



REVIEW OF SEXUAL
HARASSMENT AND SEXUAL
ASSAULT AT THE JAMES
COOK UNIVERSITY
TOWNSVILLE ON-CAMPUS
RESIDENCES

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Executive Summary

University on-campus residences play a vital role in the life and education of students. They provide accommodation and easy access to classes, and should also be places of safety and community.

James Cook University attracts students from across Australia and other countries, and up to 1300 students per year seek accommodation on the Townsville campus. On-campus accommodation at JCU Townsville is provided by two private colleges: Saints Catholic College and John Flynn College, and four JCU Halls of Residence. This review was commissioned by Ms Tricia Brand, Deputy Vice Chancellor of the Services and Resources Division of JCU.

This review sought to hear the views of current and ex-residents, and staff, in order to understand their perspectives of sexual harassment and sexual assault in their colleges and halls. The review used a multi-method approach to data collection: an anonymous and de-identified survey, group discussions and individual interviews.

An invitation to undertake the survey, and a link to it, was sent to a total of 1279 current residents, and an additional 1063 people who were resident in the colleges and halls in the 18 months preceding June 2018. Discussion groups were organised at each college and hall, and invitations made to current and ex-residents to contact the reviewer for private interviews. The reviewer spent extensive time during the five week data collection period in the dining rooms and other public spaces in the colleges and halls, introducing herself to residents and making herself available for interviews.

39% of current residents participated in the group discussions, and 4% of current residents participated in interviews. 44% of current residents completed the survey; as did 9% of ex-residents. The qualitative data from groups, interviews and open-ended survey questions were subjected to thematic analysis, and the quantitative data from the survey questionnaires was collated and analysed using *Survey Monkey*.

It is important to note that all survey questions were optional, except those which were demographic. That is, respondents could skip most questions and only answer those which they chose. Therefore, the percentages provided in this report relate to those who answered the related question in the survey, not those who responded to the survey itself.

The findings below reflect the strong themes which emerged in the analysis of qualitative data. They are headed with phrases used by participants, and the phrase “on-college” is used as it is a term commonly said by residents in halls and colleges. Where significant, quantitative data from the survey is included within the findings.

“Colleges are safe and good places to be”: The strongest theme to emerge in this review was that participants enjoyed living on-college and believed them to be safe. Survey data showed that 97% of respondents felt safe on-college all or most of the time.

“Sexual harassment is not a big problem here”: Most residents’ first response to a comment in regard to the prevalence of sexual harassment was that it did not occur on-college. When questioned further, many participants said that the only time “low level” sexual harassment occurred was when alcohol was used excessively. Participants also reported that Principals of on-campus accommodation had “clamped down” on all college and hall activities and events which had been previously associated with hazing and sexual harassment. Most participants believed this had made their on-campus accommodation a safer and better place to be.

87 of the respondents to the survey (13%) indicated that they had experienced sexual harassment. However, when given a list of examples of sexual harassment (of which respondents could choose more than one), 28% of those who responded to the question identified that they had experienced one or more types of such behaviour.

"We don't hear about sexual assault": Data from the review showed that sexual assaults were not typically disclosed, and were therefore not known about, on-college. The primary reason given for non-disclosure was fear from those assaulted that they will become the subjects of gossip.

"It does happen": While almost all group and individual participants in this review did not know if sexual assault had occurred, many believed it could, and they linked this likelihood with the misuse of alcohol. 6% (40 persons) of survey respondents indicated they had been sexually assaulted while living as a resident of a college or hall.

43 respondents provided information in relation to when the sexual assault had occurred. Of these 53% (23) had experienced sexual assault in 2018. 56 respondents answered a question in relation to where the sexual assault occurred and 50% (28) of these people identified that it had occurred in their college or hall. 20% (11 people) did not know or were not sure where it had occurred.

51 respondents answered a question in relation to who engaged in the sexual assault and 35% (18) of these indicated that those who had assaulted them were also residents of the same college or hall, and had been in residence longer than the person they had harmed; and 12% (6 people) were resident of the same college or hall, and had been in residence for a shorter time than the person they harmed. 35% (18) of respondents preferred not to say, did not know, or were not sure, who had sexually assaulted them.

There were 54 responses to a question in relation to who had committed the sexual assaults. Of these, 43 (80%) identified that a single male or males were responsible for the sexual assault. 19% (10) of respondents stated that they did not know, or were not sure who had committed the assault. As the survey data is de-identified, it is not possible to know if the sexual assaults were committed by the same male or group of males.

"There are awareness-raising activities": Participants reported that all of the colleges and halls had run some kind of mandatory awareness-raising or educational activity on-line, or in discussion groups, during O-Week. The discussion-based activities were seen as particularly useful, with some participants believing that the on-line training was not helpful. It was also reported that many colleges had developed committees or similar to continue to build safe on-college communities.

"Living co-ed creates respect": Many participants attributed their safe college and hall communities to living on mixed-gender floors. They believe this created friendships and networks that prevented one person harming another by sexual harassment or sexual assault.

