Charles Darwin University
Prevention and Response to Gender-Based Violence Survey Findings

Your Voice Student Network

CHARLES DARWIN UNIVERSITY AUSTRALIA

Table of Contents

Prevention and Response to Gender-Based Violence Survey Findings

1. Introduction

Charles Darwin University (CDU) has undertaken a qualitative inquiry into the perceptions, experiences, and recommendations of its community regarding gender-based violence (GBV). This initiative, conducted through the Your Voice Student Network, reflects CDU's commitment to fostering a safe, inclusive, and respectful environment. The survey aimed to capture the voices of students, staff, and community members to inform institutional strategies for GBV prevention and response.

This report presents a detailed thematic analysis of the survey findings. It identifies key issues, barriers to reporting, institutional strengths, and opportunities for improvement. The analysis is segmented by stakeholder group to ensure that the diversity of perspectives is accurately represented.

2. Methodology

The survey employed qualitative design, using open-ended questions to elicit detailed, narrative responses. Thematic analysis was conducted through iterative coding and categorisation of recurring patterns. The process involved:

- Initial coding of individual responses to identify key concepts and sentiments.
- Grouping of codes into broader themes based on conceptual similarity.
- Segmentation of responses by stakeholder group (students, staff, community members).
- Selection of representative quotes to illustrate each theme and subtheme.

This approach ensured that the analysis remained grounded in the data and that all perspectives were considered without bias. The use of open-ended questions allowed for the emergence of unanticipated themes and provided rich, contextual insights into the lived experiences of respondents.

3. Respondent Demographics

The survey received responses from a diverse cross-section of the CDU community.

Respondent Group	Number of Participants
Students	57
Staff	50
Community Members	1
Multiple perspective respondents	
Student and Community Member	1
Student and Staff	6
Student, Staff and Community Member	1

Although no further demographic segmentation (e.g., age, gender, ethnicity) was applied to preserve anonymity, the responses reflect a wide range of perspectives. These include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, LGBTQIA+ individuals, neurodivergent persons, international students, and both on-campus and online learners. This diversity ensures that the findings have considered the broad CDU community and its varied experiences with GBV.

4. Key Issues Surrounding Gender-Based Violence in the Community

a. Students' perspectives

Students described GBV as a pervasive and multifaceted issue. A dominant concern was domestic and family violence (DFV), often linked to economic hardship, substance use, and limited access to services, particularly in regional areas such as Palmerston. Cultural and faith-based norms were frequently cited as barriers to help-seeking, with some students noting that these norms can reinforce male dominance and discourage all genders from reporting abuse.

Students also highlighted the prevalence of casual sexism, gender stereotypes, and perceived gender bias in employment and leadership. Several respondents expressed concern about safety in shared spaces, including bathrooms and change rooms, particularly for women and gender-diverse individuals. Digital abuse, including online harassment, was identified as a growing issue, especially amongst youth, women and LGBTQIA+ individuals.

(i) Thematic analysis of key issues of GBV - student perspectives

Theme	Explanation	Supporting comments
Domestic and family violence (DFV)	Recurrent references to spousal abuse, normalisation of violence in households, and lack of protection for women and children.	*"Spousal abuse DV."* *"Domestic violence, harassment and the justification of it."* *"Some families do not value the women in their household and do not protect them from violence."*
Cultural and faith-based barriers	Cultural norms and religious beliefs were cited as barriers to help-seeking and as factors that reinforce gender inequality.	*"Cultural background and faith."* *"Cultural norms… community definitions."* *"Not being able to express faith and religious views on gender without being put down."*
Gender inequality and sexism	Perceptions of male privilege, workplace discrimination, and societal bias against women.	*"Males are given like upper place in people's perspectives rather than females."* *"Men are more frequently selected than women in job interviews."* *"Casual sexism, gender-based assumptions, toxic masculinities."*
Safety and environmental concerns	Feelings of unsafety in public/shared spaces, especially for women and gender-diverse individuals.	*"Being totally alone in a building."* *"Women not feeling safe when a man (who identifies as a woman) goes into their change rooms."* *"Safety is the biggest concern, and the ability to live without fear."*
Technology-facilitated abuse	Online harassment and digital abuse, particularly targeting women and LGBTQIA+ individuals.	*"Digital technology facilitated abuse."* *"Online harassment is another growing problem, especially for women and LGBT+ individuals."*

