

Unpacking Gender-Based Violence in Australian Universities: A Demographic Approach

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This study investigates the rates and patterns of gender-based violence (GBV) among students at Australian universities. It uses data from the 2021 National Student Safety Survey (NSSS) and information from 39 universities. The research applies descriptive and inferential statistics, including chi-square analysis, to examine sexual harassment and assault rates based on gender and location. The results show a high and uneven prevalence of GBV. The Australian Capital Territory has the highest rates of sexual harassment at 21.8% and assault at 8.6%. Females are significantly more impacted, with clear gender differences seen at most institutions (harassment: $\chi^2 = 152.415$, $p < 0.001$; assault: $p < 0.05$). Risk tends to be focused in common campus areas, lecture theatres, and libraries, highlighting where vulnerability is greater. Although many students experience harmful incidents, there is limited awareness of how to report them or access available support services. The study stresses the importance of demographic and spatial factors in understanding GBV. It calls for combined efforts, such as embedding GBV education in the curriculum, improving reporting systems, and implementing specific prevention strategies. The findings highlight the need for ongoing research and changes within institutions to create safer and more inclusive university environments across Australia.

Keywords: *gender-based violence, tertiary education, patterns, prevalence, support awareness*

Introduction and Background

Gender-based violence (GBV) is violence against people based on their biological sex. It poses a major challenge for tertiary education systems around the world (Makhene 2022). According to Garcia-Moreno et al. (2006), one in three women will experience some form of abuse in their lifetime. The World Health Organization (WHO 2021) states that 27% of women have faced GBV or intimate violence by a non-partner during their lives. This violence not only harms individuals but also negatively affects the educational environment, creating fear and discrimination. Recently, awareness and advocacy for addressing GBV have grown. Still, many tertiary institutions struggle with how well they respond and the effectiveness of their existing policies (Anitha and Lewis 2018, Khalajabadi-Farahani 2025).

This urgent issue not only threatens the safety of students but also greatly affects their mental health and academic performance. Research shows that GBV creates major challenges for the safety, dignity, and academic success of students in

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colleges and universities (Forbes-Mewett & McCulloch 2016, Makhene 2022). Even with a noticeable rise in awareness and policy changes in recent years, the rates of GBV in educational institutions remain alarmingly high, especially in diverse socio-cultural settings like Australia (Connell 2020, Beyene et al. 2019, Makhene 2022).

GBV has been called a crisis in Australia because the rates have increased over the years. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS 2021) reported that 8 million Australians have faced physical or sexual harassment since they turned 15. The numbers for intimate partner violence are even worse for women. A total of 27% of women have experienced physical or sexual violence since the age of 15, while the figure is 12% for men (ABS 2021). In Australian universities, one in two students has experienced sexual harassment at least once in their lifetime. For female students, this number rises to 62.9% (Heywood et al. 2022). Research in other countries, like Nigeria and Ethiopia, shows GBV rates between 42.3% and 67.7% in educational institutions (Beyene et al. 2019). The high number of GBV cases among students calls for immediate action.

In several African countries, young females often face specific forms of treatment that can impact their rights, opportunities, and well-being. These practices may include gender-based discrimination, limited access to education, early marriage, and restricted participation in social and economic activities. Addressing these issues is crucial to promoting equality and improving the quality of life for young women across the continent (Ibor et al. 2025).

In South African universities, research on various forms of GBV showed that 56.5% experienced emotional or verbal abuse, 46.7% faced sexual assault, and 36.3% suffered physical violence. Additionally, 36.7% reported attempted rape, and 28.9% confirmed rape (Mutinta 2022). Multiple studies have documented the prevalence of GBV in South African universities. Many victims choose not to report incidents because of stigma, fear of not being believed, and poor responses from institutions (Mavhandu-Mudzusi 2018). To prevent this ongoing issue, universities should implement measures to protect and support students.

In Australian higher education, rates of gender-based violence (GBV) have been rising rapidly. This trend is negatively affecting students' health and wellbeing. The 2021 National Student Safety Survey found that one in twenty students experienced sexual assault, and one in six faced sexual harassment during their university studies (Nisbet et al. 2022). University managers are aware of the consequences of GBV, which include unwanted pregnancy, depression, anxiety, and sexually transmitted diseases. Furthermore, Burke et al.'s (2025) findings on the impacts of gender-based violence on the experiences of university students revealed that students suffered educational disruptions resulting from being forced to withdraw from their unit of study due to an inability to cope after this harm. Additionally, some students faced lengthy delays in completing their studies because of the complicated process of withdrawing and re-enrolling took years and in some cases decades to complete (Burke et al. 2025).

However, they continue to neglect the protection and support of students (Australian Human Rights Commission 2017). Instead, universities often overlook and silence GBV victims by providing limited resources to address the issue. They also fail to take action when they are informed that a student has been sexually assaulted (Schloeffel et al. 2025). In recent years, research conducted in Australian

Higher Education revealed shocking increasing rates of Gender Based Violence (Australian Government 2026). University staff and students reported that they were unaware of where to seek support or report formally in the event that they are victims of gender-based violence; and those who knew where to report were not happy with the process involved in this (Australian Government 2025). In an attempt to address this challenge, in January 2026 the Australian Government implemented the National Higher Education Code to Prevent and Respond to Gender-based Violence (Australian Government 2026). This Code provide institutions of higher learning with a reliable framework of standards and requirements aiming at reducing the incidence of gender-based violence, prioritise safety, improve prevention efforts, improving responses to gender-based violence and ensure providers accountability in ensuring students safety, including in students' accommodation (Australian Government 2026). This National Code has legal implications and thus, non-compliance may result in regulatory action which involves serious financial fines (Australian Government 2026).

Australia consists of six states and two territories, with 39 universities spread across these regions. Gender-based violence (GBV) is a serious problem in Australia, affecting people from various backgrounds. According to recent data, 2 in 5 women (29%) and 2 in 5 men (43%) over the age of 15 have faced at least one instance of violence (ABS 2021). Regarding sexual harassment, 2 in 5 women (22%) and 1 in 16 men (6.1%) have encountered it since turning 15 (ABS 2021). The high rates of GBV in Australian communities demand immediate action. Universities in Australia have recently recognised the extent of GBV on their campuses. Reports indicate that many students, particularly women, have dealt with harassment and assault (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2017). The first national survey of university students conducted in 2016 revealed the prevalence of sexual violence (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2017). A follow-up survey in 2021 among 39 universities confirmed these findings regarding the prevalence of GBV on campus (Heywood et al. 2022). The 39 Australian universities have rolled out several plans and initiatives to tackle this crisis (Henry 2024).