"There's going to be problems when you mix young people and alcohol": Almost every discussion group and individual interviewee linked sexual harassment, and other problem behaviours, with the excessive use of alcohol.

"On-college events are safer": Many participants identified that controlled and managed drinking on-college was much safer for residents than drinking activities and events off-college, such as in public hotels and bars or unsupervised space, with unknown older men present. They believed controlled on-college drinking allowed safe fun as these events were always managed by sober staff and senior students, and had water and food available. They were also considered safer as residents did not have to find their way back to their colleges and halls late at night. This was of particular concern if

the residents were reliant on public transport. Being close to their rooms meant that residents could go back to their rooms when ready, or be assisted there if necessary.

“O-Week can be a problem”: O-Week was identified by some participants as a potential time for sexual harassment and sexual assault to occur, as many events were linked to alcohol use. Further, it was said that O-Week could be a time of anxiety for new residents as they tried to forge new friendships and fit in, often using alcohol to assist them. Principals stated that they attempted to manage this by banning or strictly controlling the consumption of alcohol for the first few days of O-Week.

183 respondents answered a question in relation to when they had experienced sexual harassment and, of these, 30 (16%) indicated it had occurred during O-Week. 56 respondents answered a similar question in regard to sexual assault and, of these, 7 (13%) identified that they were sexually assaulted during O-Week.

“Uni Bar is safe except for randos”: Uni Bar, as it was often referred to by participants, is the JCU Uni Club. It operates on the JCU campus and has a “Plus One” policy, where students can bring in one non-student as their guest. Some participants reported that male non-students, usually described as Army personnel, would wait out-of-sight of the Uni Bar security officers, harassing female students to take them into the Bar as their Plus Ones, in exchange for money or drinks.

“The campus is dark”: Numerous participants, particularly female residents, spoke about finding the university campus dark and “scary”. Many would not walk on the campus at night, preferring to take their cars if they owned them. Some female residents said they contacted JCU security officers to escort them back to their college or hall, though some did not know of this service, or did not feel comfortable using it.

“There should be security on all colleges...and cameras”: Some participants were aware that some colleges had security officers at night and thought this should be the case at all colleges and halls. They also thought there should be security cameras in car parks, and at entrances to buildings.

The bus should stop at colleges at night: Returning on the bus late at night, and walking from the bus stop near Education Central back to their colleges and halls was named as an issue by some participants, particularly females. Many participants said that the bus stop was a long way from most colleges and halls, and the footpaths were dark at night.

“It’s bad at Fisher Shield sports”: Fisher Shield in an inter-college sports competition, and features in the lives of many residents. Sporting events were named by some participants as being particularly problematic in regard to harassment, including sexual harassment. There was recognition that steps had been taken to intervene to prevent such behaviour and it had improved since last year, however it was still experienced as intimidating to the point where some female residents would not play sport. Named as being particularly problematic were “a drunk pack of boys from [a JCU residence]” who “chant and yell disgusting things at girls”.

“I didn’t tell anyone”: Almost all of those who experienced sexual harassment and sexual assault did not disclose or seek help from professionals or people in positions of authority, though many did talk with friends or family. A very small number of participants said they had reported the behaviour to someone within JCU. The main reasons given for not seeking formal assistance, or reporting, were: a belief the incident was not serious enough; the belief at the time they did not need assistance; and/or they were too ashamed or embarrassed.

In conclusion, the approach taken to date by the Principals of the colleges and halls, and the JCU Administration that supports them, have, in the minds of participants, made the colleges and halls increasingly safe. The views of participants and respondents about how to continue this work have informed the recommendations made in this report. The key strategies are the continuation of awareness-raising and education programs in relation to sexual harassment, sexual assault, and alcohol misuse; and the management of alcohol and related behaviours at on-college events and activities, and sports events. The implementation of strategies, such as improved lighting and more bus stops may address the current levels of concern experienced by residents. The totality of these measures may result in on-campus accommodation that is safe and fun for residents.

Introduction

University residential colleges and halls play an important role in the lives of students undertaking higher education. They can be described as home-away-from-home, and the place where lasting friendships are formed. On-campus accommodation at James Cook University (JCU) Townsville provides housing for nearly 1300 students at any one time. These students come from rural, remote and urban locations across Australia, and from other countries. Some students stay for a semester, others stay for their entire undergraduate program, and a few stay into their postgraduate studies. Residential colleges and halls should always be safe, and afford opportunities for connection and community.

This review sought to hear the views of current and ex-residents, and staff, in order to understand their perspectives of sexual harassment and sexual assault in their colleges and halls. There are six JCU residential colleges and halls located on the JCU campus at Douglas, Townsville. These are: John Flynn College, affiliated with the Uniting and Lutheran Churches; Saints Catholic College, auspiced by the Catholic Church; and the Residential Colleges owned and operated by JCU, which are University Hall, George Roberts Hall, Rotary International House, and Western Courts. The review was commissioned by Ms Tricia Brand, Deputy Vice Chancellor of the Services and Resources Division of JCU.