Substance abuse and socioeconomic factors	Alcohol, drugs, poverty, and unemployment were identified as contributing to GBV.	*"Alcohol and methamphetamine."* *"Low income, poor or no housing, lack of opportunity."* *"Alcohol related incidents."*
Discrimination and power imbalances	Power dynamics, marginalisation, and systemic discrimination were highlighted as root causes.	*"The powerful always judge the powerless by their own standards."* *"Victim blaming, easier and safer to not report violence incidents.* *"Lack of support from lecturers."*
Social norms and education gaps	Outdated societal beliefs and a lack of education on healthy relationships and GBV.	*"Lack of understanding and unable to move away from the old trends."* *"Modern societal blinkers preventing us all from seeing the problem."* *"Feelings of entitlement... lack of understanding/education."*
Community definitions and belonging	Concerns about how "community" is defined and its impact on recognising and addressing GBV.	*"We need to adjust our definitions of community so we can effectively give agency to individuals to identify things like gender-based violence."*
Lack of exposure	Some respondents reported not experiencing or identifying GBV or believed it was not an issue in their community.	*"There are no issues."* *"So far, I did not notice anything. Everything is all right."* *"Haven't noticed any."*

b. Staff perspectives

Staff responses focused on systemic and institutional contributors to GBV. Many described a workplace culture that tolerates inappropriate behaviour, including sexual harassment, homophobia, and gender-based exclusion. Several staff members referenced a dynamic in certain departments, where colleagues are perceived to protect one another or hold a higher status collectively, making it difficult to hold perpetrators accountable. Some staff also noted that male victims of GBV are often overlooked, and that neurodivergent individuals face additional stigma and barriers to support.

Staff also noted that GBV affects a wide range of individuals, including men and gender-diverse people, and that institutional responses often lack inclusivity. The disproportionate impact of GBV on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women was a recurring concern, with calls for culturally safe services and targeted interventions. Staff also identified a need for greater education and awareness to challenge harmful norms and behaviours.

(i)   Thematic analysis of key issues of GBV - staff perspectives

Theme	Explanation	Supporting Comments
Disrespect, inequality and cultural normalisation	GBV is often preceded by everyday disrespect, sexist jokes, and cultural attitudes that normalise harmful behaviour. These microaggressions reinforce tolerance until violence escalates.	*"It's not JUST the violence itself… it's the things leading to it."* *"Culturally acquired beliefs… not seen as a problem in Caucasian Australian culture."*
Domestic & Family Violence (DFV)	DFV is widespread and often hidden. It affects both personal and professional lives, with systemic failures in support and response.	*"Domestic and Family Violence – Systemic Failures."* *"Domestic Violence in Darwin."*
Sexual harassment and workplace gender bias	Women face exclusion, harassment, and dismissal in professional settings. Formal complaints often result in no action, reinforcing unsafe environments.	*"Obvious exclusion of women's voices… concerns dismissed."* *"Gender-based harassment at work."*
LGBTQIA+ and gender diverse vulnerability	Transgender and gender-diverse individuals face life-altering impacts from GBV, often compounded by invisibility and lack of tailored support.	*"For transgender and gender diverse people this can be life devastating."* *"White women, academic, LGBTIQA+."*
Silence, stigma and underreporting	Survivors often remain silent due to fear, shame, and disbelief. Cultural stigma and fragmented systems discourage disclosure.	*"Many survivors do not report… fear of shame, judgment."* *"The systems are so fragmented… we get bumped around."*
Intersectionality and cultural diversity	GBV is shaped by overlapping identities, race, culture, faith, neurodiversity. creating unique vulnerabilities and barriers to support.	*"Isolation of new Australians… language barriers."* *"Interests, cultural background, faith and academic discipline."*

Theme	Explanation	Supporting comments
Male victims and gendered assumptions	Male victims are often overlooked due to societal assumptions that men are perpetrators. This leads to underrecognition and a lack of support	*"Men need to feel safe and supported and not just the perpetrator."* *"Violence against men is not recognised or spoken about.*
Politicisation and social fragmentation	Increasing social division and politicisation of gender issues hinder constructive dialogue and inclusive policy development.	*"The speed at which the gaps between different social groups is widening."*
Safety in public and fieldwork contexts	Physical safety risks are heightened in fieldwork, cross-cultural settings, and public spaces. Women report feeling unsafe and unsupported.	*"Safety during field work… cross-cultural contexts."* *"Physical safety risks. Verbal abuse."*
Institutional accountability and trust	Lack of follow-through on complaints, grooming by staff, and tolerance of misconduct undermine trust in CDU's systems.	*"Concerns dismissed with no formal action taken."*
Cultural clashes and identity confusion	Rapid cultural change and mixed norms create confusion, defensiveness, and difficulty navigating gender roles and expectations.	*"Culture clashing… everyone operating under different assumptions."*

c.   Community members' perspectives

Community members raised concerns about emerging forms of GBV, including the use of artificial intelligence in harassment and the impact of digital platforms on young people. These insights point to the evolving nature of GBV and the need for CDU to remain responsive to technological and societal changes.

(i)   Thematic analysis of key issues of GBV – community members' perspectives

Theme	Explanation	Supporting comments
Technology-enabled abuse	*The use of digital tools, newly enhancing AI, is increasingly being exploited to commit gender-based abuse, harassment, and violence, particularly targeting young people.*	*"The use of AI in gender-based abuse, harassment and violence, especially with young people."*

a.   Student and community members' perspectives

Students and community members highlight that domestic and family violence (DFV) remains a critical issue in Australia, with fatality rates among the highest nationally. They also stress that gender-based violence often begins early, particularly in high school environments where harmful behaviours first emerge.

