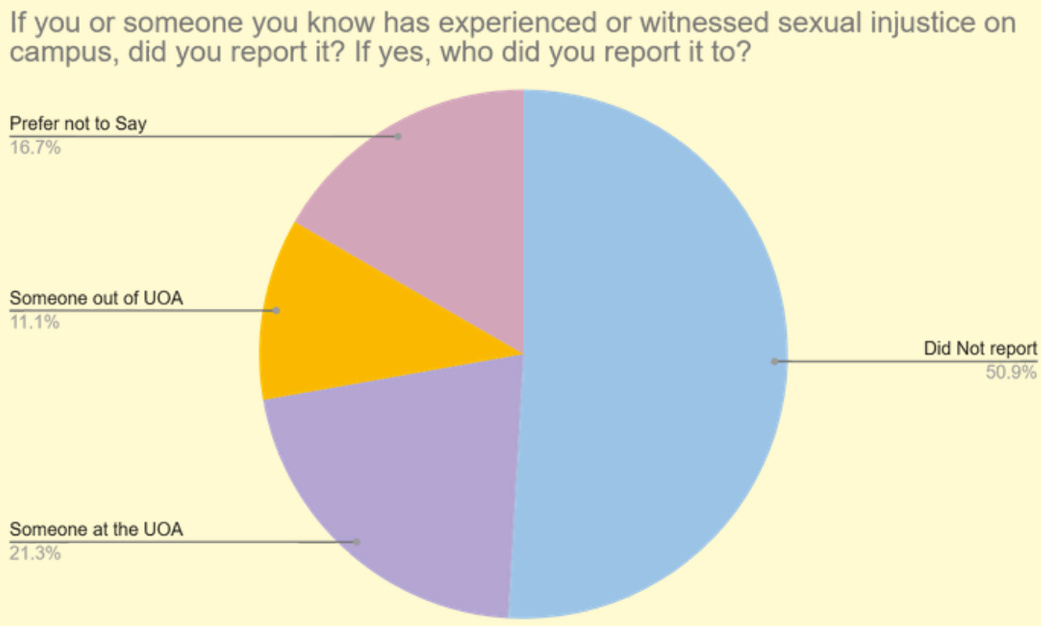
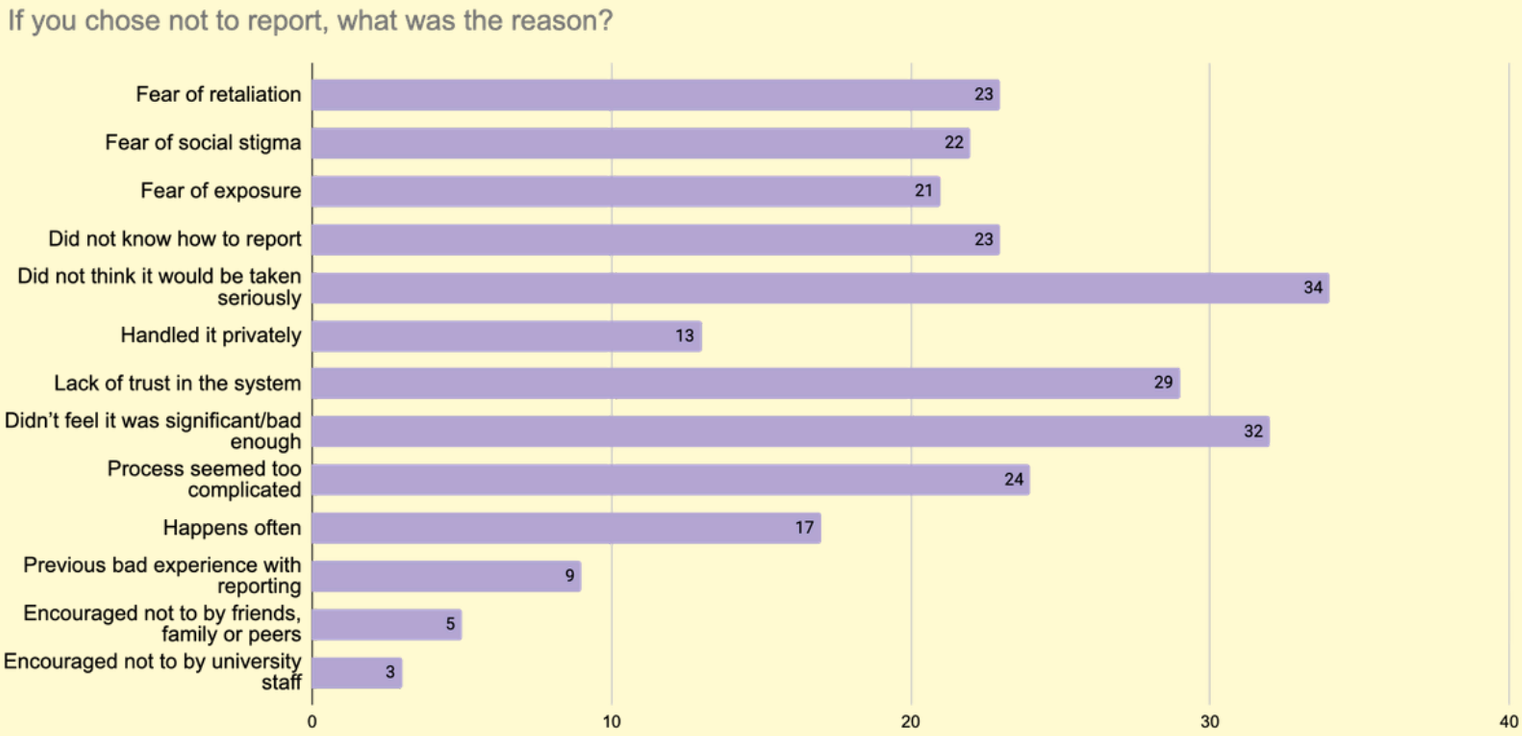