GBV shows up in many forms, including sexual harassment and sexual assault. In a study by Nisbet et al. (2022) involving university students in Australia, participants reported sexual harassment through inappropriate touching, sexist comments, stalking, unwanted kissing, and sexualized remarks. Sexual assault involves being forced to engage in sexual activity or being pressured to continue after withdrawing consent (Nisbet et al. 2022). Common forms of GBV in educational settings include sexual harassment, intimate partner violence, and stalking (Banyard et al. 2020). In terms of the effects of GBV, Burke et al. (2022) discovered that intimate partner violence was the most damaging type and presented various challenges for impacted students in terms of their participation in higher education. These experiences are not only frequent but also heavily influenced by gender, with marginalized communities facing greater risks (Silva et al. 2022). Australia offers a unique context for studying GBV. The landscape of GBV in higher education has been shaped by national surveys and policy changes aimed at tackling the issue. For example, the Australian Human Rights Commission (2017) highlighted alarming rates of sexual assault and harassment in universities. This report sparked a national reaction, motivating institutions to improve their policies and support services.

Gender based violence has a lasting negative impact on both staff and students in Higher Education in Australia. A study that was conducted in Australia and England universities with the aim of investigating the effects of gender-based violence reported that GBV is strife among university staff members and has become the norm in universities' management (Jackson and Gray 2026). The results from this study revealed that Australian universities are dangerous workplaces for women, especially those from previously marginalised groups such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People (Jackson and Gray 2026). In addition, GBV is not only experienced by women but is also experienced by men and people who identify as non-binary or with another gender identity (Humbert and Strid 2025).

In support of this, GBV negatively affects students' sense of identity, resulting in perceiving themselves to be different from others and feeling like an outsider (Burke et al. 2022). In Australia, a study that was conducted by Burke et al. (2022) on the impact of gender-based violence on students' participation and a sense of belonging reported that GBV results in on-going stress, loss of self-esteem, shame and loss of one's sense of confidence and capability.

Research on students' knowledge of where to report GBV cases and their awareness of available support in higher education has been troubling. Many students who are victims of GBV said they do not know where to report their cases or find help (Nisbet et al. 2022). Additionally, some students mentioned that after reporting their cases, they did not receive the timely response they needed. This led some students to choose not to report GBV incidents, as they felt that their university system had completely failed them (Nisbet et al. 2022).

A study involving five countries investigated students' experiences, knowledge, and confidence regarding gender-based violence (GBV) issues and concluded that students felt unprepared to handle these situations because their courses did not fully equip them (Bradbury-Jones et al. 2021). The study suggested that universities should include GBV topics in their curriculum to better prepare students for this issue (Bradbury-Jones et al. 2021). In support of this, findings from a study conducted by Coffey et al. (2023) among Australian university students argued that gender-based violence should be considered an equity issue due to its impacts on students' academic progress, high stress levels and anxiety.

Additionally, research has pointed out how institutional culture affects the reporting and support systems for GBV survivors (Henry et al. 2020). In Australia, many universities are working to raise awareness and encourage reporting. However, challenges still exist in making sure these programs are effective and reach all students (Henry et al. 2020). Students in Australian higher education have reported several obstacles to reporting GBV cases. They include a lack of understanding of what constitutes sexual assault and harassment, which affects when they report, slow response times for reported cases, and unclear policies and systems for educating, supporting, and reporting GBV cases (Nisbet et al. 2022). This situation calls for universities to urgently tackle these issues to ensure students' safety on campuses.

The existing literature highlights the need for a way to understand GBV in tertiary institutions. By examining the prevalence, patterns, and students' awareness of GBV support at Australian universities, we can gain important insights that will help develop effective policies and improve institutional practices. Ultimately, addressing GBV in

educational settings is crucial for creating a fair and inclusive academic environment for all students. Specifically, we address the following research questions:

1. What are the rates and types of gender-based violence in higher education institutions across Australia? How do these rates vary by gender and location?
2. How knowledgeable are students in Australian universities about support services and their options for seeking help with GBV?
3. How consistent and transparent are Australian universities in publicly reporting sexual violence incidents, disclosures, and institutional responses on their official websites?

In addressing these research questions, this study offers three main contributions to academic knowledge and policy by examining each university individually and conducting quantitative analyses to present findings not included in the NSSS report (Heywood et al. 2022). First, this study enhances understanding by providing evidence on the prevalence of GBV in Australian universities. The analysis of GBV rates shows how incidents differ by gender and geographic location on campuses. Second, it investigates whether students know about support services and where to seek help for dealing with GBV in university settings. This study will help assess how aware students are regarding reporting and seeking help. Third, the study highlights significant inconsistencies and gaps in the public reporting of sexual violence data by Australian universities. This research emphasises the urgent need for standardised, reliable reporting to improve transparency and accountability in higher education.

The findings are important for informing policymakers and university officials who want to create and maintain a safer and more supportive environment for addressing GBV in universities.

The rest of the paper is organised as follows:

- *Section 2: Methodology* — This section describes the methods and procedures used to conduct the research, providing a clear explanation of the steps taken and their rationale.
- *Section 3: Results and Discussion* — Here, we present the findings of our research and offer an in-depth discussion that interprets the results in the context of the research questions and contributions.
- *Section 4: Limitations* — This section outlines the limitations encountered during the research and addresses any constraints that may affect the interpretation or generalisability of the results.
- *Section 5: Conclusion and Recommendations* — In the final section, we summarise the main findings, draw conclusions, and offer recommendations based on the research outcomes.

Methodology

Overview

The study investigated how common sexual harassment and sexual assault are at universities in Australia and used a method that involved systematic data collection, an in-depth analysis of infographics, and advanced statistical modelling such as logistic regression in order to gain a thorough understanding of these matters.