Methodology and Participation

Ethics approval was sought for this review from the Chair of the Human Ethics Research Committee, Dr Anne Swinbourne. Dr Swinbourne advised that that ethics approval was not required as the data collected was not going to be used for research purposes. Dr Swinbourne and the Deputy Chair, Assoc Prof Anthony Leicht, reviewed the questionnaire and recruitment method and resolved that these followed best practice for ethical project implementation. The letter from Dr Swinbourne can be found in Appendix A.

Data Collection

This review used three different methods for data collection from residents of colleges and halls: group discussions; interviews with individual residents; and survey. The reviewer also sought data from staff of colleges and halls and this occurred in groups and by interviews with one or two members of staff. Data collection occurred over a five week period, beginning on 23.7.18 and finishing on 27.8.18. All percentages given in this report are rounded-up for ease of reading.

Residents

Group discussions: Discussion groups with residents were planned by the reviewer and advertised by Principals of the colleges and halls, and participation in the groups was encouraged by Senior Residential Assistants (SRAs) and Residential Assistants (RAs). In the five week data collection period the reviewer spent extensive time in each of the six colleges and halls introducing herself to residents in the dining rooms and in other public areas, explaining the purpose and format of the review. Residents frequently initiated an opinion about sexual harassment and sexual assault in relation to their college or hall and discussion ensued. All group discussions occurred within colleges and halls.

Individual interviews: Residents were provided with the reviewer's contact details and were invited to contact her if they preferred to speak privately. Private meeting rooms were used on-college and in other locations on the JCU campus if the resident preferred to be off-college. Discussions were also held with individuals as part of the reviewer's visits to dining halls and other public college areas, and with individual participants who approached the reviewer after the discussion group in

which they had participated finished. Two telephone interviews were also conducted at the request of participants.

Survey: An invitation to participate in the survey was sent to residents by the Principals of the colleges and halls, with a link to the survey. The survey was anonymous and non-identifying, and included closed and open-ended questions.

Ex-residents

The invitation to participate in the survey was sent to those who had been resident in the colleges or halls during the 18 month period preceding 23.7.18. That is, those who were residents in the colleges and halls for the 2017 academic year, and/or first semester 2018, but had now left. Ex-residents were also invited to contact the reviewer to give their views via telephone, email or private interview.

Staff

Staff were provided with the opportunity to meet with the reviewer to participate in the review. Discussion groups and interviews with staff were held in the last two weeks of the data collection period.

Participation

The number of residents in the colleges and halls for the period of time over which data collection occurred was 1279; and the number of ex-residents included in the review was 1063. Females accounted for 59% of current residents, and 64% of ex-residents. The following table provides the numbers of current and ex-residents by gender.

	Current Residents	Ex-residents	Total
Females	753	686	1439
Males	526	378	904
	1279	1064	2343

39% of current residents participated in the group discussion, and 4% of current residents participated in interviews. Females made up 68% of the total number of participants in group discussions and interviews, and are over-represented in discussion groups and interviews. In a very small number of cases (less than 10), residents participated in both group discussions and individual interviews. The following table provides actual numbers of participants in groups and interviews.

	Residents		Ex-residents		Total
	Females	Males	Females	Males	
Discussion Groups	332	169	0	0	501
Individual interviews	40	11	2	1	54
					555

28% of the total number of those invited to participate in the survey completed it. 85% of those who completed surveys were current residents; and 68% of respondents identified as female. 44% of current residents completed the survey. 68% of those who completed the survey identified as female, and are therefore over-represented in the survey.

The average age of survey respondent was 19, and 77% of respondents had been resident at their college or hall for less than two years. 95% of respondents were in their undergraduate years, and 35% were in their first year. Domestic students made up 77% of respondents and 98% identified as non-Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. 92% of respondents identified their sexual orientation as heterosexual.

The following table provides actual numbers of participants in the survey.

	Residents		Ex-residents		Other/Prefer not to say	Total
	Females	Males	Females	Males		
Survey	386	176	67	31	6	666

The number of staff who spoke to the reviewer in discussion groups or interviews appears below:

	Staff		Total
	Females	Males	
Discussion Groups	9	5	14
Individual interviews	5	2	7
			21

Data Analysis

The survey questionnaire was administered and the data collated by *Engagement Plus*, an independent organisation, using *Survey Monkey*. The qualitative data from groups, interviews and open-ended survey questions were subjected to thematic analysis by the reviewer. Quantitative data from the survey questionnaires was also analysed by the review.

Findings

The following findings are presented thematically, having emerged from the analysis of qualitative data. The headings are phrases used by participants in this review. Unless stated otherwise “participants” and “respondents” refer to resident and ex-residents, as opposed to staff. If the views of staff are included in the findings, they are identified as staff. The phrase “on-college” is used to denote behaviours, events or activities that occur in the college or hall. It was the phrase said by participants in most discussion groups.