Figure I shows that just over half of respondents (50.9%) indicated that they did not report an experience of sexual harm to either the University or an external organisation. Some respondent may have reported to both but this was not captured with the response options A proportion reported the incident to someone within the University (21.3%) or someone outside the University (11.1%), while some respondents preferred not to disclose whether they had reported. These findings suggest that many students choose not to engage with formal or informal reporting pathways following an experience of sexual harm emphasizing that experiences of sexual harm may not be fully reflected in institutional reporting data.

As this question was not restricted to respondents who had personally experienced sexual harm, responses may reflect respondents' own experiences, incidents they witnessed, or incidents they were aware of through others. The findings should therefore be interpreted as reflecting reporting behaviours and perceptions within the broader student community. Even when restricted to respondents who reported experiencing sexual injustice, it cannot be determined from the data whether respondents were referring to their own experience when answering the reporting question or to an incident experienced by another person. To provide additional context, the analysis was also restricted to respondents who reported experiencing sexual injustice. However, the survey design does not allow confirmation that responses to this question referred specifically to their own experiences rather than incidents involving others.

Figure J: Barriers to Reporting Sexual Harm (84 Responses)



As shown by the graph, two of the main reasons that those who responded to this question chose not to report were that they did not think it would be taken seriously and that they didn't feel it was significant enough to report. Lack of trust in the system and the overwhelming nature of reporting also represent major barriers .

The number of respondents identifying barriers to reporting exceeded the number who indicated that they did not formally report their experience. This is likely because respondents could experience barriers to reporting regardless of whether they ultimately chose to make a report. As such, the reported barriers reflect the experiences of both those who reported and those who did not report.
Future analysis could examine barriers specifically among respondents who did not formally report their experiences to determine whether the primary barriers differ from those identified by the wider respondent group.

KEY FINDINGS SUMMARY

The survey indicates that sexual injustice remains a significant concern for many University of Auckland students. Respondents reported a range of experiences, including sexual harassment, inappropriate sexual comments, non-consensual physical contact, and sexual assault.
The findings suggest that incidents occur across multiple contexts, including external social events, university residences, and academic environments.

Nearly one in three respondents reported experiencing some form of sexual injustice during their time as a student, while almost one in two reported knowing someone who had experienced sexual injustice. These findings demonstrate that sexual harm is not an isolated issue but one that is visible across student communities and has wider implications for student safety, wellbeing, and participation in university life.

Many respondents indicated that incidents were not formally reported, highlighting the continued challenge of underreporting.
Key barriers to reporting included concerns that reports would not be taken seriously, perceptions that incidents were not significant enough to report, lack of trust in reporting systems, and the emotional burden associated with reporting processes.

Overall, the findings point to the need for clearer reporting pathways, increased confidence in institutional responses, and continued efforts to prevent sexual harm across all aspects of university life.