Data Collection

We carried out a systematic review of the official websites of all 39 Australian universities that took part in the National Student Safety Survey (Heywood et al. 2022). The main source of data was the infographics available on each university's website, since these infographics give a summary of the survey's key results. For each institution, we carefully extracted and arranged the relevant information concerning sexual harassment and sexual assault to guarantee consistency and accuracy.

Infographic Analysis

From the infographics, we identified and recorded several key variables:

- The total amount of students who have been sexually harassed or sexually assaulted since the start of their studies.
- The number of such incidents that have taken place over the last 12 months.
- The locations on campus most frequently associated with sexual harassment, with a focus on the three main ones at each university.
- The difference in prevalence between genders about sexual harassment and sexual assault over the past year.
- The percentage of students who are aware of the reporting options and support services.

We also looked at the way each university gave information online regarding reporting and support services, judging the information on the grounds of its accessibility, clarity, and completeness.

Sample Size and Demographics

The number of students included in each sample differed, with the smallest number coming from Bond University (452 students) and the largest from the biggest university (1,775 students). Since more than 60% of the universities had samples consisting of over 1,000 students, this lends support to the idea that the findings are representative. Moreover, we looked at demographic data, focusing especially on gender, to put the results in context and to point out any differences in the experiences or way of reporting between male and female students.

Data Organisation

The data extracted were put together in Microsoft Excel so that they could be analysed systematically. The percentages given in the infographics were transformed into actual figures for the students by using the sample size of each university, which then allowed for an accurate estimate of the number of students in each category. For comparing the subgroups, for monitoring trends over time, and for checking the results for accuracy, the Excel tools were employed.

Statistical Analysis

The data were analysed using SPSS software (version 32) and Microsoft Excel. Descriptive statistics were used to summarise the demographic and incident data, and chi-square tests were carried out to examine the associations between gender and the experiences of sexual harassment or assault, while the status of the universities in terms of their harassment and assault rates was determined.

Logistic Regression Analysis

To find out which factors affect the chances of experiencing sexual harassment, we used logistic regression analysis. This method calculated the odds of an individual being affected according to factors such as gender. The model produced adjusted odds ratios together with confidence intervals thus giving a detailed evaluation of the risk factors while considering any possible confounding variables.

Results and Discussion

Results

Sexual Harassment and Sexual Assault

Table 1a. Sexual Harassment Rates at Australian Universities Above (A) and Below (B) the National University Average (16.1%) Since Enrolment

Status	University	Sexual Harassment 1 %
1 (A)	Australian National University	26.1
2 (A)	Bond University	25.0
3 (A)	James Cook University	22.2
4 (A)	University of Western Australia	21.4
5 (A)	Queensland University of Technology	20.4
6 (A)	Griffith University	20.2
7 (A)	University of Queensland	19.3
8 (A)	University of Adelaide	19.3
9 (A)	Notre Dame University	19.2
10 (A)	La Trobe University	18.9
11 (A)	Macquarie University	18.6
12 (A)	University of Melbourne	18.5
13 (A)	Murdoch University	18.5

14 (A)	University of Wollongong	18.5
15 (A)	University of Sydney	18.5
16 (A)	University of Newcastle	17.9
17 (A)	University of Canberra	17.5
18 (A)	Flinders University	17.3
19 (A)	University of Tasmania	16.9
20 (A)	University of Sunshine Coast	16.8
21 (B)	Charles Sturt University	16.0
22 (B)	Curtin University	15.6
23 (B)	Monash University	15.3
24 (B)	University of New England	15.0
25 (B)	Edith Cowan University	14.3
26 (B)	University of Technology Sydney	13.8
27 (B)	Western Sydney University	13.5
28 (B)	University of New South Wales	12.9
29 (B)	Swinburne University	12.6
30 (B)	Sothorn Cross University	12.4
31 (B)	Charles Darwin University	12.3
32 (B)	University of South Australia	12.1
33 (B)	Deakin University	11.9
34 (B)	Australia Catholic University	11.0
35 (B)	Victoria University	11.0
36 (B)	RMIT University	10.5
37 (B)	Federation University	10.2
38 (B)	University of Southern Queensland	10.1
39 (B)	Central Queensland University	9.1

Table 1b. *Sexual Harassment Rates at Australian Universities Above (A) and Below (B) the National Average (8.1%) in the Past 12 Months*

Status	University	Sexual Harassment 2 %
1 (A)	Bond University	20.6
2 (A)	University of Western Australia	14.8
3 (A)	Australia National University	14.5
4 (A)	James Cook University	13.8
5 (A)	University of Adelaide	13.0
6 (A)	Griffith University	12.8
7 (A)	Murdoch University	11.9
8 (A)	Queensland University of Technology	11.8
9 (A)	Notre Dame University	11.5
10 (A)	University of Sunshine Coast	11.2
11 (A)	Flinders University	11.2
12 (A)	University of Queensland	11.0
13 (A)	University of Canberra	10.2
14 (A)	Macquarie University	9.9
15 (A)	University of Wollongong	9.6
16 (A)	University of Sydney	9.5
17 (A)	University of Newcastle	9.3
18 (A)	Curtin University	9.2
19 (A)	University of Tasmania	8.6
20 (A)	La Trobe University	8.5
21 (A)	Edith Cowan University	8.2

22 (B)	University of Melbourne	7.5
23 (B)	Monash University	7.3
24 (B)	University Technology Sydney	7.2
25 (B)	Charles Sturt University	7.1
26 (B)	University of South Australia	7.1
27 (B)	Australian Catholic University	5.8
28 (B)	University of New South Wales	5.8
29 (B)	Western Sydney University	5.3
30 (B)	Southern Cross University	5.2
31 (B)	Charles Darwin University	4.6
32 (B)	Deakin University	4.5
33 (B)	Victoria University	4.0
34 (B)	University of Southern Queensland	3.8
35 (B)	Central Queensland University	3.8
36 (B)	University of New England	3.8
37 (B)	Swinburne University	3.7
38 (B)	Federation University of Australia	3.6
39 (B)	RMIT University	3.0

Table 1a shows that the Australian National University (ANU) has the highest percentage of sexual harassment, at 26.1%. A total of 430 students experienced harassment at ANU. The five universities with the highest rates of harassment are ANU, Bond University, James Cook University, the University of Western Australia, and Queensland University of Technology (QUT). All five institutions have percentages above 20%. The actual numbers from the study's sample size are ANU (430), University of Western Australia (370), University of Notre Dame (274), University of Melbourne (274), and University of Adelaide. Central Queensland University (CQU) has the lowest percentage of harassment incidents. However, in actual numbers, the bottom five universities, based on the sample size, are: RMIT (70), Southern Cross University (91), Federation University Australia (92), Victoria University (98), and Central Queensland University (104), since the beginning of the university.