(i)   Thematic analysis of key issues of GBV – student and community members' perspectives

Themes	Explanation	Supporting comments
Domestic and family violence (DFV) fatality rates	DFV remains a critical issue in Australia, with murder rates among the highest nationally, highlighting the severe consequences of unchecked GBV.	*"DFV murder rates the highest in Australia."*

Early onset of gender-based violence	GBV often begins during adolescence, with schools, particularly high schools. identified as early environments where harmful behaviours and attitudes emerge.	*"Gender-based violence starts in schools, particularly in high schools."*

b.   Staff and student perspectives

Gender-based violence (GBV) remains a deeply entrenched issue within staff and student communities, shaped by intersecting factors such as substance use, systemic discrimination, and institutional neglect. Contributors like alcohol and drugs exacerbate the risk and impact of GBV, while survivors, particularly those who are neurodivergent, gender-diverse, or AFAB (assigned female at birth), face significant barriers to accessing trauma-informed support.

(i)   Thematic analysis of key issues of GBV – staff and student perspectives

Themes	Explanation	Supporting comments
Substance use (alcohol and drugs)	Substance use is frequently linked to the escalation of gender-based violence, impairing judgment and increasing vulnerability.	*"Alcohol and drugs"*
Trauma-informed accessibility	Neurodivergent and gender-diverse survivors face systemic barriers in accessing services that understand their unique needs.	*"Lack of accessible, trauma-informed services that understand both autism and gender diversity, leaving survivors to navigate retraumatising systems alone."*
Social and institutional barriers	Survivors are often met with disbelief and minimisation from institutions, especially when their identities or communication styles deviate from normative expectations.	*"Systemic disbelief and dismissal of survivors especially neurodivergent, queer, and gender-diverse people whose communication styles or affect don't fit stereotypical 'victim' narratives."* *"Institutional gaslighting, where schools, police, and welfare systems often minimise or rationalise abuse instead of protecting those affected."*
Mental abuse recognition	Emotional and psychological abuse is under-recognised despite its serious impact and should be treated with equal gravity as physical violence.	*"I believe that mental abuse must be treated with similar weight as physical abuse."*
Domestic violence	Domestic violence remains a central concern, particularly for AFAB individuals and single parents, who face compounded risks.	*"Domestic violence."*

5. Barriers to Reporting Gender-Based Violence at CDU

a. Student perspectives

Students reported a range of barriers to reporting GBV. These included fear of not being believed, fear of retaliation, and concerns about confidentiality. International students expressed particular concern about the potential impact of reporting on their visa status. Some students were unaware of the reporting procedures or felt that the process was too complex or inaccessible. Others noted that reporting often did not lead to meaningful outcomes, which discouraged future disclosures.

Students also highlighted the emotional burden of reporting, including shame, embarrassment, and fear of social judgment. Some respondents noted that cultural norms and language barriers further complicated the reporting process, particularly for students from cultural and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

(i) Barriers to reporting GBV for students

Barriers to reporting for students	
Psychological and emotional barriers	**Institutional and systemic barriers**
- Fear of not being believed or taken seriously - Fear of retaliation or escalation of violence - Shame, embarrassment, and social anxiety - Fear of being labelled as the instigator or villain - Victims being too forgiving or hopeful for change - Feeling that reporting will not lead to meaningful outcomes - Fear of being ridiculed or judged - Internalised stigma and cultural shame - Fear of causing defamation or reputational damage - Belief that the issue is not severe enough to report	- Lack of trust in CDU's reporting systems - Perceived inaction or lack of consequences after reporting - Power imbalances and protection of perpetrators in authority - Reactive rather than preventative institutional responses - Untrained or unsupportive staff handling disclosures - Lack of trauma-informed support structures - Unclear or inaccessible reporting procedures - Previous negative experiences with reporting - Perception that CDU tolerates certain behaviours or cultures - Lack of visible zero-tolerance enforcement
Cultural and social barriers	**Procedural and practical barriers**
- Cultural norms discouraging disclosure - Fear of backlash from family, friends, or community - Religious or community pressure, especially for LGBTQIA+ individuals - Isolation due to being international or without local support - Misunderstanding or minimisation of GBV due to cultural differences - Fear of being misunderstood or overreacting	- Not knowing where or how to report - Difficulty providing evidence (e.g., digital harassment) - Lack of anonymity or confidentiality - Need to speak with a counsellor first to gain confidence - No trusted person available to report to - Reporting perceived as time-consuming or disruptive to studies - Lack of visible signage or reporting tools (e.g., QR codes)
Legal and academic consequences	
- Fear of visa implications for international students - Concern about academic progress being affected - Fear of career or reputation damage	

a. Staff perspectives

Staff described similar barriers, with additional emphasis on institutional dynamics. Many expressed a lack of confidence in the HR process, particularly when allegations involved senior staff. Power imbalances, fear of professional consequences, and reputational concerns were frequently mentioned. Some staff felt that male victims were not adequately supported or recognised, and that cultural narratives often positioned men solely as perpetrators.