Where significant, quantitative data from the survey has been included within the findings. It is important to note that all survey questions were optional, except those which were demographical. That is, respondents could skip most questions and only answer those which they chose. Therefore, the percentages provided in this report relate to those who answered the related question in the survey, not those who responded to the survey itself.

“Colleges are safe and good places to be”

The strongest theme to emerge from this review was that participants enjoyed living on-college and felt safe. This view was the most resounding theme to emerge in almost every group discussion, and many of the individual interviews. This finding is supported by survey data which shows that over 97% (648) of respondents felt safe all or most of the time on-college.

Participants frequently stated that living on-college felt like living as part of a family, with the determining characteristic being that residents looked after each other, and out for each other. This

included intervening if they believed another resident was “going too far” with their behaviour or comments; and intervention was said to occur whether the residents were on-college, at the on-campus Uni Club, or in the city at clubs and bars.

Feeling unsafe on-college was linked to the excessive consumption of alcohol and “drunk loud boys from [a JCU residence]”. Events associated with feeling unsafe included intoxicated residents returning to colleges and halls from other venues, and unsupervised parties on-college.

“Sexual harassment is not a big problem here”

The first comment from most group and individual participants was that sexual harassment was not an issue for them or their college or hall. When questioned further, some participants stated that if it did occur it would be “at the lower end of the scale”, and usually when alcohol was being used excessively.

The phrases “they have really clamped down on it”, or “things are a lot different this year”, or similar, were said frequently by participants, and were explained by saying that “the college” (usually meaning the Principal) had adopted a no or low tolerance to any event with uncontrolled drinking, or where sexual harassment was likely to occur.

Participants stated that sexual harassment in the past, including 2016 and 2017, was linked to some activities and events seen to form the “traditions” of colleges and halls. Some participants talked about “a cultural change” and believed it was a result of recent reports into hazing and sexual harassment at universities. Many participants said that as a result of the focus on sexual harassment, it was no longer socially acceptable behaviour, with one participant claiming “it is social death to be seen as a harasser”.

In interviews with Principals and other staff, these actions were confirmed, with the three Principals stating that they had taken steps to stop activities and events which were linked to hazing and sexual harassment. Some colleges had also developed committees or similar to continue to build safe college communities.

When speaking on the topic of sexual harassment, all discussion groups approached the topic from the perspective of female residents being harassed by male residents. When asked if they had noticed the sexual harassment of male residents by female residents, the usual response was that this was typically a “lower level” form of harassment, usually involving constant messaging, and “girls throwing themselves at boys”. A number of participants noted that female harassment of males was taken less seriously than that done by males towards females. Comments were also made in some groups to indicate that while males may be harassed by females, they were less likely to become frightened or intimidated.

87 of the respondents to the survey (13%) indicated that they had experienced sexual harassment. A further 34 (5%) of respondents preferred not to say or did not know if they had been sexually harassed. However, when given a list of examples of sexual harassment (of which respondents could choose more than one), 28% of those who responded to the question identified that they had experienced one or more types of such behaviour. The three most common types of sexual harassment experienced while resident in their college or hall were: unwelcome touching, hugging, cornering or kissing; inappropriate staring or leering; and, sexually suggestive comments or jokes.

Of the 216 respondents to this question, 42 (19%) had experienced these behaviours once, while 52 (24%) had experienced them more than once but less than 5 times. 92 (43%) respondents did not know or were not sure how often they had been sexually harassed.

147 respondents answered a question in relation to when they had last experienced sexual harassment. 80 (55%) of these respondents had experienced this behaviour in 2018. 186 respondents answered a question about where the sexual harassment happened and 100 (54%) indicated that it had occurred on-college.

43% of respondents (76 of the 178 who answered this question) identified that the sexual harassment involved others who had been in residence longer than the respondent; and 38 (21%) respondents reported being harassed by someone who had been in residence less time than they had. 32 (18%) respondents did not know or were not sure who had sexually harassed them.

184 respondents answered a question in relation to who had harassed them and 74% (136) of respondents stated that the behaviour was committed by a single male or a group of males. As the survey data is de-identified, it is not possible to know if all the sexual harassment identified by respondents was committed by the same male or group of males.

2 (1%) respondents, of the 187 who answered a question in relation to reporting the sexual harassment, identified that they had reported it to JCU. 10 (5%) respondents said they did not know or were not sure if they had reported it. 3 (2%) respondents, of the 185 who answered the question, identified that they made a complaint to JCU about the behaviour. 14 respondents (8%) did not know or were not sure if they made a complaint.

“We don’t hear about sexual assault”

In group discussions, the usual comment made by respondents was that sexual assault did not happen at their colleges and halls. When asked if residents would know if sexual assault had occurred, it was generally thought that they would not. This was seen to be because gossip on-college is rife; “anything that happens is talked about”. Almost all those who commented on this said they believed that it was highly unlikely that anyone would tell someone on-college if they had been assaulted because it was not likely to remain private.

