



# University Student Disclosures of Crime, Violence, and Trauma: Findings from a Survey of Criminology Educators across Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand

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## Abstract

This study explores the findings from a survey-based questionnaire investigating the prevalence and predictors of student disclosures of crime, violence, and trauma to criminology educators working at Australian and Aotearoa New Zealand universities. Responses show student disclosures are common, with educators receiving an average of three to four disclosures in the preceding two years. While gender did not predict the number of disclosures received, teaching subjects discussing domestic and family/whānau and/or sexual violence increased the likelihood of disclosures. The study's findings can help inform the development of university interventions, systems, and resources to improve support for students and staff, enhancing classroom and campus safety.

**Keywords:** Criminology education; violence; trauma; student disclosures; teaching and learning; teaching sensitive topics.

## Introduction

Criminology content addresses sensitive topics associated with offending, victimisation, and criminal justice processes. This means tertiary educators are exposed to the probability of student disclosures of crime, harm, and violence in direct and indirect ways (Branch et al., 2011). There has been little empirical research examining the rate of student disclosures of crime, violence, and trauma (see Branch et al., 2011). However, some criminologists, such as Keene and Jordan (2021, p. 67), have recounted anecdotes about frequently experiencing student disclosures in their classes:

Student disclosures of trauma have been common in our experience, as others teaching similar content have also observed. ... Students feeling able to make disclosures of trauma to their teachers requires a high level of rapport and trust to have



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been built between the student and teaching staff. Disclosures of this nature are unlikely if students do not feel such safeguards exist.

In recent years, there has been a strong focus on the prevalence of student experiences of sexual violence and harassment, including on university campuses in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand, and the failure of universities to respond (see Australian Human Rights Commission, 2017; Beres et al., 2020; Funnell, 2016; Heywood et al., 2022). More broadly, there has been a strong focus at a federal and state level. This has included key commissions of inquiry and national action plans to address gender-based violence in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand (see *National plan to end violence against women and children 2022–2032* (Department of Social Services [DSS], 2022); *Te Aorerekura: The national strategy to eliminate family violence and sexual violence 2021–2046* (New Zealand Government, 2021)). The increased emphasis on these harms in social, political, and legal discourse might, in part, have also influenced the increase in student disclosures to criminology educators in recent years, particularly since the emergence of the digital hashtag #MeToo in 2017.

Branch et al. (2011) found educators teaching in disciplines centring on violence-related subjects may be more likely to receive student disclosures of crime, violence, and trauma, compared to educators in other disciplines. However, there remains a paucity of research examining the extent to which criminologists specifically receive student disclosures of crime, violence, and trauma. To address this gap, our study draws on a survey of 176 ongoing, contract, and sessional educators<sup>1</sup> across Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand. The research explores the prevalence and predictors of student disclosures of crime, violence, and trauma at universities in these countries. Findings show 66.9% of the educators reported at least one experience of a student disclosure of crime, violence, or trauma in the preceding two years (from May 2021–May 2023). On average, study participants reported three to four instances of student disclosures. These disclosures involved robbery, assault, terrorism, and witnessing or being affiliated with people who have been involved in homicides. Notably, the most common harms students disclosed to criminology educators were sexual violence and domestic and family/whānau violence.<sup>2</sup>

The high number of disclosures of gender-based violence identified in our study indicate a crucial need to bolster the type, and level of, training and support offered to criminology educators who have, or are likely to, receive student disclosures. This would improve referral pathways and targeted interventions for students, and help ensure educators' emotional and psychological well-being. These measures could create safer and more supportive learning environments for students and criminology educators. Gender was not found to be a significant predictor of the number of disclosures educators received (cf. Richards et al., 2013). The likelihood of educators receiving a higher number of student disclosures increased if they shared support services on learning management portals; utilised content or trigger warnings in lectures, tutorials, and other classes; and/or taught subjects related to domestic and family/whānau violence and sexual violence. Below, we provide an overview of findings from the existing literature relating to student disclosures of crime, violence, and trauma. We then present our research design, method, and key findings.