There were also concerns about the clarity of reporting procedures and the availability of trauma-informed support. Several staff members noted that previous experience with reporting had led to inaction, which discouraged further engagement with the system.

(i) Barriers to reporting GBV for staff

Barriers to reporting for staff	
Psychological and emotional barriers	**Institutional and systemic barriers**
• Shame and embarrassment, including internalised stigma. • Fear of intimidation or retaliation. • Feelings of awkwardness or uncertainty about who to report to. • Reluctance to relive traumatic experiences during the reporting process. • Uncertainty about how information will be used or whether it will be kept confidential.	• Supervisors denying or dismissing concerns, especially when they are perceived as allies of the perpetrator. • Management failing to act on complaints, even when behaviour is acknowledged. • Male staff denying their behaviour, with no follow-up from leadership. • Lack of trauma-informed support and trained personnel to handle disclosures. • Inadequate complaints process, especially in cases involving power dynamics. • Known examples of poor outcomes and long processes, leading to mistrust. • Dependence on individual managers for support, creating inconsistency and risk. • Lack of clarity on what constitutes GBV, especially for less overt forms. • Unawareness of reporting encouragement or available support services.
Cultural and social barriers	**Procedural and practical barriers**
• Cultural and religious beliefs discouraging disclosure. • Mistrust of authority, particularly among culturally diverse staff and students. • Lack of understanding of Australian laws and norms, especially for international staff/students. • Perception that reporting may lead to community exclusion or judgment.	• Uncertainty about where or how to report. • No clear information on outcomes or processes once a report is made. • Lack of visible, accessible support channels. • Fear that reporting may affect visa status, whether as victim, survivor, or accused. • Overreliance on formal complaints, with no proactive outreach or informal support mechanisms.
Power and hierarchical barriers	
• Perpetrators in positions of power, including academic supervisors. • Fear of career impact due to reporting against senior staff. • Supervisors and senior staff reinforcing unsafe environments through denial or complicity. • Victims fearing they will be accused of lying or exaggerating.	

b. Community members' perspectives

The community member respondent noted a general lack of awareness and trust in the reporting system. They suggested that individuals may not recognise GBV or know where to seek help, particularly if they lack access to information or support networks.

(i) Barriers to reporting GBV for community members

Barriers to reporting for community members	
Procedural and practical barriers	Psychological and emotional barriers
• Lack of awareness on where to report/reporting process	• Lack of awareness of what GBV looks like when not physical • Not having support systems outside of reporting channels

c. Staff and student perspectives

Staff and students face significant barriers to reporting gender-based violence, including limited anonymity, distrust in internal systems, and fear of retaliation. Cultural invisibility, power imbalances, and a lack of trauma- and neurodiversity-informed processes further alienate survivors. Emotional distress, shame, and fear of not being believed often prevent individuals from seeking support or justice.

(i) Barriers to reporting GBV for staff and students

Procedural and practical barriers	Cultural and social barriers
• Limited anonymity in small academic communities • Distrust of internal reporting systems • Complaints being minimised, mishandled, or buried • Lack of trauma-informed processes • Lack of neurodiversity-aware processes • Alienation of survivors who communicate or respond differently under stress • Power imbalances between staff, supervisors, and students • Professional risk in postgraduate or research settings • If the alleged offender is another student or staff member • Not knowing where or how to report	• Cultural and gender-diverse invisibility • Perception that systems are not designed for non-normative identities • Fear of institutional retaliation or reputational damage • Lack of empathy or belief from the person receiving the report • Being judged or blamed for the incident
Psychological and emotional barriers	
• Fear of retaliation and consequences • Shame and emotional distress • Difficulty proving the subtle nature of gender-based violence or mistreatment • Fear of not being believed • Fear of being believed but not protected • Repercussions with no follow-through or follow-up	

d. Student and community members' perspectives

Students and community members face significant psychological and emotional barriers to reporting GBV, particularly when the alleged offender is another student or staff member. Fear, distress, and concerns about retaliation or institutional inaction often deter individuals from coming forward.

(i) Barriers to reporting GBV for student and community members

Barriers to reporting for students, staff, and community members
Psychological and emotional barriers • Concern of offenders being other staff or students

e. Student, staff and community members' perspectives

Student, staff and community members' reporting instances of GBV is hindered by cultural and social fears of being ostracised or singled out, especially for those with lived experiences. Psychological barriers such as fear of judgment and anxiety about the reporting process and its outcomes further discourage individuals from seeking support.

