**Investigators include:** Gina Cleo, Jo Bishop, Kirsty Forest, Amy Bannatyne, Richard Matthews, Janie Smith, Sivassaini Sivakumaran and Nina Eid.

The Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) conducted an independent national survey of university students to gain greater insight into the nature, prevalence and reporting of sexual harassment and sexual assault at Australian universities. Over thirty thousand students across 39 Australian universities, responded to the 2017 survey. The findings suggest one in five (21%) students were sexually harassed in a university setting 1.

The psychological and professional impacts of this harassment are devastating, with survivors experiencing higher rates of depression, suicide and leave the profession at much greater levels 2. The implications are far reaching for students, due to their vulnerability at this stage of their life cycle, where they are maturing into adults and may be away from home for the first time. There are often severe consequences for how they access education and the completion of their studies, which in turn can impact their future careers 1.

It’s not a case of whether sexual harassment is happening but rather who is it happening to. The rates of sexual harassment experienced by students are a call to action for Australian universities. Every individual in our community has the right and is entitled to feel safe and respected in their place of study, their place of work, or – as for many medical students - their home.

To address this, the AHRC, recommended the commissioning of an independent, systematic review of universities’ policies in responding to sexual harassment and sexual assault to assess their effectiveness 1. Researchers at Bond University’s Faculty of Health Sciences and Medicine have commenced this important work; this is the first systematic review to specifically address this issue. Lead researcher, Dr Gina Cleo states, *“This project aims to highlight the best practice responses to preventing and responding to sexual harassment and sexual assault, based on comprehensive, evidence-based data. Without this work, we risk wasting time and resources, implementing ineffective strategies, and leaving more students at risk of abuse.”*

The outcomes of this systematic review will be accessible to all universities, nationally and internationally, so we can collectively work towards preventing such abuse from occurring in the first place, whilst building a culture of respect and responding appropriately. Directly addressing these issues extends beyond the individual reputations of universities and safety of their students; it is critical in informing community safety among the next generation of leaders and health professionals in Australia.

Our focus is on ensuring that all students can access education in environments that are safe, and which enable them to achieve their full potential. The identified strategies and lessons learned could inform national policy and serve as a road map for universities globally.

We hope to publish the results by the end of 2020. Please contact gcleo@bond.edu.au for enquiries or for more information.

1. *Change the Course: National report on harassment in Australian Universities 2017.* Australian Human Rights Commission.
2. *Sexual Harassment of Women: Climate, Culture, and Consequences in Academic Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine.* National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine*.*Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. 2018. https://doi.org/10.17226/24994.