This opinion is supported by information provided by some participants who sought private interviews. A total of 12 participants (including three ex-residents) sought interviews to disclose sexual assault, or sexual harassment that had been ongoing and caused extreme distress. Most of these participants had not disclosed their experience to anyone before, except perhaps immediately before the interview when they sought the support of a friend to accompany them to the interview.

“It does happen”

While most group or individual participants in this review said they did not know of sexual assault, many of them believed it could happen, and a few said that they were aware that a friend had been sexually assaulted on-college. Most participants linked sexual assault with alcohol misuse. The reviewer received disclosures of sexual assault from six participants.

6% of respondents to this survey (40 persons) reported that they had experienced sexual assault while a resident of their college or hall. 66 respondents answered a question in relation to frequency of sexual assault as a resident and, of these, 30% (20) had experienced sexual assault once, and 35% (23) had experienced it more than once. 26% (17) of respondents did not know or were not sure how often they had been assaulted.

43 respondents provided information in relation to when the sexual assault had occurred. Of these 53% (23) had experienced sexual assault in 2018. 56 respondents answered a question in relation to where the sexual assault occurred and 50% (28) of these people identified that it had occurred in their hall. 20% (11 people) did not know or were not sure where it had occurred.

51 respondents answered a question in relation to who engaged in the sexual assault and 35% (18) of these indicated that those who had assaulted them were also residents of the same college or hall, and had been in residence longer than the person they had harmed; and 12% (6 people) were resident of the same college or hall, and had been in residence for a shorter time than the person they harmed. 35% (18) of respondents preferred not to say, did not know, or were not sure, who had sexually assaulted them.

There were 54 responses to a question in relation to who had committed the sexual assaults. Of these, 43 (80%) identified that a single male or males was responsible for the sexual assault. 19% (10) of respondents stated that they did not know, or were not sure who had committed the assault. As the survey data is de-identified, it is not possible to know if the sexual assaults were committed by the same male or group of males.

“There are awareness-raising activities”

Many participants spoke about the changes in the colleges and halls and realised that these were designed to prevent sexual harassment and other inappropriate behaviours. All colleges and halls had, during O-Week, ran some kind of awareness-raising activity, in the form of on-line training, and/or talks from staff or SRAs.

Feedback from participants indicated that while some found the on-line training useful, most did not. These participants found it to be “boring” and “easy to skip through” without necessarily absorbing it. Those participants who had experienced talks and discussions said they found this much more useful and learnt more. They believed that such activities should occur at the start of every semester and be compulsory for all students.

The value of talks was seen to be dependent on their quality. It was thought they needed to be “modern”, engaging, interactive, informative, discussion-based, and integrated with other information (such as alcohol misuse). Some female participants said that they believed the focus of these talks should be how to stop being a harasser, rather than how to avoid becoming a victim of harassment. Other topics suggested for inclusion were: how to say “no” to friends who were “overstepping the boundary”, and how to intervene when they saw someone being harassed.

Of the 627 respondents to a question about their level of satisfaction in relation to the seriousness afforded by their college or hall to the issues of sexual assault and sexual harassment, 82% (516) of respondents to the survey reported that they were very satisfied, fairly satisfied or satisfied.

“Living co-ed creates respect”

When asked why sexual harassment and sexual assault were not thought to be a problem on-college, the most frequent reason given was that having mixed gender floors created a sense of family and community. Other reasons given for the value of mixed gender floors included: it creates “good socialization”, forges “better cross-gender relationships”, and that it leads to “greater respect for women” as female residents were said to often manage and monitor behaviour. One participant captured the value of mixed gender floors in this way “girls and boys pull each other up”.

However, not all participants liked mixed-gender floors, and some believed they inhibited privacy and created the opportunity for sexual harassment and sexual assault if residents were intoxicated and “boundaries become blurred”. SRAs and RAs reported that they actively discourage relationships forming between residents living on the same floors. Several participants said that alcohol-fuelled behaviour sometimes lead to sexual behaviour that was often regretted the next day.

“There’s going to be problems when you mix young people and alcohol”

Almost every discussion group, and most individual interviewees stated that alcohol-use could be a problem if it was not managed and controlled, and was linked to sexual harassment and sexual assault. Many participants said that the “crack down” by Principals on uncontrolled drinking events on-college had made them safer.

Some participants were concerned that the results of this review would lead to Principals making a decision to not allow alcohol on-college. The anticipated result of this was that drinking would be “driven underground” and become more dangerous. Many participants stated that most residents were of drinking age and that it was an acceptable part of Australian culture and college life. Other participants, particularly those who were not yet 18 or who were non-drinkers, appreciated having non-drinking activities, including movie nights on-college and coffee-crawls off-college, as they were frequently excluded from any events where alcohol was being served.