DISCUSSION

1. **Lack of Understanding on Definitions of Sexual Harm**

One significant obstacle appears to be how students interpret their experiences. Many respondents described believing that what happened to them was “not serious enough” to warrant reporting, or that any attempt to report would be dismissed.

Steps should be taken to reinforce that all forms of sexual harm are reportable and that support is available regardless of the severity of the incident. Specific actions to support this are outlined in the Recommendations section.

There appears to be an uncertainty regarding the distinction between disclosures, reports and formal complaints, as well as what happens once the information is shared. There is a lack of clarity about the purpose, consequences or potential outcomes of different reporting pathways.

Experiences can range from sexual harassment and other harmful sexual behaviours to conduct that may constitute a criminal offence, yet the available options are not always clear. Students should be provided with clear information about University reporting processes, between sexual harassment (misconduct) and sexual assault (crime), there should be a distinction. There needs to be different pathways for the two, including a survivor-led, survivor-supported process for making a police complaint.

DISCUSSION

2. **Lack of Institutional Trust**

A breakdown in institutional trust plays a major role in discouraging students from coming forward about experiences of sexual harm. Many respondents expressed low confidence in University systems, noting that the reporting process often felt unclear, overly complicated, or intimidating. When pathways are difficult to navigate, the act of reporting can feel overwhelming, particularly for survivors already managing the emotional weight of what occurred.

Many students also reported that the reporting processes involved procedures that some respondents found distressing or retraumatising. Concerns about inadequate follow-up, a perceived lack of investigation, and fears of retaliation, further undermined confidence in institutional responses. These findings suggest that barriers to reporting are not solely related to awareness of available processes, but also to students' confidence that disclosures and complaints will be handled fairly, transparently, and effectively. Past negative experiences may also contribute to ongoing reluctance to report future incidences.

3. **Unclear Reporting Processes**

Confusion around reporting pathways also emerged as a significant obstacle. Many respondents indicated that they were unsure where or how to lodge a report, and others described the process as daunting, overly technical, or difficult to navigate. When procedures feel opaque or burdensome, students are less likely to come forward, even when harm has occurred.

DISCUSSION

Before students report their experiences to the Student Conduct Office, they often interact with other university staff members both professional and academic staff. Many students have had negative experiences when reporting incidents, which can leave them feeling discouraged from escalating their concerns further.

Another issue students have experienced relates to reporting incidents involving staff members. Students have reported that complaints made against staff are often not followed up, are not taken seriously, or create fear of retaliation. This again is supported by public cases from the University of Auckland. Many students are also unsure where to report these incidents, as the Student Conduct process only applies to issues between students. As a result, it is important that students are clearly informed about the appropriate procedures for reporting incidents involving staff members and feel confident that their concerns will be addressed fairly and safely. It is also important to note that there is no clear reporting process for students to report against staff members within the University of Auckland. The current student complaint flowchart directs students to Human Resources, but it does not provide any contact information for this department. Furthermore, the general misconduct section lacks guidance on how students can report misconduct involving staff members.

4. **Victim shaming and stigma**

Survey responses indicate that victim blaming is prevalent, among respondents. Many participants described social stigma as a significant deterrent to reporting, noting that concerns about being judged, blamed, or socially marginalised shaped their decisions. This stigma can create an environment where individuals hesitate to disclose harm or seek support, reinforcing silence around sexual violence. This indicates that broader cultural change is required to prevent sexual harm.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Prior to the announcement of the Independent Review of the Sexual Harassment Complaints Processes these recommendations were developed.

Reducing sexual harm on campus requires a transformation that is both structural and cultural. Institutional reforms are essential for establishing clear reporting channels, accessible support, and robust accountability systems; however, these mechanisms alone cannot eliminate harmful behaviour. Sustained progress also depends on cultural change that normalises healthy, consent-based relationships and actively challenges the attitudes and social norms that enable sexual harm to persist. The recommendations that follow are designed to strengthen both prevention efforts and the University's capacity to respond effectively when harm occurs, addressing the issue at every level of campus life.

The University of Auckland has a recognised responsibility for the wellbeing of its students, including in contexts beyond its physical campus. New Zealand case law supports this broad scope of responsibility. In Otago University Students' Association v University of Otago [2010], the High Court confirmed that universities may regulate student conduct beyond campus where there is a "sufficient nexus" between that conduct and the institution.