Table 1b also shows the percentage of reported harassment at different universities over 12 months based on data collected in 2021. Bond University, with 20.6% (93), has the highest reported harassment. The actual number of harassed students, based on the sample size, includes the University of Western Australia (256), Australian National University (ANU) (204), Notre Dame (165), Murdoch University (162), and James Cook University (162). RMIT had 20 harassed students over 12 months, representing the lowest number.

The top 20 universities have rates above the national average of 16.1% (CDU 2022, Heywood et al. 2022), while 19 universities fall below the average, as shown in Table 1a. Similarly, as in Table 1b, for students who have experienced sexual harassment in the past 12 months, 21 universities are above the national average of 8.1% (CDU 2022, Heywood et al. 2022), while 18 universities are below.

Tables 2a and 2b highlight the percentages of sexual assault since starting university and over 12 months. These results show differences in student safety across the universities. Bond University reported the highest rate of sexual assault at 13.2%. The top five universities with the highest rates of sexual assault, based on the sample size, are: ANU (203), the University of Western Australia (119), the University of New England (117), James Cook University (112), and Notre Dame (89). In the 12 months, as shown

in Table 2b, Bond still has the highest percentage for sexual assault. The top five universities in terms of the actual number of sexual assaults, based on the sample size, are ANU (74), University of Western Australia (55), Bond University (42), James Cook University (39), and Notre Dame (28).

RMIT, Victoria University, Charles Darwin University (CDU), Deakin University, and Swinburne University did not record any data on sexual assault over the past 12 months.

Of the 39 universities as shown in Table 2a for assault since starting university, the assault rates of 18 universities are above the national average of 4.5% (CDU 2022, Heywood et al. 2022), while of the 32 universities that have reported cases of sexual assault in the past 12 months, 20 universities' assaults rates are above the national average of 1.1% (Heywood et al. 2022).

Table 3 shows the average rate of sexual harassment among university students in each state and territory since they began their studies. The two universities in the ACT have the highest average at 21.80%. Following that are the five universities in Western Australia, with an average of 17.94%. Queensland is next with an average of 17.30% across its nine universities. Tasmania has only one university, so its reported rate of 16.90% is not an average, but it places fourth. South Australia and New South Wales take the 5th and 6th positions, respectively. The Northern Territory has only one university and reports a rate of 12.40%, which is lower than the other states.

Table 3 also shows that the Australian Capital Territory reported the highest rate at 8.60% for sexual assault. Tasmania follows with a rate of 5.70%, marking it as the only university with this figure. Queensland is third with a rate of 5.44%. Bond University reported a high figure for sexual assault, which may have influenced the high rate in Queensland. New South Wales comes in fourth with a rate of 5.39%. This is followed by Western Australia at 4.20% and the Northern Territory at 3.80%, which is the figure for one university. South Australia has the lowest rate, sitting at 3.37%. The results are also presented in Figure 1.

Table 2a. *Sexual Assault Rates at Australian Universities Above (A) and Below (B) the National Average (4.5%) Since Enrolment*

Status	University	Sexual Assault 1 %
1 (A)	Bond University	13.2
2 (A)	Australian National University	12.3
3 (A)	James Cook University	9.5
4 (A)	University of New England	7.6
5 (A)	Charles Sturt University	7.4
6 (A)	University of Western Australia	6.9
7 (A)	University of Sydney	6.7
8 (A)	University of Newcastle	6.0
9 (A)	University of Wollongong	6.0
10 (A)	University of Tasmania	5.7
11 (A)	University of Melbourne	5.5
12 (A)	Monash University	5.1
13 (A)	University of Queensland	5.0
14 (A)	Notre Dame University	5.0
15 (A)	Macquarie	5.0
16 (A)	University of Canberra	4.9
17 (A)	La Trobe University	4.7
18 (A)	Griffith University	4.6

19 (B)	Queensland University of Technology	4.3
20 (B)	Curtin University	4.2
21 (B)	Southern Cross University	4.1
22 (B)	University of Adelaide	4.0
23 (B)	University of Technology Sydney	4.0
24 (B)	Flinders University	4.0
25 (B)	Charles Darwin University	3.8
26 (B)	Deakin University	3.7
27 (B)	University of Sunshine Coast	3.4
28 (B)	Swinburne University	3.3
29 (B)	University of New South Wales	3.2
30 (B)	University of Southern Queensland	2.9
31 (B)	Murdoch University	2.9
32 (B)	RMIT University	2.8
33 (B)	Western Sydney University	2.6
34 (B)	Australian Catholic University	2.5
35 (B)	Victoria University	2.5
36 (B)	University of South Australia	2.1
37 (B)	Edith Cowan University	2.0
38 (B)	Central Queensland University	2.0
39 (B)	Federation University Australia	1.9

Table 2b. Sexual Assault Rates at Australian Universities at and Above (A) and Below (B) the National Average (1.1%) in the Past 12 Months

Status	University	Sexual Assault 2 %
1 (A)	Bond University	9.3
2 (A)	Australian National University	4.5
3 (A)	James Cook University	3.3
4 (A)	University of Western Australia	3.2
5 (A)	University of Newcastle	2.8
6 (A)	Griffith University	2.6
7 (A)	University of Wollongong	2.1
8 (A)	Charles Sturt University	1.9
9 (A)	University of Canberra	1.7
10 (A)	University of Queensland	1.6
11 (A)	Notre Dame University	1.6
12 (A)	University of Technology Sydney	1.6
13 (A)	University of Sydney	1.5
14 (A)	University of Adelaide	1.4
15 (A)	Macquarie University	1.4
16 (A)	University of Melbourne	1.3
17 (A)	University of Sunshine Coast	1.2
18 (A)	Curtin University	1.1
19 (A)	University of Tasmania	1.1
20 (A)	University of New England	1.1
21 (B)	La Trobe University	1.0
22 (B)	Murdoch University	1.0
23 (B)	Flinders University	1.0
24 (B)	Queensland University of Technology	0.9
25 (B)	Edith Cowan University	0.7
26 (B)	Monash University	0.7
27 (B)	Central Queensland University	0.7
28 (B)	Southern Cross University	0.6