“On-college events are safer”

In spite of making the link between sexual harassment and misuse of alcohol, most participants stated that it was safer to allow drinking on-college than to force events off-college. Their explanation was that many activities, events and parties are going to happen anyway, but they would be taken off-college and occur in unsafe and uncontrolled ways. Risk of harm was said to increase, particularly for female residents, when trying to get back to their college or hall from an event held off the JCU campus. This was thought to be particularly true if public transport was used.

Many participants believed that the answer to sexual harassment (and other problems) that might occur as a result of alcohol misuse lay in having events managed on-college, and placing drinking bans on those who behaved badly while intoxicated. It was said by many participants that when events and activities were organised by the Principals or student/social clubs of colleges and halls, there was a requirement to have sober RAs, water and food. Further, participants stated that those who were sober would intervene when behaviour became problematic, and if someone was too intoxicated they would be assisted to their rooms. Some participants said that sometimes the presence of ex-residents (often known as “Old Girls” or “Old Boys”) was problematic as these groups often tried to reintroduce old “traditions” which have been linked to sexual harassment.

SRAs and RAs were considered, by most participants who spoke on this topic, as being pivotal to the safety of colleges and halls. These were the residents selected for their leadership qualities and tasked with being responsive to the needs of others in their colleges or halls. Many participants said that they would go to SRAs and RAs to discuss problems such as sexual harassment if they believed confidentiality would be kept, and that the person would respond without favouring their friends. The people in these positions were also the ones expected to intervene if they observed sexual harassment.

Participants who were informed about other colleges and halls identified that some colleges had a higher ratio of SRAs and RAs to residents, thereby being more accessible and responsive and with less responsibility per person. It was thought by participants that SRAs and RAs needed to be well-trained, supervised and supported.

A number of problems were identified by participants as being caused by off-college events and activities. These problems include: residents, particularly female residents, being confronted by intoxicated older men unknown to them, and having to find their way back to their residence, perhaps by themselves and usually by bus. Participants in this review said that they tried to mitigate

these risks by watching out for, and intervening if they saw another resident being bothered by anyone, and traveling back to the campus in groups.

“O-Week can be a problem”

O-Week was identified by some participants as a time of heightened risk of sexual harassment and sexual assault. The reasons given for this include: residents did not yet know each other and had not bonded in ways that prevented harming behaviour, such as harassment; there was a high amount of alcohol, little sleep and some anxiety as new residents tried to form friendships; some residents were “still learning to drink”; anxious residents used alcohol as a “social lubricant”; and residents had not yet had the opportunity to identify who to go to for help if it was needed.

Most of the colleges and halls have a residents’ club or social executive which takes responsibility for the organisation of some events and activities in their colleges and halls. Participants in this review stated that residents’ social clubs and Principals try to manage the misuse of alcohol during O-Week by not having alcohol-related events in the first few days of the week, or by strictly controlling them.

Many respondents said that the culture of colleges and halls had changed in such a way that it was now acceptable to say “no” to alcohol or participation in any event that made a resident feel uncomfortable. Some respondents said that while they knew they could say “no” it would likely mean that they would be socially excluded or find it difficult to fit into a friendship network.

While O-Week may be seen as a time of heightened risk, survey responses showed that sexual harassment and sexual assault were more likely to occur at times other than O-Week. 183 respondents answered a question in relation to when they had experienced sexual harassment and, of these, 30 (16%) indicated it had occurred during O-Week. 56 respondents answered a similar question in regard to sexual assault and, of these, 7 (13%) identified that they were sexually assaulted during O-Week.

“Uni Bar is safe except for randoms”

The JCU Uni Club (also known as the Uni Bar) is a social club located on the JCU campus. Participants and respondents reported that it is popular with JCU students and almost every participant who spoke about it did so in a positive manner. It is seen as a safe place to go and socialise with other residents and students. There was some concern expressed by participants about the Uni Club closing as its closure would mean that residents would travel into the city to go to other bars and clubs, thereby increasing risk to safety.

Some participants reported issues associated with the Uni Club and identified ways to resolve them. The Uni Club has a “Plus One” policy: that is, a non-student is only allowed in if accompanied by a student. One of the issues identified was Army personnel, usually male, who waited outside the Uni Club, often harassing female students to take them in as their “Plus Ones” in exchange for money or drinks. A usual place for these men to wait was around the ATM, which is out of the sight of Uni Club security officers. Some female participants also stated that they had been followed to their colleges or halls by Army personnel.

Another issue was that most of the security officers were male and some participants thought that, being men, they often did not notice or intervene if females were being harassed. A solution to this was seen to be the employment of more female security officers. Another solution offered by participants was the adoption of a code name for a drink, such as “Angel Shot” whereby anyone who was being harassed could go to the bar and ask for an “Angel Shot”, signalling that they needed assistance.