(i) Barriers to reporting GBV for students, staff and community members

Barriers to reporting for students, staff, and community members	
Cultural and social barriers	**Psychological and emotional barriers**
• Lack of reporting due to becoming a social pariah or standing out due to their experiences	• Fear of being judged • Feeling nervous about the reporting process and outcomes

6. Current Strengths in CDU's Prevention and Response Efforts

a. Student perspectives

Students identified several institutional strengths in CDU's current approach to GBV prevention and response. The most frequently cited was the mandatory "Consent Matters" training, which was viewed as a foundational step in educating the student body about respectful relationships and consent. Students also appreciated the availability of anonymous reporting mechanisms, which were seen as critical for reducing fear and stigma associated with disclosure.

Visual campaigns such as "Respect. Now. Always." were noted for their visibility and clarity in communicating CDU's zero-tolerance stance on violence. Some students also referred to the presence of support networks, including counselling services and women's advocacy groups, as positive indicators of CDU's commitment to student wellbeing.

However, several students, particularly those studying online, reported limited awareness of these services. This suggests that while the infrastructure exists, its visibility and accessibility may not be consistent across all student cohorts.

(i) Strengths in prevention and response at CDU – student perspectives

Strengths at responding and preventing GBV through student perspective	
• Mandatory consent units and public stance against violence • Strong policies supporting student wellbeing • Women's network promoting safety and discussion • Clear campus information on harassment and reporting procedures • Anonymous and confidential support services • Equal opportunity practices • Encouragement for survivors to speak about their experiences • Students feel supported and safe on campus • Visual campaigns and posters promoting zero tolerance • Modifications to coursework addressing structural and sociocultural inequities • Clear listing and promotion of help services	• Visible campaigns against active violence • Support services are offered and made known • Perceived zero-tolerance approach to GBV • Confidence in disciplinary action if GBV is reported • Diverse staff contributing to inclusive culture • Inclusion and diversity promoted through communications and training (e.g., purple bench initiative) • Educational efforts to raise awareness • Respect. Now. Always. campaign promoting respectful campus culture • Culturally sensitive and trauma-informed support services • Options for anonymous reporting • This survey itself as a sign of institutional engagement • Mental health support and counselling availability • Positive overall perception of CDU's efforts • Accessible campus security during open hours

b. Staff perspectives

Staff respondents acknowledged CDU's efforts to promote a respectful and inclusive environment. Many praised the university's policy frameworks, including those related to sexual harassment, domestic violence leave, and equal opportunity. The availability of counselling and Employee Assistance Program (EAP) services was also highlighted as a strength, particularly for staff navigating personal or professional challenges related to GBV.

Campaigns such as "Be A Better Human" were viewed positively for their non-confrontational tone and emphasis on shared responsibility. Staff also noted that CDU's leadership had taken steps to support diversity and inclusion, including the promotion of women into leadership roles and the development of a Gender Equity Action Plan. While CDU's messaging was seen as strong, there were calls for more consistent enforcement and tangible outcomes following reports of misconduct.

(i) Strengths in prevention and response at CDU – staff perspectives

Strengths at responding and preventing GBV through staff perspective	
• Strong policies in place to support student wellbeing • Clear policies and procedures communicated effectively • CDU complies with legislative responsibilities • Specific leave provisions for domestic and family violence • DV leave entitlements and access to Employee Assistance Program (EAP) • Gender Equality Action Plan and GBV Working Group • CDU supports leave for fleeing domestic violence situations • Mandatory consent training and reporting tools • Respect. Now. Always. campaign • Be A Better Human (BABH) campaign • Respect Month and other awareness events • Posters and visual messaging around campus • Marketing and awareness raising activities • Student education on GBV has increased significantly • Programs and initiatives to raise awareness • Information events and activities held • Conversations are starting around GBV • Asking questions and conducting surveys to improve responses • This survey as a sign of institutional engagement • Genuine efforts to gather feedback and improve • Trying to get information to do better	• Anonymous and confidential support services available • Access to mental health support and counselling • Security escort services (e.g., walking students to cars) • Help services are clearly listed and promoted • Providing a safe and inclusive environment for disclosure • Students feel safe and supported on campus • Support services are promoted well and accessible • Staff and student partnerships in delivering non-judgmental support • Promotion of respect, kindness, and acceptance • Strong culture of equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) • Leadership demonstrates respect for women and supports initiatives • Women@CDU and leadership roles for women • Inclusive policies and visible campaigns promoting gender equity • Fostering a respectful environment for female staff and students • Diverse staff contributing to inclusive culture • Zero-tolerance messaging is loud and clear • Active support for diversity and inclusion • Culture of care and peer support among students and staff • Speaking openly about the issue • Taking GBV seriously at all levels

c. Staff and student perspectives

Staff and students identify several strengths in GBV prevention and response, including visible policy frameworks, shared language around GBV, and strong commitments to diversity, inclusion, and gender equity. Support services such as counselling, active engagement in national conversations, and recognition of institutional progress—particularly at CDU—further reinforce a proactive and informed approach.