## Understanding Student Disclosures of Crime, Violence, and Trauma to University Educators

University students have been extensively studied for their views on the prevalence of, fears about, and experiences of crime, violence, and trauma. A United Kingdom (UK) study found university students perceived crime as an underlying feature of undergraduate life (Selwyn, 2009). Additionally, Grinshteyn et al. (2020) noted minority students had a higher level of fear of crime than their peers. Student perceptions have also been sought regarding fears about credit and debit card fraud (Abdulai, 2020), the motivations driving hate crimes (Andersson et al., 2018), and deliberate drugging (Butler et al., 2021).

Although university students may be victim-survivors of diverse crime types, research investigating the prevalence of crime, violence, and trauma amongst this cohort has heavily focused on gender-based violence. For example, Fedina et al. (2020) found 17.4% of students reported experiencing stalking while at college in the United States (US). This research showed cisgender women, transgender/gender-nonconforming, and sexual minority students were more likely to be victim-survivors of stalking than cisgender men. While studies have found transgender people more likely to be victim-survivors of sexual assault than cisgender men and women, Coulter et al. (2017) documented a higher likelihood of sexual assault for cisgender women than cisgender men. Notably, university students with disabilities were approximately twice as likely to experience intimate partner violence (IPV) than their counterparts without disabilities. In this respect, students with mental illness and multiple disability types were found to have the greatest likelihood of experiencing IPV (Scherer et al., 2016). In Germany, a study examining sexual aggression perpetration at four universities found a prevalence rate of 62.1% for women and 37.5% for men (Krähe et al., 2021). Another Canadian study of 977 university students found 23.2% of women, 9.6% of men, and 16.7% of non-binary students reported experiencing sexual violence at least once in the preceding 12 months (Jeffrey et al., 2023). A UK study by Hales and Gannon (2022) also found one in nine of the 554 male university students surveyed self-reported recent sexual aggression.

Australian research has shown university students have experienced gender-based violence at alarming rates. A study by Zark et al. (2022) found women tertiary students in Australia reported prevalence estimates of 56% for physical violence, 53% for sexual violence, 81% for psychological violence, and 48% for financial violence by an intimate partner or family member since the age of 18 years. In Aotearoa New Zealand, a report was released in 2017 by the collective, *Thursdays in Black*, about sexual harassment and assault on university campuses. The report revealed 52% of cis-gender heterosexual women, 53% of cis-gender lesbian women, and 63% of bi-sexual cis-gender women reported experiencing sexual assault while undertaking their degrees. Fifty-seven per cent of Māori women and 77% of takatāpui (LGBTQ+) gender-identifying Māori students disclosed being subjected to sexual assault during their time at university (Thursdays in Black, 2017). The study found a further 90% of students with disabilities experienced sexual harassment during their time in tertiary education in Aotearoa New Zealand.

In broad terms, disclosure involves sharing one's experience of crime, violence, and/or trauma with another person (see Mennicke et al., 2022). However, this does not necessarily mean students want to seek help for their experience or make a formal report to their university or the police (Zark et al., 2022). International examples found students were more likely to disclose experiences of crime, violence, and trauma to their roommates and friends rather than reporting to law enforcement (Arney, 2020). Students have also expressed a lack of trust in their university to position their needs and interests at the forefront (Marques et al., 2020). The rate of student disclosures to university educators has been less extensively researched. Similarly, few studies have investigated the factors shaping the rate at which—and reasons why—students disclose crime, violence, and trauma to their educators.