“The campus is dark”

In most discussion groups participants identified the campus as being “dark”, “badly lit”, and “scary at night”. Many female residents said they would not walk on the campus at night as they were wary of the dark areas, and the heavy vegetation. Those who had cars often used them to go to the library at night, or tried to walk with friends. Similarly, those who used the Uni Club or walked from the bus stop tried to do so in groups. Particular areas of concern named by residents included: the library car park; the road into the library car park; around the medical buildings; around Uni Club; the footpath from the bus stop at Education Central to the colleges and halls; and between some of the colleges and halls, particularly the University Hall buildings.

Some residents were aware they could ask security officers to escort them to residences, but some female residents did not like getting into a vehicle at night with a man they do not know. Others spoke of the long wait for security to arrive. Suggestions to make the campus feel safer at night included: female security officers; better advertised security services; and duress buttons at key locations, such as the bus stop and library car park.

“There should be security on all colleges...and cameras”

Some participants in the review were aware that some colleges had security officers every night or at week-ends, and believed this should be the case for all colleges and halls. Residents from the colleges which had security at night appreciated knowing that security officers would be watching out for them as they returned to their residences. Suggestions to improve security at colleges and halls included: security cameras in car parks and at entrances; security officers patrolling the perimeters of the colleges and halls as they are unfenced; and the development of a code word to be used by residents to signal to security officers that they were in need of assistance.

“The bus should stop at colleges at night”

Those participants who were concerned about poorly lit parts of the campus, also often spoke of the long dark walk from the bus stop opposite Education Central to their colleges and halls. They believed that the bus should stop at all colleges and halls. Some participants said they thought the buses should have women security officers on them as they would be more likely to notice if female residents were being harassed.

“It’s bad at Fisher Shield sports”

Fisher Shield is an inter-college sports competition in which residents of colleges and halls compete across a range of sports. These events were named by some participants as being particularly problematic in regard to harassment, including sexual harassment.

Those who spoke of this issue said that it was better managed this year, but some events still saw the arrival of “a drunk pack of boys from [a JCU residence]” who “chant and yell disgusting stuff at the girls”. They were described as “scary” and “vulgar and rude”. Events named as having drawn this behaviour this year included water polo, the swimming carnival and netball.

Some female residents were particularly intimidated by this behaviour and other female residents said that they would not play sport because of it. There was recognition that JCU Sports had responded in the past, but that there needed to be stronger measures taken against the teams that were supported by male residents engaging in harassing behaviour.

“I didn’t tell anyone”

Most of those who experienced sexual harassment which they considered to be serious said in interviews that they did not tell anyone, except perhaps friends who were students. In discussion

groups reasons given for not reporting sexual harassment that was considered “low-level” included: a belief the behaviour was not meant to harm; concern they may be over-reacting; and uncertainty about whether anything could or would be done about it. Some participants who had experienced sexual harassment or sexual assault had not sought counselling services as they did not know where to go, or did not want to use the JCU Counselling Service because of a concern about confidentiality. Some participants also thought that the Counselling Service, being situated in the JCU Library, was too publically located.

Some female residents, including about half of those who disclosed sexual harassment they considered extreme, or sexual assault, to the reviewer had not reported the behaviour because they did not know who to report to, or feared that the response to the perpetrator might be too harsh. Those who were of this view did not want the responsibility of another person being removed from their college or hall, or their studies being interrupted. Some participants saw such actions as potentially “ruining someone’s life”. Some of these participants thought there needed to be a reporting process that resulted in the perpetrator of such behaviours receiving counselling or training, rather than being removed from their residence.

Those participants who had a view about disclosure and reporting thought that reports should be made to someone off-college. They believed that Principals may be in a conflict of interest as they may also be responsible for the perpetrator. There was also great concern that the matter would not be kept confidential. The preference given by participants was for a report to be made to someone who was part of the University structure, but independent of colleges and halls.

The survey results echo the views given of participants in discussion groups and interviews in relation to the disclosure of sexual harassment and sexual assault. 180 survey respondents answered a question in relation to disclosing or seeking help after an incident of sexual harassment. Of those, 65 respondents (36%) did not disclose or seek help from anyone; and another 104 (58%) spoke about it with other students, family or friends off-college.

Respondents were provided with a list of reasons why they may not have chosen to disclose or seek help (of which they could choose more than one option) for the sexual harassment they experienced. The main reason (50%) given was that they did not believe it was a significant enough event; and the next most common reason was that they did not believe they needed help at the time (38%).

Of the 40 respondents who indicated in the survey that they had been sexually assaulted, 19% (10 people) identified that they did not disclose or seek help, and another 65% (34) spoke about it with other students, family or friends off-college. Respondents were provided with a list of reasons why they may not have chosen to disclose or seek help (of which they could choose more than one option). The main reason given was that they did not believe it was a significant enough event (33%); and the next most common reason was that they did not believe they needed help at the time (23%).

Recommendations

This review sought data only from residents, ex-residents and staff. The recommendations are therefore based on the information provided by those participants and respondents.

1. That the developing practice of mandatory awareness-raising and education activities in relation to sexual harassment and sexual assault continue. These activities should occur at least yearly, and be presented in an engaging and interactive manner.