29 (B)	University of New South Wales	0.6
30 (B)	Australian Catholic University	0.5
31 (B)	University of South Australia	0.5
32 (B)	Federation University Australia	0.4
33 (B)*	RMIT University	-----
34 (B)*	Victoria University	-----
35 (B)*	Charles Darwin University	-----
36 (B)*	Deakin University	-----
37 (B)*	Swinburne University	-----
38 (B)*	University of Southern Queensland	-----
39 (B)*	Western Sydney University	-----

*There are no assault values.

Table 3. *SH and SASlt Percentage since Starting University in States or Territories*

Status	State/Territory	Average Percentage (Sexual Harassment)	Status	State/Territory	Average Percentage (Sexual Assault)
1	Australia Capital Territory	21.80	1	Australia Capital Territory	8.60
2	Western Australia	17.94	2	*Tasmania	5.70
3	Queensland	17.30	3	Queensland	5.44
4	*Tasmania	16.90	4	New South Wales	5.39
5	South Australia	16.30	5	Western Australia	4.20
6	New South Wales	16.27	6	**Northern Territory	3.80
7	Victoria	13.68	7	Victoria	3.69
8	**Northern Territory	12.40	8	South Australia	3.37

*Average for only one university in a state.

**Average for only one university in a state.

Figure 1. *Sexual Harassment (SH) and Sexual Assault (SASLT) Percentage since Starting University in States and Territories*

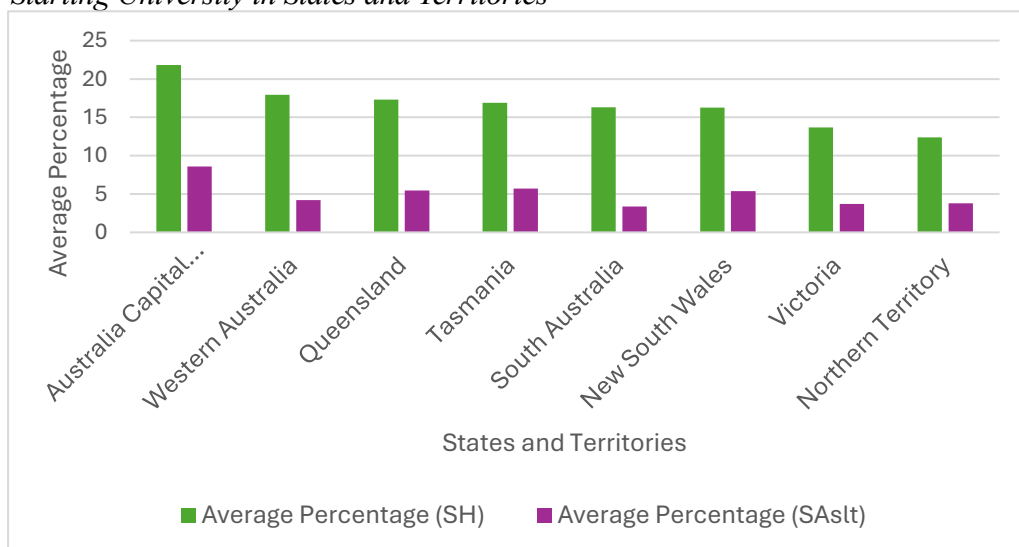
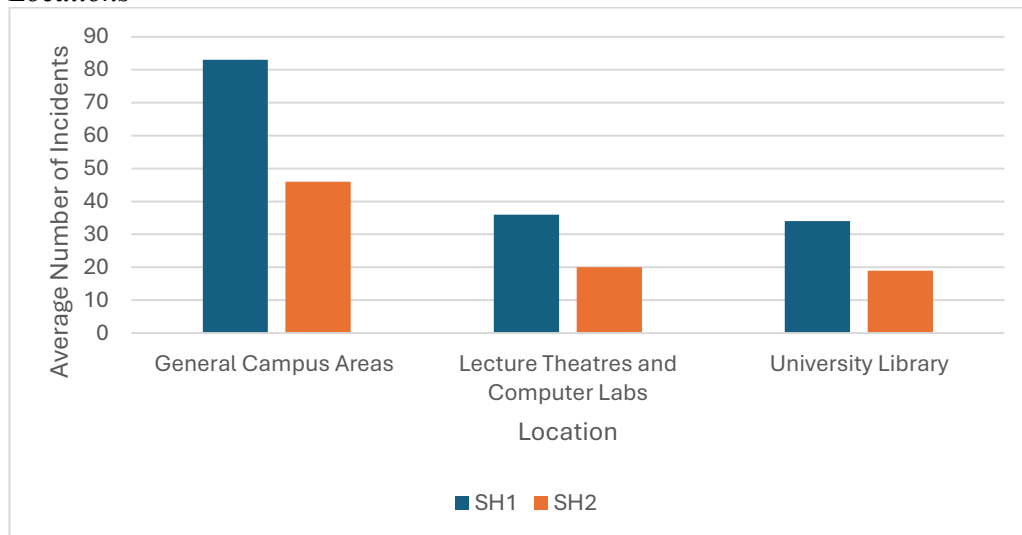


Table 4. Average Number of Sexual Harassment since Starting University (SH1) and 12 Months (SH2)

Period	Top three Locations for 23 Universities		
	General Campus Areas	Lecture Theatres and Computer Labs	University Library
SH1	83	36	34
SH2	46	20	19

Table 4 shows the average number of sexual harassment incidents reported by students in three areas across 23 universities in Australia. The comparison includes incidents since the start of university (SH1) and those in the last 12 months (SH2), based on data collected in 2021. The results indicate that General Campus Areas have the highest number of sexual harassment cases for both periods, with 83 incidents for SH1 and 46 for SH2. Following this are the incidents in Lecture Theatres and Computer Labs, with averages of 36 and 20 incidents, respectively. University Libraries are close behind, showing averages of 34 and 19 incidents for SH1 and SH2, respectively. Figure 2 also presents these results.