To our knowledge, only one empirical study in the US has examined the rate at which university educators receive student disclosures of victimisation (Richards et al., 2013). Richards and colleagues (2013) randomly sampled 261 professors at two US colleges to examine whether student disclosures of crime, violence, and trauma were a common occurrence for college professors. The research also examined whether staff characteristics—namely, gender and the nature of the topics they teach—predict higher levels of student disclosures. The authors hypothesised that female university educators who taught on sensitive topics would be more likely to receive at least one disclosure of crime, violence, or trauma, compared to men or those who did not teach sensitive topics. Richards and colleagues (2013) attributed this hypothesis to expectations about women's teaching styles, often influenced by gendered assumptions about traditional gender roles, wherein women are assumed to be more compassionate and emotionally available to students (see Bem, 1983). Their research was also influenced by Lindholm et al.'s (2005) national survey of college teachers. The study found approximately 46% of women university educators reported actively attempting to assist in the emotional development of their students, compared to 33% of men university educators.

The disparity between men and women educators receiving disclosures of crime, violence, and trauma may also reflect the different and uneven emotional and invisible labour performed by women in academia to support students. Minoritised women and trans and gender-diverse academics have been shown to perform even higher levels of such labour (Rickett & Morris, 2020; Wallace et al., 2017). These disparities have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic (Górska et al., 2021). Branch et al. (2011) further noted that an educator's gender may shape the nature of the subjects they teach, which, in turn, may lead to disclosures of crime, violence, and trauma. Women in higher education are more likely to teach liberal arts subjects, including women's studies, that concern topics such as domestic and family/whānau and sexual violence. As Hayes-Smith et al. (2010, p. 56) stated, “professors, especially in fields like criminal justice and sociology, teaching classes on family violence, may be viewed as especially attractive support systems for students because of their expertise and/or their perceived proclivity for withholding judgement”. Branch et al. (2011) found educators in disciplines with violence-related subjects—including criminology and criminal justice—may be more likely to encounter student disclosures related to crime, violence, and trauma than educators in other disciplines.

Richards et al. (2013) found 42% of their study participants reported receiving a student disclosure of crime, violence, or trauma over their teaching career. The research also revealed 29% of those individuals who received student disclosures taught courses on crime, victims, and/or gender/sexuality. The most disclosed incidents included rape and sexual assault (42%), assault (18%), theft (15%), domestic violence (6%), and sexual harassment and stalking (both 3%). Richards et al.'s logistic regression identified two statistically significant predictors of educators receiving a disclosure of crime, violence, or trauma. Professors who taught sensitive topics were 2.63 times more likely to receive student disclosures than those who did not cover such subjects. This suggests the nature of the material being taught can influence students' decisions to disclose their experiences to their educators. Furthermore, the study found a correlation between professors' age and the likelihood of receiving student disclosures. As professors' age increased, the odds of receiving a student disclosure decreased by a factor of 0.97. This suggests younger educators may be more likely to receive disclosures, compared to their older counterparts. However, Richards et al.'s (2013) study did not find significant associations between professors' gender and receiving student disclosures.

## The Current Study

As Richards et al.'s important study was conducted over 10 years ago, there is a need for further research to provide a more contemporary understanding of student disclosures of crime, violence, and trauma to university educators. To our knowledge, no study to date has explored the extent to which criminology educators receive such disclosures. Richards et al.'s (2013) study examined whether gender predicted educators receiving at least one student disclosure of crime, violence, or trauma. However, no study has explored whether gender predicts higher student disclosures while also controlling for demographic, pedagogical views, teaching strategies, and subject matter variables. This research is important given recent evidence suggesting women educators receive notably high numbers of student disclosures (Bedera, 2021; Growette Bostaph et al., 2021; Keene & Jordan, 2021).

It is also beneficial to consider factors shaping the likelihood of student disclosures of crime, violence, and trauma alongside what is taught and how it is taught. University educators have developed a range of techniques promoting a violence- and trauma-informed, and survivor-centred pedagogy. These measures create learning environments that prioritise the needs and experiences of victim-survivors. Specific techniques can create spaces where victim-survivors feel safe, validated, and understood, acknowledging the impact of trauma on their lives. These include encouraging students to express their additional thoughts or concerns via email (Bedera, 2021), sharing support services in lectures and tutorials (Keene & Jordan, 2021), and considering the intensity of the material an educator intends to cover in their teaching (see Harding, 2022; Zurbriggen, 2011). The selection and use of these strategies can be heavily patterned by course subject matter. As these techniques seek to foster an environment of psychological safety, their use may mediate the number of disclosures students make to educators. However, relatively little research has empirically verified whether educators using particular strategies to teach sensitive topics are more likely to receive disclosures.