(i) Strengths in prevention and response at CDU – staff and student perspectives

Strengths at responding and preventing GBV through staff and student perspectives
• Visible policy frameworks addressing sexual assault and harassment
• Establishment of shared language and expectations around GBV
• Commitment to diversity and inclusion
• Gender equity and cultural awareness initiatives
• Availability of counselling and student support services
• Engagement in national conversations on respectful relationships and GBV prevention
• Recognition that CDU has taken constructive steps toward addressing GBV

d. Student and community member perspective

Although only one community member responded, they acknowledged the value of CDU's engagement with the broader community through initiatives like this survey. While no specific institutional strengths were cited, the act of seeking feedback was interpreted as a positive step toward transparency and responsiveness.

(i) Strengths in prevention and response at CDU – student and community members' perspectives

Strengths at responding and preventing GBV through staff and community member perspectives
• This survey is a sign of institutional engagement and reflects positive steps forward

e. Staff, student and community member perspectives

A key strength in addressing GBV at CDU is the perception of adequate support systems, which provide essential pathways for prevention, response, and recovery across staff, students, and community settings.

(i) Strengths in prevention and response at CDU – staff, student and community members' perspectives

Strengths at responding and preventing GBV through staff, student and community members perspecitves
• Having adequate support systems in place

7. Opportunities for Improvement in Prevention and Support

Students, staff and community members provided a wide range of suggestions for improving CDU's prevention and support systems. A recurring recommendation was the need for culturally informed and inclusive services, particularly for students from diverse backgrounds. The list of suggestions from all stakeholders in its entirety is as follows.

(i) Student suggestions

Culturally informed and inclusive services

- Recruit more People of Colour (POC) counsellors and gender-diverse support staff.
- Ensure services are accessible to neurodivergent individuals.
- Develop culturally sensitive approaches to GBV support, especially for international students and those from diverse backgrounds.
- Provide multilingual resources and culturally appropriate education about Australian laws and rights.

Visibility and awareness of reporting procedures

- Increase promotion of reporting pathways using:
  - QR codes
  - Posters
  - Online modules

Campus signage

- Launch a "If you see something, say something" campaign to encourage bystander intervention.
- Improve labelling of shared facilities and ensure CCTV coverage in blind spots.

Education and training

- Introduce a mandatory training module on family/gender-based violence, similar to the existing "Consent Matters" module.
- Offer lectures and information sessions on GBV, its consequences, and support options.
- Develop an online course focused on GBV awareness and prevention.
- Embed preventative education in orientation and across curricula, including emotional regulation and respectful relationships.

Support for all genders

- Expand awareness of support services to include male victims of GBV.
- Promote inclusive sporting events, such as mixed-gender teams, to reduce exclusion and promote safety.
- Ensure gender-neutral facilities are available and clearly marked.

Victim-Centred Support and Accountability

- Provide active post-reporting care, including follow-up and emotional support.
- Ensure clear disciplinary action against perpetrators, especially in cases involving power imbalances.
- Make victims feel heard, safe, and supported, not just processed through formalities.
- Allow flexibility in academic requirements for victims (e.g., extensions, reduced workload).

Community Engagement and Belonging

- Appoint a Women's Officer on the Student Council and establish alternative support officers across campus.
- Create anonymous feedback mechanisms (e.g., surveys) to monitor GBV-related concerns.
- Foster group engagement around gender diversity and respectful dialogue.
- Support the formation of LGBTQI+ student groups and explore barriers to participation.

(i)   Student suggestions (continued)

Policy and structural improvements
- Clarify reporting procedures and ensure they are accessible to all students.   - Improve visibility of CDU's zero-tolerance stance through consistent messaging.   - Ensure transparency in investigations and outcomes to build trust in the system.   - Undertake academic research on the topic. Embed educational material into orientation.   - Support the formation of a student committee.

a. Staff suggestions

Expand and diversify support services

- Increase availability of support services, including case management and trauma-informed counselling.
- Appoint a full-time clinician on campus for immediate, confidential support.
- Ensure EAP services are regularly available on-site to normalise access.
- Provide support initiatives for male victims, alongside existing services for women and gender-diverse individuals.
- Include more men in support roles to encourage broader engagement.

Mandatory and inclusive training

- Implement mandatory GBV prevention training for all staff and students, including those who may not perceive themselves as needing it.
- Ensure training is inclusive of women, gender-diverse individuals, and male victims.
- Embed GBV prevention into all curricula, not just health or social sciences.
- Develop trauma-informed and culturally appropriate training tailored to CDU's demographic context.
- Include assertiveness training and role-play scenarios to build confidence and awareness.

Improve reporting pathways and processes

- Enhance clarity and visibility of reporting pathways both online and on campus.
- Integrate reporting into tools like the SafeZone app.
- Establish independent and anonymous reporting mechanisms to reduce fear of retaliation.
- Ensure skilled handling of incidents and transparent investigative processes.
- De-weaponise the complaints process to reduce harm and increase trust.
- Provide step-by-step guidance on how to report and what to expect.