Figure 2. Average Number of Sexual Harassment for SH1 and SH2 in the Three Top Locations**Table 5a.** Chi-Square Results

GBV Measure – Harassment and Assault	Number of Universities	Chi-Square Value	df	Cramer's V	p-value
1. Sexual Harassment and Gender	36	152.415	1	0.144	<0.001**
2. Sexual Assault and Gender	8	3.360	1	0.079	0.067
3. Sexual Assault and Gender	28	4.045	1	0.061	0.044*

*P<0.05, **P<0.01

The Chi-Square value given in the first row of Table 5a is 152.415 having one degree of freedom ($df = 1$) and is based on data from 36 universities. Cramer's V for this case is 0.144 and the p-value is less than 0.001. This shows that there is a statistically significant association between gender and the experiences of sexual harassment at these universities. Yet the Cramer's V value of 0.144 shows that even though the relationship is statistically significant, it is weak in terms of strength. The Chi-Square value given in the second row is 3.360 (with 1 degree of freedom) for a group of 8 universities. These are the universities which supplied complete data regarding both female and male students who had experienced sexual assault in the previous 12 months. Here, the p-value is 0.067 and Cramer's V is 0.079. The findings indicate that there is no statistically significant association between gender and sexual assault at these universities. The third analysis includes 28 universities where complete data were not supplied for both male and female students who have been assaulted; in this case, the Chi-Square value is 4.045 (with 1 degree of freedom), the p-value is 0.044, and Cramer's V is 0.061. There is therefore a statistically significant association between gender and sexual assault among this group. Yet the Cramer's V value shows that the strength of this association is very weak. The data gathered from eight universities covered detailed information regarding both female and male students who had experienced sexual assault in the previous 12 months. In the case of the bigger group of 28 universities, however, complete data for both genders were not provided. Even though the incomplete data represented a limitation, the analysis was still carried out with all the available information to make the best possible use of the data available.

Table 5b. *Logistic Regression Analysis of Relationship between Sexual Harassment and Gender*

Independent	Variables in the Equation						95% C.I for Exp(B)	
	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)	Lower	Upper
Gender			1557.601	2	< 0.001			
Gender (1)	2.447	0.085	825.078	1	< 0.001	11.555	9.778	13.655
Gender (2)	4.818	0.122	1556.929	1	< 0.001	123.769	97.424	157.238
Constant	1.214	0.067	323.952	1	< 0.001	3.368		

The findings from a logistic regression analysis examining the relationship between gender and experiences of sexual harassment are given in Table 5b. The results show that women are 11.6 times more likely than men to experience sexual harassment, and this figure is accurate since the 95% confidence interval is relatively narrow, extending from 9.78 to 13.66. People who have been classified as 'other gender', such as transgender, non-binary, and other similar identities, are at an even higher risk, the odds of them suffering sexual harassment being about 124 times greater than those for men. This finding is highly statistically significant ($p < 0.001$) and the 95% confidence interval for this group ranges from 97.42 to 157.24. The constant value ($\text{Exp}(B) = 3.368$) represents the odds of members of the reference group (males) being subjected to sexual harassment when all the other variables in the model are at their baseline levels.

Report and Support Seeking

Table 6 provides an overview of sexual harassment and assault report and support awareness across 39 universities, using six indicators as follows:

- **UCSH:** University Complaints on Sexual Harassment
- **USSH:** University Support for Sexual Harassment
- **UWCSH:** Unsure Where to Complain about Sexual Harassment
- **UASH:** Unaware of Support for Sexual Harassment
- **UWRSAs:** Unaware of Where to Report Sexual Assault
- **LKSAs:** Lack Knowledge about Support for Sexual Assault

The values for sexual harassment reveal differences in formal complaints and in seeking help within the university setting. For instance, the University of Southern Queensland and Deakin University have higher complaint rates, at 7.9% and 6.7%, respectively. In contrast, the University of New South Wales (UNSW) and the University of Melbourne have lower complaint rates of 3.5% and 1.9%. Curtin University, the University of Tasmania, the University of the Sunshine Coast, Western Sydney University, RMIT University, La Trobe University, Swinburne University, the University of South Australia, and the University of Sydney did not provide any percentage values for formal complaints.

Although most students do not know where to find help or how to file a complaint, some universities stand out. Charles Sturt University has 25% of its students seeking support, while the University of Wollongong has 24.1%.

The percentage values for sexual assault are listed in the last two columns of Table 6. In terms of awareness about where to report sexual assault, a significant number of students from the University of Western Australia (63.1%) and Australia Catholic University (61.1%) do not know where to report sexual assault. Other universities with high levels of unawareness include Queensland University of Technology and Griffith University, with percentages of 60.7% and 60.2%. The levels of unawareness regarding where to seek support for sexual assault are as follows: the top three universities are the University of Western Australia (51.9%), RMIT University (51.8%), and Queensland University of Technology (51.4%).

Table 7 shows the availability and consistency of data on sexual violence reports, disclosures, and institutional responses from the websites of 39 Australian universities. All the universities listed claim to provide this information on their official websites, marked by "Yes." However, an asterisk (*) next to several universities indicates that some data is available, but it is not consistently updated or regularly reported. This leads to important gaps in the information that the public can access. Nearly half of the institutions listed face this inconsistency, which points to ongoing issues with transparency and reporting practices in higher education.

The table shows that out of 39 Australian universities, 22 have an asterisk (*) next to 'Yes'. This indicates that their websites do not consistently provide regular updates or reports on incidents of sexual violence. Approximately 56% (22 out of 39) of universities have gaps or inconsistencies in their public reporting. The remaining 44% (17 out of 39) of universities share data on sexual violence reports,

disclosures, and responses on their websites without an asterisk. This suggests they offer more consistent and regular updates.