This principle is particularly relevant to sexual harm, which frequently occurs in off-campus social settings. Survey findings indicate that a significant proportion of incidents take place in external environments connected to student social life. Despite this, such harm has direct and ongoing impacts on students' safety, wellbeing, and participation in university life.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings suggest that sexual harm occurs across a range of academic, residential, and social environments, including contexts beyond the University's direct control. While the University's ability to intervene may be limited in some cases, particularly where incidents occur off-campus and involve individuals with no connection to the University, the University can still play a critical advocacy and support role by assisting students to access information, reporting mechanisms, and specialist services.

This approach aligns with the University of Auckland’s Code of Conduct, which establishes behavioural expectations that support a safe and respectful learning environment. While the Code provides a framework for accountability, it also reinforces the University’s role in implementing preventative measures that address the broader social contexts in which students live and interact. Prevention therefore requires a range of proactive strategies that extend beyond disciplinary responses, including education, community engagement, and early intervention.

These recommendations directly respond to the key areas of concerns identified in the survey, particularly gaps in reporting clarity, inconsistent support mechanisms, and a lack of trust in institutional processes. They also address the prevalence of sexual harm in off-campus and student-led environments, where current prevention and response systems are less visible or effective.

Overall, these recommendations aim to strengthen both structural responses and cultural conditions that contribute to sexual harm, ensuring a more consistent, accessible, and preventative approach across the University.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Defining Harmful Sexual Behaviour**

a. **Increased Awareness and Understanding of Sexual Harm and Support Services**

The University of Auckland should strengthen communication about what constitutes sexual harm and the formal support services available to students to improve students' understanding of what constitutes harmful sexual behaviour, what support is available, and what they can expect if they choose to make a report.

While the University already communicates that sexual harm will not be tolerated, the survey findings indicate that many students do not report experiences of harmful sexual behaviour because they do not believe the incident is serious enough to warrant formal reporting. This suggests that awareness of the University's stance on sexual harm alone is insufficient to overcome barriers to reporting.

Sexual harm exists on a spectrum, and individuals may experience and respond to harmful behaviours in different ways. No student should feel that their experience is "too minor" or "not serious enough" to seek support or make a report. The University should therefore focus on improving students' understanding of what behaviours may be reported, the support available to them, and the reporting options they can access.

Communication should include:

- Scenario-based examples demonstrating different forms of sexual harassment, sexual misconduct, and other harmful sexual behaviours that students may experience in university settings.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Clear explanations of the difference between seeking support, making a disclosure, and submitting a formal complaint.

- Information about what happens after a report is made, including likely timeframes, confidentiality considerations, and available support services.

- Guidance regarding the role of evidence and what students can reasonably expect if they choose to report.

- Information emphasising that support can be accessed regardless of whether a student wishes to pursue a formal complaint.

While the Student Conduct Office provides information about reporting processes and available options during individual meetings with students, this information is often only accessed after a student has already decided to come forward. Survey findings suggest that many students do not reach this stage because they are uncertain whether their experience is serious enough to report or are unsure what the reporting process entails. Providing clearer, student-facing information earlier may help address these barriers by enabling students to make more informed decisions about seeking support and reporting harmful behaviour.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The University of Otago's Sexual Misconduct Policy may provide a useful point of reference. Otago distinguishes between different reporting pathways and provides access to support and guidance regardless of whether an individual chooses to make a complaint. Otago also allows for "no-fault protective measures"[10], including no-contact arrangements, accommodation-related measures, and other steps designed to support safety while concerns are being addressed.[11] Consideration should be given to models such as the University of Otago's Sexual Misconduct Policy, which provides clearer distinctions between reporting pathways and allows for the implementation of safety and protective measures regardless of whether a formal complaint is pursued.[12]

The University of Queensland's Safer Communities service provides clear explanations of reporting pathways, including the distinction between disclosures and formal reports, and emphasises that students can access support without initiating a formal investigation.[13] Similarly, the Australian National University allows students to make disclosures and receive information, support, and advice about reporting options before deciding whether to pursue a formal complaint. These approaches aim to reduce uncertainty and help students engage with support services while maintaining control over their reporting choices.

