



THE HUNTING GROUND AUSTRALIA PROJECT

AUSTRALIAN CONTEXT

The Hunting Ground is a critically acclaimed US feature-length documentary that chronicles the personal stories of students who have reported sexual assault on campuses, and the failure of a number of American universities to respond effectively and appropriately to these reports.

The Hunting Ground Australia Project is using the film as a catalyst for conversation and action around the issue of sexual violence in Australian universities.

We acknowledge that there are cultural, financial and structural differences between American and Australian universities and student life.

As depicted in *The Hunting Ground*, American universities often have their own campus police forces. In the U.S., if an assault occurs on campus and it is reported to the university, it is compulsory for the university to then report the incident to the federal Department of Justice. This compulsory reporting regime means that national data can be collected, as demonstrated in the film.

The legal frameworks governing Australian and American universities differ markedly. In Australia, responsibility for investigating reports of sexual violence primarily lies with State and Territory police forces. Australian universities have a more limited role to play in investigating allegations of sexual assault and sexual harassment, and in collecting incident data, than their American counterparts, and there is no Australian equivalent of the Title IX mechanism utilised by student activists in the film.

Nonetheless, Australian universities have a responsibility to create a safe, secure and nondiscriminatory environment for staff and students. Through the *Respect.Now.Always.* initiative, Australian universities have made a strong commitment to working together across the sector to prevent sexual assault and harassment.

While the structure of universities and college life encompassing big college sports, fraternities and sororities in the U.S. differs from Australia, the depictions of university culture — particularly college inductions, parties and nightlife at university — are familiar to the Australian student experience.

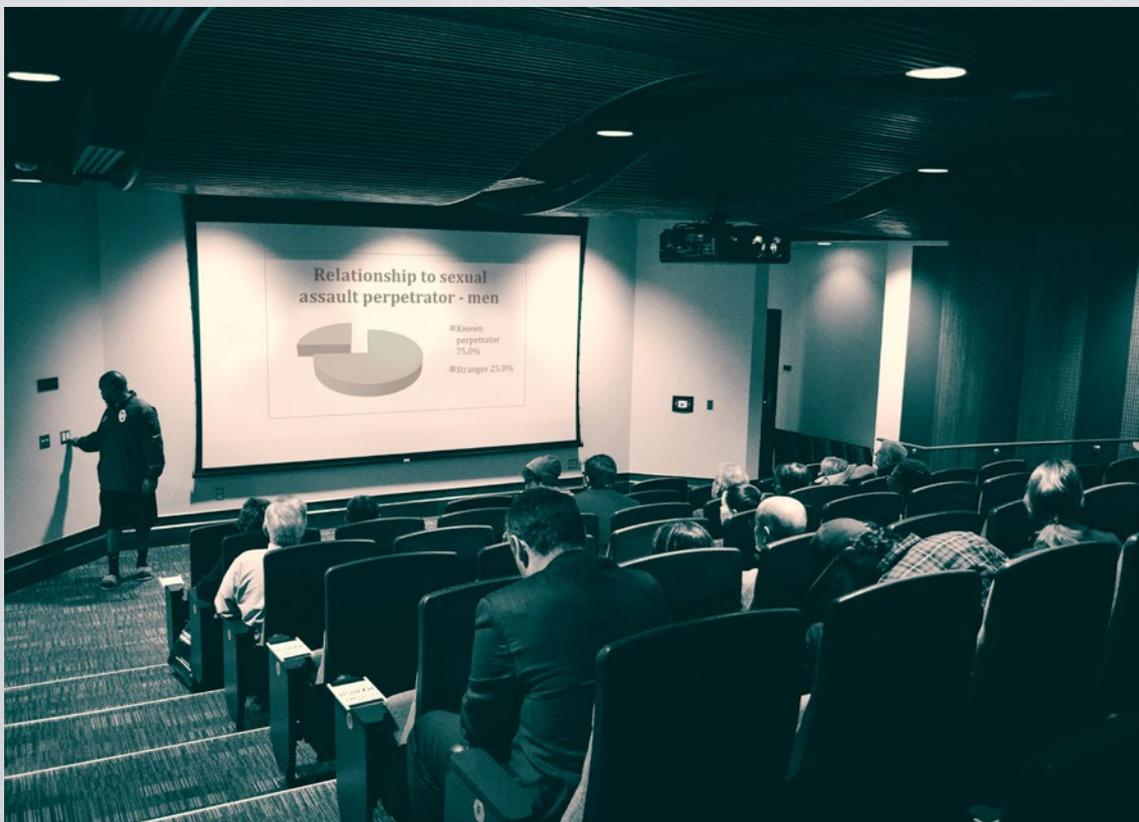
The Australian context – what do we know about sexual violence in Australian universities?

While media reports (see below) suggest that sexual violence in Australian universities does occur, the issue of sexual violence on campuses has not, to date, been subject to the same degree of attention in Australia as in the United States, where *The Hunting Ground* was made.

To date there has been no comprehensive, sector-wide independent statistical information available about the prevalence of sexual assault, sexual threats and sexual harassment in Australian universities.

What we do know is:

- **The Australian Bureau of Statistics' *Recorded Crime – Victims*** publication, released in July 2016, found that reports of sexual assault had reached a six-year high, after a 3% rise during 2015. Nationally, over four in five sexual assault victims were female, and females aged between 15 and 19 years were seven times more likely to have been a victim of sexual assault compared to the overall population.¹



- **The Australian Bureau of Statistics' Personal Safety Survey²** (PSS) in 2012 estimated that 1 in 5 women and 1 in 20 men had experienced sexual violence³ since the age of 15.⁴ Of these, 75% of women had experienced sexual violence by a known person, and the most common perpetrator (in about a third of these cases) was a boyfriend/girlfriend or date.
The PSS also found that women in the 18 to 24 years age group — accounting for some 59% of students at Australia's higher education institutions⁵ — were more likely, compared to all women, to have experienced sexual assault in the 12 months prior to the survey.
- The 2011 **Review into the Treatment of Women at the Australian Defence Force Academy** (ADFA) examined the incidence of sexual violence there. The review team found that ADFA was “not alone in facing these challenges. Other tertiary institutions and residential colleges have similar concerns.”⁶
- Two National Union of Students (NUS) **Talk About It** surveys — the first in 2010-2011⁷ and the second in 2015⁸ — explored student's experience of sexual violence. The sample sizes of the surveys were small, and the methodology could be improved; nonetheless the surveys provide some important and concerning indicators of the experience of Australian women university students. For example, in the 2015 survey, the overwhelming majority of female university students — around 95% — who reported experiencing physical mistreatment, sexual harassment, or some form of sexual assault, had not reported the incident to either university officials or the police.⁹ Of the 102 respondents who had reported an incident to the police or their university, 73 reported being unsatisfied with how it was dealt with and responded to.¹⁰

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