Table 6. *Sexual Harassment and Assault Reporting & Support Awareness at Australian Universities*

University	UCSH	USSH	UWCSH	UASH	UWRSA's	LKSA's
1. University of Queensland	2.1	17.5	47.5	42.6	51.7	39.3
2. Curtin University of Technology	----	10.6	55.6	51.7	58.6	49.6
3. Southern Cross University	5.5	22.3	55.0	50.4	58.7	47.3
4. Griffith University	2.9	18.9	56.9	53.9	60.2	49.7
5. Notre Dame University	4.4	14.1	44.2	38.6	47.1	34.4
6. Australian Catholic University	2.6	16.5	57.4	52.2	61.1	48.4
7. Edith Cowan University	2.7	11.6	46.2	42.6	49.3	38.5
8. Federation University Australia	3.7	16.5	43.0	39.0	45.6	34.3
9. University of Adelaide	3.1	17.4	47.0	42.3	50.3	37.5
10. University of Melbourne	1.9	20.7	56.5	51.5	59.3	46.5
11. University of Southern Queensland	7.9	21.2	46.1	44.1	48.8	42.6
12. University of Western Australia	3.4	15.1	59.8	55.8	63.1	51.9
13. University of Canberra	2.8	16.9	47.0	41.6	49.6	40.0
14. University of Tasmania	----	17.7	50.3	47.1	53.6	45.7
15. University of Sunshine Coast	----	18.3	35.5	32.2	38.9	29.7
16. Western Sydney University	----	17.2	49.7	47.9	55.2	46.4
17. University of Newcastle	4.2	11.1	46.6	39.1	50.1	36.3
18. Charles Sturt University	3.8	25.0	50.4	47.9	53.4	45.0
19. Macquarie University	2.7	10.6	45.0	41.1	47.4	38.7
20. RMIT University	----	14.0	57.3	52.7	59.3	51.8
21. Victoria University	4.7	24.0	54.3	50.8	56.7	49.5
22. La Trobe University	----	15.3	52.0	48.5	55.1	43.5
23. Murdoch University	4.4	12.4	57.1	51.1	59.7	45.6
24. Queensland University of Technology	2.8	12.7	58.4	54.9	60.7	51.4
25. University of Wollongong	5.5	24.1	53.9	48.0	55.9	45.2
26. University Technology Sydney	2.5	16.2	41.0	36.0	42.3	29.2
27. Charles Darwin University	4.2	21.4	50.8	48.6	53.3	43.4
28. Monash University	2.7	19.9	46.7	41.0	48.0	37.8
29. Bond University	3.6	19.6	39	34.8	40.6	33.5
30. Central Queensland University	2.1	11.5	44.1	41.5	47.4	39.0
31. Deakin University	6.7	17.7	46.9	43.7	50.3	41.2
32. Flinders University	3.6	14.0	46.4	41.7	49.1	36.9
33. James Cook University	3.1	22.6	37.1	33.4	38.3	29.8
34. Swinburne University	----	19.2	52.3	47.8	54.4	43.9

35. University of New South Wales	2.1	16.2	52.0	49.3	54.0	45.9
36. University of South Australia	----	11.3	55.9	52.7	58.7	49.7
37. University of Sydney	----	17.0	55.1	47.6	56.9	47.3
38. Australian National University	3.3	18.6	48.3	41.5	48.5	36.9
39. University of New England	2.8	19.7	49.4	46.2	51.1	44.0

Column 2. UCSH – University Complaints on Sexual Harassment

Column 3. USSH – University Support for Sexual Harassment

Column 4. UWCSH – Unsure Where to Complain about Sexual Harassment

Column 5. UASH – Unaware of Support for Sexual Harassment

Column 6. UWRsAs – Unaware of Where to Report Sexual Assault

Column 7. LKSAs – Lack Knowledge about Support for Sexual Assault

Table 7. Sexual Violence Reporting Data on Australian University Websites

University	Sexual Violence Reports and Responses on University Websites
1. Australian Catholic University	Yes
2. Australian National University	Yes
3. University of Notre Dame	Yes*
4. University of Canberra	Yes*
5. Charles Sturt University	Yes*
6. Macquarie University	Yes
7. Southern Cross University	Yes*
8. University of New England	Yes*
9. University of Newcastle	Yes*
10. University of Sydney	Yes
11. University of Technology Sydney	Yes
12. University of Wollongong	Yes
13. University of New South Wales	Yes
14. University of Western Sydney	Yes*
15. Charles Darwin University	Yes*
16. Bond University	Yes
17. Central Queensland University	Yes*
18. Griffith University	Yes
19. James Cook University	Yes*
20. Queensland University of Technology	Yes*
21. University of Queensland	Yes*
22. University of Southern Queensland	Yes*
23. University of Sunshine Coast	Yes
24. Flinders	Yes*
25. University of Adelaide	Yes*
26. University of South Australia	Yes*
27. University of Tasmania	Yes
28. Deakin University	Yes
29. Federation University	Yes*
30. La Trobe University	Yes
31. Monash University	Yes
32. RMIT University	Yes*
33. Swinburne University	Yes

34. University of Melbourne	Yes
35. Victoria University	Yes*
36. Curtin University	Yes
37. Edith Cowan University	Yes *
38. Murdoch University	Yes*
39. University of Western Australia	Yes*

*The university's website has failed to provide consistent updates or reports on sexual violence incidents, leading to gaps in publicly available information.

Discussion

The results of this study show that the Australian National University (ANU) has the highest proportion of sexual harassment, amounting to 26.1 per cent, 430 students having experienced harassment at ANU. Likewise, Bond University, James Cook University, the University of Western Australia, and the Queensland University of Technology (QUT) all have sexual harassment rates above 20 per cent. These findings demonstrate that sexual harassment is a widespread problem in several Australian universities, supporting the patterns that have been reported in recent national studies (CDU 2022, Heywood et al. 2022). Furthermore, Bond University also has the highest rate of reported sexual harassment in the past 12 months, which is 20.6 per cent. With regard to sexual assault, Bond University is again first, with a rate of 13.2 per cent, and the top five universities in terms of sexual assault when looked at by sample size are ANU (203), the University of Western Australia (119), the University of New England (117), James Cook University (112), and Notre Dame (89). The results are in line with national trends showing that some institutions consistently report higher levels of both harassment and assault, thus highlighting the need for specific interventions (CDU 2022, Heywood et al. 2022).