RECOMMENDATIONS

2. Strengthen Institutional Practices

a. Extend the Existing Support Services Provided to Students

Support should extend beyond counselling and wellbeing services to include risk assessment, safety planning, and protective measures. Students may be reluctant to disclose safety concerns if they believe that protective measures are only available through a formal complaint process. Ensuring that appropriate safety and support options are accessible following a disclosure, regardless of whether a student wishes to pursue a formal complaint, may help reduce barriers to seeking support and improve student wellbeing.

b. Clarity on Reporting Process and Evidential Requirements

There is a disconnect between the University and the student body regarding how to report. This may raise issues related to the principles of natural justice that the University is required to follow. Students often come in with the expectation of the perpetrator being removed; however, when such expectations cannot be met and are not communicated, it erodes institutional trust. It is important for the University to clearly communicate what these processes entail and what actions may be taken.

The University should provide clearer information regarding the role of evidence within reporting and investigation processes. This should include guidance on what types of information may assist an investigation, how evidence is assessed, and what support, safety measures, or procedural options remain available where evidence is limited.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Responsibility for investigating complaints and gathering relevant information should remain with the University, while ensuring students are able to make informed decisions about reporting. Students need to understand how the process works, what information may be relevant, and what the University can do in different circumstances.

c. **Centralise Reporting Process**

Steps need to be taken to streamline the process for reporting to prevent further distress and re-traumatisation of survivors. Various faculties, departments,and university servicesfrom accommodation to Hiwa Recreation Centre, have different processes in dealing with sexual harm.

As a result, students are encountering inconsistent report processes regarding sexual harm between different departments and inconsistent messaging. This involves improving coordination and communication between support services to avoid survivors having to recount their experiences to multiple university departments.

Students may seek support from their faculty and may be unaware of the Student Conduct Office and the measures that could be taken. The University should also consider centralising its approach to sexual harm. It is also important to note that this would ensure that disclosures and reports are managed by staff with appropriate specialist training and that survivors receive more consistent, trauma-informed support.

RECOMMENDATIONS

d. **Defining Clear Distinctions between a Disclosure and Reporting Pathway**

Many students may wish to share their experiences or seek support without initiating a formal misconduct proceeding. Clear communication about the purpose and processes is needed to ensure students can make informed choices about the support they require.

This includes outlining what will happen after making a formal complaint versus an informal disclosure, who decides which route is followed. Increasing transparency around these distinctions will help reduce fear and confusion, allowing students to choose an option that aligns with their personal circumstances and desired outcomes.

e. **Clear guidelines for staff-student incidents**

There is uncertainity ureprocesses for reporting inappropriate behaviour between Staff and Students. At present, the Student Conduct Officer primarily handles student-to-student issues. Students have expressed fear of repercussions that could potentially harm their academic progress, particularly at the postgraduate level. Students who have disclosed incidents with staff to Human Resources have also reported being met with hostility. These experiences have often left students confused and left frustrated with HR, leading to further dissatisfaction with the University.

The University should review whether existing accountability and reporting mechanisms provide sufficient oversight of sexual harm incidents and associated health and safety risks.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The University should use an independent external investigation of all serious sexual harm incidents regardless of whether there is a formal complaint. The university should use an independent external investigator for at least all disclosure on staff on student sexual misconduct. There should be a mandatory requirement that the University report all disclosures of sexual harm to Work Safe.

f. **Integrated Support Response**

If a student reports an experience of sexual harm to the Student Conduct Office, a coordinated support response should be available alongside the reporting process. This should include referrals to mental health and wellbeing services, information about external specialist support organisations, guidance on when appropriate, support for students who choose to make police complaints and consideration of any academic impacts arising from their experience.

Survey findings indicate that experiences of sexual harm can have consequences beyond the immediate incident, affecting students' wellbeing, sense of safety, and ability to engage fully with their studies. Students may experience difficulties attending classes, completing assessments, or participating in university life following an experience of sexual harm.

While the University already provides academic support mechanisms such as Compassionate Consideration, Aegrotat and Compassionate Consideration applications, and Late Deletion, these should form part of a coordinated response when students disclose experiences of sexual harm.

RECOMMENDATIONS

g. **Adequate Protection Procedures**

University disciplinary policies must explicitly address retaliatory behaviour and peer harassment. Clear procedures should outline what constitutes retaliatory behaviour, the processes for reporting such behaviour, and the range of disciplinary responses available to the University. Responses should be proportionate to the level of harm involved, and disciplinary processes should take into account the complexities that can arise in cases involving sexual harm.