The content of these activities should be integrated with information in relation to alcohol misuse, and include skills-based training in how to interrupt sexual harassment towards themselves or others. The underpinning philosophy of awareness-raising and education activities should be the acceptance of responsibility for those likely to engage in harassing behaviour, as opposed to a focus on potential victims needing to prevent harassment. It should also include information about how to report incidents of sexual harassment and sexual assault. Consideration should be given to using well-trained and supported Senior Residential Assistants for this role.

2. That a designated person, preferably a professionally trained female, become a regular visitor to the colleges and halls. The task of this person is to become known by residents as someone who is independent of the colleges and halls, and who can provide confidential support and counselling for anyone wishing to disclose sexual harassment and sexual assault.
3. That sufficient staff, Senior Residential Assistants and Residential Assistants are appointed in each college and hall to ensure that residents can seek their support if they are being sexually harassed. To enable this to occur, those designated with these roles need to be trained, supported and supervised.
4. That colleges and halls continue with their practice of holding events and activities on-college. These events and activities should include non-drinking and controlled drinking opportunities that encourage the building of friendships and communities. Each of these events and activities should be supported by non-drinking staff, members of student social clubs, Senior Residential Assistants and Residential Assistants, with water and food readily available.
5. That consideration be given to the development of a response to those who commit sexual harassment and sexual assault which includes a range of disciplinary actions from education to removal from their college or hall.
6. That JCU investigate the culture of Fisher Shield. This investigation should include consideration of the inclusion of awareness-raising and educational campaigns, and the presence of security and representatives of colleges and halls at all events.
7. That lighting on the JCU campus, including around colleges and halls, be reviewed and improved. This is particularly the case for the library car park, the road into the library, the footpaths between the Education Central bus stop and colleges and halls, and between the buildings associated with University Hall.

8. That safer walking and cycling paths between significant areas of the campus be developed.
9. That JCU Administration explore safe transport options from the city to their colleges and halls at night.
10. That the Uni Bar be retained to continue to be enjoyed by on-campus residents and other students, and to provide a safe alternative to residents traveling to the city to other bars and clubs.
11. That JCU Administration investigate the presence of Army personnel on the campus, particularly at nights.
12. That Uni Bar and JCU security officers monitor the congregation of non-students outside the Uni Bar, harassing students to admit them as their "Plus Ones".
13. That the Uni Bar adopt the practice of acknowledging and responding to phrases such as "Angel Shot", so they can be used by residents to indicate they are being harassed and need assistance.
14. That the Uni Bar and JCU Security consider the employment of female security officers.
15. That JCU Security and its service of escorting residents to their colleges and halls be better advertised.
16. That the JCU Counselling Service be better advertised and its current location in the JCU library reviewed.
17. That all colleges and halls install security cameras at key locations, such as car parks and entrances to buildings.
18. That colleges and halls consider the employment of over-night security officers, including female security officers, to patrol the grounds of the colleges and halls, and monitor the return of residents at night to ensure they are not accompanied by unwanted others. Further, that code words are identified which residents can use to alert security officers that they are in need of assistance.
19. That consideration be given to the installation of duress buttons, placed in such locations as the bus stops, and library car park.

Conclusion

This review sought to hear the views of current and ex-residents, and staff, in order to understand their perspectives of sexual harassment and sexual assault in their colleges and halls. Discussion group participants believed that the levels of sexual harassment were relatively low, and had decreased in recent years. The sexual harassment which had occurred was said to be “low-level” and usually fuelled by alcohol-misuse. It was thought that the encouragement of activities and events on-college, and controlling the level of alcohol-use, would decrease the risk of sexual harassment. Similarly, discussion group and interview participants believed that sexual assault occurred infrequently, and was also related to alcohol misuse.

The strong themes which emerged in this review provide a clear direction for the Principals of colleges and halls, and the JCU Administration that supports them. The approach the Principals have taken to date, in the minds of participants, has made the colleges and halls increasingly safe. Successful implementation of the recommendations made in this review would continue this work. The key strategies are the continuation of awareness-raising and education programs in relation to sexual harassment, sexual assault, and alcohol misuse; and the management of alcohol and related behaviours at on-college events and activities, and sports events. The implementation of strategies, such as improved lighting and more bus stops may address the current levels of concern experienced by residents. The totality of these measures may result in on-campus accommodation that is safer, and fun for residents.

Appendix A: Letter from Dr Swinbourne, Chair of the Human Research Ethics Committee



4 September 2018

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Dear Dr McCallum,

Re: Review of sexual harassment and sexual assault at James Cook University residential colleges

The Chair confirms that the study is not a research project and thus acknowledges that this project falls outside the formal Human Research Ethics review and approval processes. In collaboration with the Deputy Chair, I have informally reviewed the survey content and the proposed recruitment method and resolved that these parts of the design of the project follow best practice for ethical project implementation.

Thank you

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Anne Swinbourne".

Dr. Anne Swinbourne
Chair
Human Ethics Research Committee
James Cook University