This study focused on the following research questions to address these hitherto under-researched factors that may shape how students disclose experiences of crime, violence, and trauma to staff. Questions 1 and 2 are adapted from Richards et al.'s (2013) exploratory study of student-to-professor disclosures of crime victimisation. To our knowledge, this represents the only other study that has quantitatively examined the rate and predictors of student-to-educator disclosures in higher education.

**Research Question 1:** Are student disclosures of crime, violence, and trauma common for criminology educators at universities in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand?

- Hypothesis 1: Student disclosures of crime, violence, and trauma are a very common occurrence for criminology educators at universities in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand.

**Research Question 2:** Do educators' gender; age; ethnicity; sharing of support services on unit learning management systems; use of content or trigger warnings in lectures, tutorials, and other classes; and teaching of subjects discussing domestic and family/whānau violence and/or sexual violence predict the number of student disclosures of crime, violence, and trauma they receive?

- Hypothesis 2: Educators who are women, non-binary, genderqueer/fluid or use another term will receive significantly more student disclosures of crime, violence, and trauma, compared with educators who are men.
- Hypothesis 3: Educators who teach subjects discussing domestic and family/whānau violence and/or sexual violence will receive significantly more student disclosures than educators who do not teach subjects discussing domestic and family/whānau violence and sexual violence.

**Research Question 3:** Do educators' gender; age; ethnicity; sharing of support services on unit learning management systems; or use of content or trigger warnings in lectures, tutorials, and other classes predict the types of student disclosures educators receive?

- Hypothesis 4: Educators who are men will be significantly less likely to receive at least one disclosure of sexual violence and significantly less likely to receive at least one disclosure of intimate partner violence, compared with educators who are women, non-binary or another gender.

## Study Design

### *Sampling Method and Recruitment*

To address our research questions, we employed an online survey questionnaire. Ethical approval for this study was obtained from Deakin University's Human Research Ethics Committee (DUHREC, project number 2022-293). To generate a potentially representative sample, we created a sampling frame using contact details obtained from university websites. We compiled a list of all universities in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand with criminology and/or criminal justice programs using official government lists and information on individual university websites. Thirty-six criminology and/or criminal justice programs were identified ( $n = 30$  Australia,  $n = 6$  Aotearoa New Zealand). These included criminology, criminal justice, legal studies, or justice undergraduate degrees, or generalist degrees (e.g., Bachelor of Arts or Social Sciences) where criminology, criminal justice, or justice majors and minors were offered. Subsequently, we collected contact and demographic information for ongoing and contracted university educators teaching in these programs. We emailed the survey to 588 ongoing, contract, and sessional academics that we identified as teaching criminology and/or criminal justice programs in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand. We also advertised the survey on our professional social media accounts, such as LinkedIn. To mitigate potential biases associated with self-selection, the advertisements for participant recruitment deliberately avoided mentioning the study's focus on student disclosures of crime, violence, and trauma, as the study encompassed various aspects of criminologists' teaching and learning activities. Data collection took place between May and June 2023.

### *Survey Instrument*

Our survey comprised four thematic areas, relating to: 1) participants' recent teaching load, teaching practices, and their universities' teaching practices; 2) participants' teaching practices, curriculum, and the extent to which work-integrated learning, sensitive subjects, and Indigenous knowledges were embedded in their teaching; 3) the challenges associated with teaching criminology; and 4) demographic information, including age, gender, academic role, and career stage. Several survey items were adapted from the Higher Education Research Institute's 2016–2017 faculty survey (Stolzenberg et al., 2019) and Jaggars et al.'s (2020) COVID-19 teaching and learning survey. This paper focuses solely on data related to student disclosures of crime, violence, and trauma.