The University should establish clear and consistent protocols to support students living in residential accommodation following a report of sexual harm, particularly where the parties involved reside in close proximity (e.g. the same hall or floor).
At present, there is a significant gap in guidance regarding what occurs after a disclosure or report, especially in situations where ongoing proximity may compromise a student's sense of safety and wellbeing. The University should introduce clear protocols for managing residential arrangements following reports of sexual harm, including safety planning, interim measures, and relocation options to prevent ongoing harm in shared living environments.

3. Strengthening Institutional Accountability and Oversight

a. Regular Institutional-Wide Surveying
This survey was only a start to understanding the prevalence of sexual harm on campus and does not capture the full scope or complexity of experiences. Ongoing, regular surveying is necessary to identify patterns in experiences and assess whether the implemented prevention and support initiatives are effective. A more comprehensive data-collection framework should be developed and distributed to students regularly.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The University of Otago approach demonstrates the value of institutionalised surveying as part of a broader accountability framework. Its latest study sampled over 1540 students which led to the establishment of Te Whare Tāwharau, a nationwide-first initiative, and the implementation of a sexual misconduct policy.[14] Such a survey has led to ongoing monitoring, policy development and coordinated institutional responses with dedicated support services and oversight mechanisms.

In this context, the University of Auckland's survey represents an important initial step; however, to achieve meaningful institutional accountability, it should be developed into a regular, coordinated programme of data collection and review. This would enable the University to monitor trends over time, evaluate the effectiveness of interventions, and ensure that responses to sexual harm remain evidence-based and responsive to student experiences.

b. Representative Student Rōpū Group

The University has previously held Student Harm Advisory Group roundtables to discuss students' experiences and access to support. The Group has been discontinued, but these groups are important to provide platforms where students can directly address those responsible for the University's response to sexual harm on campus.

The University should establish regular mechanisms for student consultation and accountability in relation to sexual harm prevention and response initiatives. It is recommended that the University establish a **Sexual Harm Prevention and Response Advisory Group** to provide ongoing, coordinated support to the University's efforts to prevent and respond to sexual harm.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Advisory Group would function as a cross-functional, institution-wide body, bringing together student representatives, professional and academic staff, and residential stakeholders to support a cohesive and responsive approach. Its mandate would extend beyond any single initiative; the University's work in this area is sustained, strategic, and informed by both data and lived experience.

The Group would serve as a central forum to identify and respond to emerging and ongoing issues, monitor progress across prevention and awareness campaigns, and strengthen communication within the University. In time, we hope that this platform will enable improved coordination between student-led initiatives, operational services, and institutional policy responses, supporting a more integrated approach to tackling sexual harm.

A key component of the Group's work would include oversight of a biennial University-wide sexual harm survey, ensuring that it is effectively designed, implemented, and reviewed. The Group would also support the interpretation of findings and provide advice on the development and monitoring of subsequent action plans. In addition, the Group would contribute to transparent reporting processes, including the release of survey findings and progress updates in the years following each survey cycle.

Membership would include diverse representation across the University community, including the **Women's Rights Officer, additional student representatives, representatives from the Student Conduct Office, professional staff, academic staff, and representatives from residential life, including Residential Advisors and student residents.** This composition is intended to ensure that both student voice and institutional accountability are embedded within decision-making and advisory processes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Operating in alignment with university statutes, policies, and procedures, the Advisory Group would act as a dedicated accountability mechanism, supporting ongoing review, continuous improvement, and strengthened institutional responsiveness to sexual harm.

4. Training for Club Executives

The University currently requires student leaders to complete Creating Cultures of Consent (CCOC) and Addressing Bullying, Harassment and Discrimination training. While these programmes provide an important foundation, survey findings suggest that they may not sufficiently address the practical realities of responding to sexual harm within student club environments. The following recommendations provide some practical steps to ensure student leaders are better equipped to identify and respond to harmful sexual behaviour within club settings.

a. Strengthen Student Club Training and Education

The University should therefore consider replacing or supplementing existing workshops with professionally led training specifically focused on responding to sexual harm within student organisations. This training should address issues identified within the survey, including managing disclosures, understanding appropriate referral pathways, responding to conflicts of interest, navigating power imbalances within club hierarchies, and maintaining clear boundaries between student leadership responsibilities and formal university processes.