Leadership accountability and cultural reform

- Address power imbalances and "boys' club" dynamics in senior leadership and departments.
- Promote visible role modelling from leadership on GBV prevention and respectful behaviour.
- Support male leaders to challenge patriarchal norms and unconscious bias through professional development.
- Ensure clear consequences for proven misconduct, regardless of position.
- Encourage team-based recognition over individual accolades to foster a respectful culture.

Policy and structural improvements

- Strengthen retention and recruitment practices to support a psychologically safe environment.
- Develop gender-inclusive policies that acknowledge all genders as potential victims.
- Improve complaints system to ensure fairness and reduce bias.
- Clarify workplace boundaries and address grooming or inappropriate behaviour.
- Promote transparent and inclusive management practices.

Awareness and education

- Increase awareness campaigns using multimodal formats (e.g., videos, infographics).
- Promote respect and peer support through everyday interactions and messaging.
- Include examples of GBV in training and communications to improve understanding.
- Encourage open conversations and proactive check-ins beyond formal reporting

(i)   Staff suggestions (continued)

Culturally safe and community-responsive services
• Expand culturally safe services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women. • Develop multilingual and multicultural engagement strategies. • Ensure content and delivery are relevant to CDU's unique student and staff demographics. • Support women's groups and safe spaces, especially for international and migrant communities .
Monitoring and feedback mechanisms
• Establish anonymous feedback systems to identify patterns and systemic issues. • Regularly consult with staff and students to understand lived experiences and improve responsiveness. • Use academic research to inform policy and practice.
External and independent support visibility
• Consider having external representatives (e.g., police, workplace tribunal) available for confidential reporting. • Allow external pathways for reporting to reduce perceived bias or conflict of interest.

b. Staff, student and community members' suggestions

Clarify and simplify reporting procedures

- Develop and disseminate step-by-step guidance on how to report gender-based violence (GBV).
- Provide clear explanations of what to expect during and after the reporting process.
- Ensure transparency in follow-up procedures, including timelines, outcomes, and available support.

Embed trauma-informed and neurodiversity-aware training

- Make trauma-informed and neurodiversity-aware training mandatory for all staff and students.
- Integrate this training into core professional development, not as optional workshops.
- Ensure training is ongoing and updated regularly to reflect evolving best practices.

Establish independent and safe reporting pathways

- Create reporting mechanisms that are independent of traditional university hierarchies to reduce fear of retaliation.
- Ensure confidentiality and anonymity in all reporting channels.
- Provide multiple access points (e.g., online, in-person, anonymous digital tools).

Improve policy inclusivity and representation

- Involve First Nations, LGBTQIA+, and neurodivergent individuals in the design and review of GBV-related policies.
- Ensure policies reflect intersectional experiences and are inclusive of all identities.

Invest in community education and cultural change

- Deliver education on consent, power dynamics, and bystander intervention that is relevant to CDU's campus culture.
- Move beyond compliance-based training to values-driven, practical learning.
- Promote consistent modelling of safety, accountability, and care by leadership and staff.

Normalise reporting and reduce stigma

- Launch campaigns to normalise the act of reporting GBV as a standard and supported process.
- Use inclusive language and messaging to reduce shame and stigma.
- Encourage open dialogue and peer support to foster a culture of safety and trust.

8. Additional Feedback and Recommendations

a. Student Perspectives

Students provided a wide range of suggestions for improving CDU's prevention and support systems. A recurring recommendation was the need for culturally informed and inclusive services, particularly for students from diverse backgrounds. This included calls for more People of Colour (POC) counsellors, gender-diverse support staff, and services that are accessible to neurodivergent individuals.

Students also expressed a desire for greater visibility and promotion of reporting procedures, noting that many were unaware of how to report GBV or what support was available. Suggestions included the use of QR codes, posters, and online modules to improve awareness.

There was strong support for additional training, including a mandatory module on family violence, similar to the existing consent training. Students also recommended increased campus safety measures, such as CCTV coverage, improved lighting, and clearer signage in shared spaces.

(i) Additional feedback and recommendations – student perspectives

Preventative education and training	• Strong support for early and ongoing education in relationship skills, emotional regulation, and moral values. • Calls for compulsory induction modules on respectful relationships and consent, similar to programs implemented currently at CDU. • Emphasis on practical, values-based messaging, such as "You don't hurt the people you love," to reinforce positive behavioural norms
Victim-centred approaches	• Students advocated for victim-informed research and the inclusion of victim voices in shaping institutional responses. • A recurring recommendation was to consult directly with victims when developing policies and interventions.
Inclusivity and respect for diverse perspectives	• Feedback highlighted the need to respect all identities and beliefs, including those with traditional gender views, while also enhancing LGBTQI+ visibility. • Students noted the absence of a visible LGBTQI+ student group at CDU and encouraged the university to explore underlying barriers to participation .
Safety and reporting mechanisms	• Several students recommended practical safety improvements, such as enhanced lighting in poorly lit areas, particularly around the Casuarina campus. • There was strong support for a "If you see something, say something" campaign to empower bystanders and encourage reporting of inappropriate behaviour.
Policy and cultural change	• Students stressed the importance of ongoing policy review and regular training updates to reflect evolving societal norms and student needs. • Some expressed concern about overcorrection or the potential for exclusionary practices, advocating instead for balanced, inclusive approaches. • The power differential framework was suggested as a more holistic lens for understanding the root causes of GBV, beyond gender alone.