With regard to gender and the places where cases of gender-based violence (GBV) take place, the General Campus Areas had the highest number of cases of sexual harassment for both the period since the students began university (SH1: 83 cases) and for the previous 12 months (SH2: 46 cases). Lecture Theatres and Computer Labs came next, with 36 and 20 cases on average, respectively, while the University Libraries recorded averages of 34 for SH1 and 19 for SH2. This is in line with earlier research that has found general campus areas and shared spaces to be typical locations for GBV incidents because of the higher volume of people present and the reduced level of supervision (Henry et al. 2020, Bradbury-Jones et al. 2021). The fact that incidents are concentrated in these kinds of environments underscores the need for specific prevention strategies and for greater campus safety measures, as suggested in the literature (Nisbet et al. 2022).

In terms of the association between gender and experiences of gender-based violence (GBV), focusing on sexual harassment and assault in 36 universities, a p-value of less than 0.001 was obtained. This low p-value shows that the result is statistically significant. It means there is a strong connection between a person's gender and their chance of experiencing sexual harassment. Females are more likely to face sexual harassment compared to males in the universities studied. The result from this study corroborates research that has concluded that women are mostly at risk in terms of experiencing GBV globally (Heywood et al. 2022, WHO 2013, Garcia-Moreno et al. 2006). Our study also indicates that students of other genders,

such as transgender and non-binary individuals, face a higher risk of experiencing sexual harassment compared to their cisgender peers. This finding is supported by earlier research conducted by Martin-Storey et al. (2018), which reported similar results regarding the vulnerability of transgender and non-binary students to sexual harassment.

In terms of students' knowledge about where to complain or seek support within the university regarding sexual harassment and sexual assault, the values for sexual harassment reveal differences in formal complaints and in seeking help within the university setting. Although most students do not know where to find help or how to file a complaint, some universities stand out. Charles Sturt University has 25% of its students seeking support, while the University of Wollongong has 24.1%. With regard to where to report sexual assault, a significant number of students from the University of Western Australia (63.1%) and Australia Catholic University (61.1%) do not know where to report sexual assault. Other universities with high levels of unawareness include Queensland University of Technology and Griffith University, with percentages of 60.7% and 60.2%. The results from this study are similar to other studies which concluded that students lack understanding of what constitutes GBV, how and where to report cases due to unclear policies and systems for educating, supporting and reporting GBV (Nisbet et al. 2022, Henry et al. 2020, Bradbury-Jones et al. 2021). Additionally, in instances where students have reported the abuse they have experienced, universities often overlook and silence GBV victims by providing limited resources to address the issue, resulting in failing to take action when they are informed that a student has been sexually assaulted (Schloeffel et al. 2025). Research shows that many tertiary institutions still struggle how well to respond and effectively implement their GBV policies (Anitha and Lewis 2018, Khalajabadi-Farahani 2025). This calls for an urgent intervention for GBV educational and reporting training to raise awareness. On this note, research calls for GBV to be considered an equity issue due to its impacts on students' academic progress, high stress levels and anxiety (Coffey et al. 2023).

Additionally, results from this study reveals that universities' website have not consistently provided regular updates or reports on incidents of sexual violence, resulting in gaps in the information available to the public. Approximately 56% (22 out of 39) of universities have gaps or inconsistencies in their public reporting. The remaining 44% (17 out of 39) of universities share data on sexual violence reports, disclosures, and responses on their websites without an asterisk. This finding aligns with research conducted by Henry et al. (2020) which pointed out how institutional culture affects the reporting and support systems for GBV survivors. This is an area of improvement on university management to ensure that more consistent and regular updates on GBV cases are provided by all universities in Australia.

Limitations

This study has limitations that should be kept in mind when interpreting the findings. First, relying on self-reported survey data may lead to recall bias and underreporting, especially with sensitive topics like sexual harassment and assault. Students might hesitate to share their experiences due to stigma, fear of consequences, or distrust in

institutional processes. This could result in an underestimation of prevalence rates. Second, the study focuses on Australian universities and leaves out non-university tertiary institutions, which might have different patterns and rates of gender-based violence (GBV). This limits how broadly the findings can be applied to the entire tertiary education sector. Third, while the sample sizes for most universities were large enough, differences in response rates and the lack of updated, consistently reported data for some institutions might influence the accuracy and comparability of the results. Finally, the analysis used institutional infographics and publicly available data, which might not reflect the full complexity or recent changes in GBV incidents and response efforts.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Gender-based violence (GBV) is still a widespread and serious problem in Australian universities. It constitutes significant risks to student security and well-being and threatens the wider aim of educational fairness. This study provides a detailed demographic analysis of the prevalence of GBV, where it occurs, and the factors associated with it. It highlights clear differences based on gender and location. The results show the vital need for strong, university-wide strategies that raise awareness and make support and reporting systems easier to access and effective.

To tackle these challenges, universities should take the following actions:

1. *Strengthen Data Practices:* Improve the consistency, transparency, and frequency of data collection and reporting on GBV incidents. Public data can drive accountability and guide targeted interventions.
2. *Integrate GBV Education:* Include GBV prevention and response education in university curricula and orientation programs. Customized workshops and ongoing training for both students and staff can foster a culture of respect and understanding.
3. *Expand Support Services:* Increase the availability and visibility of confidential, trauma-informed support services. Ensure these services are accessible to all students, especially those from marginalized or remote backgrounds.
4. *Promote Safe Campus Environments:* Invest in campus infrastructure, like better lighting and secure transit options. Establish clear and well-communicated policies for responding to GBV.
5. *Foster Inclusive Leadership and Community Engagement:* Encourage leaders at all levels to support GBV prevention and response. Actively involve students and staff in ongoing discussions and policy development.
6. *Ongoing Research and Policy Reform:* Support continuous research to track trends and assess how effective interventions are. Stay responsive to new evidence by updating policies and practices as needed.

Institutional commitment at all levels is essential for meaningful progress. By using detailed strategies and maintaining a culture of accountability, Australian universities can create safer, more inclusive learning environments. In these environments, all students are protected from gender-based violence and are supported to thrive.

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