Student clubs should also be required to establish clear processes for responding to concerns about harmful behaviour, including designated points of contact and referral pathways to appropriate University support services where requested by the student.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Training should be delivered by appropriately qualified professionals with expertise in sexual harm prevention and response. This would help ensure that guidance is accurate, legally informed, trauma-informed, and aligned with current best practice.

As part of these initiatives, the University should also implement mandatory bystander intervention training for all student club executive members to ensure they are equipped to handle instances of harmful sexual behaviour that arise in club-sanctioned environments. Embedding this training into annual club orientation programmes ensures that all student executives receive consistent, baseline guidance on how to respond effectively.

b. Establish clear student club response processes and accountability pathways

The University should strengthen its support to student clubs to ensure they are equipped to respond to sexual harm, harassment and related misconduct safely and intentionally. This recommendation is consistent with the University's broader responsibility to promote student safety and well-being.

There should be clear processes and guidance for managing complaints, with practical implementation across the clubs. There should also be a support option in the future if the complainant would like to seek external support or pursue a complaint procedure with the University or the police. Particular attention needs to be given to the power dynamics within club structures, such as committee hierarchy, which may make it difficult to provide a fair and safe response.

RECOMMENDATIONS

While responsibility for investigating complaints and imposing disciplinary outcomes should remain with the University, enhanced training would better equip student leaders to provide appropriate initial responses, connect students to relevant support services, and reduce the risk of harmful or inconsistent responses occurring within club environments.

5. Strengthening Prevention Interventions

a. Mandatory Consent Training for University Staff

The University should implement mandatory consent training for all staff members to be aware of what constitutes sexual harm, particularly around sexual harassment. As noted earlier, several respondents described incidents involving staff members or supervisory relationships. Improving staff understanding of sexual harm and appropriate responses should form part of broader cultural change across the University.

b. Reviewing and Strengthening the University's Policy on Staff–Student Intimate Relationships

The current policy does not prohibit intimate relationships between staff and students and generally requires disclosure only where a conflict of interest arises. Given the inherent power imbalances that may exist in some staff-student relationships, the policy should be reviewed to ensure it adequately protects students from exploitation, coercion, and other inappropriate behaviour. We have seen this translate in high profile staff and student incidents such as Joanthan Sperry and James Tibbles. In its current form, the policy may not sufficiently address the risks associated with power imbalances between students and staff, particularly where senior staff hold significant influence over a student's academic progression, wellbeing, or future opportunities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

c**. Funding for a student club event for creating cultural change**

While mandatory consent training for all students represents a preventative approach, previous efforts to make such programmes compulsory have faced resistance. In this context, a solely top-down approach may be ineffective in driving cultural change.

Effective prevention requires not only institutional policies and training, but also opportunities for students to lead conversations, challenge harmful attitudes, and shape cultural norms within their own communities. This recommendation emphasises the importance of student-led initiatives and peer engagement in fostering bottom-up cultural change.

This recommendation emphasises the importance of student-led initiatives and peer engagement in fostering bottom-up cultural change. Previous studies led by organisations such as Speak Up for Her (organised by Women in Law and AUSA) and Rape Awareness Week initiative (run by Thursday in Black, supported by AUSA) demonstrated the value of creating space for conversation and awareness.

Expanding these types of initiatives, particularly those that engage diverse student groups and encourage peer-to-peer discussion, may foster greater empathy, challenge harmful attitudes, and contribute to shifts in consent-related behaviours within student communities.

CONCLUSION

Sexual harm remains a significant issue within the student community of **Waipapa Taumata Rau | University of Auckland**. The survey findings suggest that the primary challenges are barriers to reporting, uncertainty regarding available support, and a lack of confidence in institutional responses.

Respondents also expressed concerns about aspects of campus culture, particularly around conversations relating to consent, respect, and harmful sexual behaviour. These findings highlight the importance of prevention initiatives that not only improve awareness but also contribute to broader cultural change within the University community.

While this survey is not representative of the wider student population, it provides valuable insight into the experiences and perspectives of those who chose to participate. It also contributes to a growing body of research indicating that sexual harm remains a persistent challenge across tertiary education settings in Aotearoa New Zealand and internationally.

The recommendations outlined in this report seek to strengthen prevention initiatives, reporting processes, support services, and institutional accountability. However, meaningful change requires more than procedural reform alone. The University must commit to long-term, sustainable, and transformative change that is proactive rather than reactive.

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SURVEY QUESTIONS

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