Community and belonging	• Several responses pointed to the need for greater integration and community-building efforts, suggesting that a stronger sense of belonging may reduce incidents of GBV. • Students expressed appreciation for CDU's efforts to create a respectful environment and encouraged continued open dialogue, staff-student mutual respect, and cultural sensitivity.

b. Staff Perspectives

Staff feedback focused on the need for multilingual and multicultural engagement, particularly in a diverse university setting like CDU. Respondents recommended that conversations about GBV be held in multiple languages and facilitated by individuals who can engage meaningfully with different cultural groups.

There were also calls for gender-inclusive policies that explicitly recognise all genders as potential victims of GBV. Staff expressed concern about bias in investigations, particularly the risk of presuming guilt based on gender. They recommended fair and transparent processes that protect the rights of all parties involved.

(i)   Additional feedback and recommendations – staff perspectives

Inclusive and multicultural engagement	- Strong support for multilingual, multicultural dialogue to ensure all voices are heard and respected. - Recognition that cultural diversity enriches the university community but also necessitates open, courageous conversations about difference and inclusion.
Policy and process improvements	- Calls for gender-inclusive policies that explicitly acknowledge all genders as potential victims of GBV. - Concerns raised about bias in investigations, particularly the presumption of guilt based on gender, and the need for fair, transparent processes. - Recommendations to strengthen post-reporting safeguards to better protect victims and support healing.
Power dynamics and structural drivers	- Staff highlighted the importance of addressing power imbalances as a root cause of GBV. - Suggestions included adopting frameworks that go beyond gender to consider intersectional factors such as race, culture, and hierarchy.
Support for all genders	Recognition that current initiatives may overemphasise support for women, with insufficient visibility or resources for male and non-binary victims. Recommendations included: - Training to address unconscious bias. - Support services tailored to diverse gender experiences. - Balanced communication strategies that avoid reinforcing stereotypes.
Workplace culture and accountability	- Feedback emphasised the need to clarify workplace boundaries, particularly around grooming and inappropriate behaviour. - Staff expressed concern about misuse of gendered language (e.g., sexism claims masking other forms of discrimination), which can undermine genuine equity efforts. - A call for clear, enforceable processes to address ongoing gendered disrespect and sexualisation, especially where previous interventions have failed.

Recognition and encouragement	• Many staff expressed appreciation for the survey, acknowledging it as a positive step toward change. • There was a shared sense that CDU is building a strong community, but that ongoing communication and resource investment are essential to sustain progress.

c.   Staff, Student and Community Member Perspectives

Feedback from across the CDU community highlighted the importance of embedding respect, accountability, and accessibility into everyday practice. The following themes emerged:

(i)   Additional feedback and recommendations – staff, student and community members' perspectives (continued)

Enhancing accessibility and engagement of resources	• The "Respect. Now. Always." site was described as text-heavy and difficult to engage with. Respondents recommended the development of multimodal resources, such as short videos, infographics, and interactive content, to improve accessibility and appeal. • There was a strong call to actively promote existing resources, ensuring they are visible, relatable, and used as preventative tools, not just reactive ones.
Victim-informed systems	• Respondents emphasised the need for systems shaped by lived experience, advocating for genuine consultation with victims to inform policy, support services, and educational content. • Building trust and safety requires listening to those who have experienced harm and involving them in the design of solutions.

Visible and lived accountability	A recurring theme was the need to make accountability tangible, moving beyond policy documents to real-world practices.
	• Prevention efforts should be embedded in everyday environments, including:
	   o Classroom culture
	   o Leadership behaviour
	   o Research and teaching spaces
	• Accountability should be felt and observed, not just referenced in HR or compliance frameworks.

Normalising reporting procedures	• Community members stressed the importance of normalising the act of reporting, particularly for students. • Reporting should be framed as a standard, supported process, not something unusual or stigmatised. • This includes ensuring that language, tone, and systems do not inadvertently discourage disclosure.

9. Conclusion

The thematic analysis of CDU's Prevention and Response to Gender-Based Violence Survey reveals a complex and multifaceted understanding of GBV within the university community. While CDU has made progress in developing policies, training, and support services, the findings indicate that further work is needed to ensure these efforts are effective, inclusive, and trusted.

Across all stakeholder groups, there is a clear call for:
- Stronger trauma-informed and culturally safe support systems
- Improved visibility and accessibility of reporting pathways
- Transparent and fair investigative processes
- Expanded education and awareness initiatives
- Leadership accountability and community engagement

By centring the voices of students, staff, and community members, CDU is well-positioned to build a more responsive and inclusive framework for GBV prevention and support, one that reflects the lived realities of its diverse population and fosters a culture of safety, respect, and equity.