### *Sample*

Our sample consisted of 176 criminology educators teaching at one or more universities in Australia or Aotearoa New Zealand (see Table 1). This included 76 sessional educators and 100 ongoing or contracted academics. The response rate of 30% aligns with expectations for a list-based email survey on a salient topic (Callegaro et al., 2015, p. 137). A survey completeness benchmark of 60% was used, resulting in 94.3% of participants returning completed survey questionnaires, 1.7% returning surveys that were 96% complete, and the remaining participants ( $n = 6$ ) providing partially completed surveys that responded to between 60% and 78% of the survey items.

**Table 1**

#### *Sample Demographics*

Variables	Sample	Total population
<b>Gender</b>		
Woman	108 (65.9%)	386 (65.8%)
Man	49 (27.8%)	173 (29.5%)
Non-binary, genderqueer, genderfluid, or uses another term	7 (4.3%)	28 (4.8%)
Missing or prefer not to disclose	12	-
<b>Country of current employment</b>		
Australia	149 (84.6%)	526 (89.6%)
Aotearoa New Zealand	23 (13.4%)	61 (10.4%)
Missing or prefer not to disclose	4	-
<b>Academic level</b>		
Sessional	76 (43.7%)	256 (43.6%)
Associate/Assistant Lecturer	3 (1.7%)	6 (1%)
Lecturer	29 (16.7%)	97 (16.5%)
Senior Lecturer	33 (18.8%)	96 (16.4%)
Associate Professor	18 (10.3%)	67 (11.4%)
Professor	15 (8.6%)	65 (11.1%)
Missing or prefer not to disclose	5	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>176 (30%)</b>	<b>588</b>

To assess sample representativeness, we conducted chi-square tests examining the distribution of gender, country, and academic level among criminology educators in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand. The test results revealed that the sample was representative in terms of the countries ( $\chi^2 (df = 1) = 1.641, p = .200$ ), with no significant deviations between the observed and expected frequencies of participants from Aotearoa New Zealand and Australia. Similarly, the sample exhibited representativeness regarding gender ( $\chi^2 (df = 2) = 0.096, p = .953$ ), as the observed deviations in gender distribution were not statistically significant. Additionally, the sample was representative regarding academic level ( $\chi^2 (df = 4) = 1.852, p = .763$ ), with no significant deviations between the observed and expected frequencies across various academic positions. These non-significant p-values indicate that the observed deviations in all three tests are likely due to random chance, rather than systematic biases in the sample's representativeness.

### ***Data Analysis***

To address RQ1, descriptive statistics on student disclosures to staff were generated, including the mean number of disclosures received by participants. As our RQ2 dependent variable was a count variable with a negative binomial distribution, a negative binomial regression was used to address it. To address RQ3, logistic regression was used to provide insights into whether educator characteristics predicted receiving at least one disclosure of a particular type of crime, such as domestic, family, or sexual/whānau violence. All data analyses were performed in SPSS.

### ***Dependent Variables***

The dependent variables were derived from two survey questions that respectively measured the number of student disclosures participants received and the nature of these disclosures. Participants were asked, “In the previous two years, have you had a student disclose to you that they have been a crime victim?” and had the option of selecting 1) no; 2) yes, one student; or 3) yes, more than one student. Participants who selected “yes, more than one student” were prompted to indicate the number of disclosures they had received. If a participant indicated that they had received one or more disclosures from students, they were asked, if they felt comfortable to do so, to “please briefly outline the nature of those disclosures”. Types of crime, violence, and trauma disclosed to participants were quantised into categorical variables.

### ***Predictor Variables***

Gender; ethnicity; sharing/not sharing support services on unit learning management systems; and use/non-use of content warnings in seminars, lectures, or other classes when teaching sensitive subjects were coded as dummy variables. Similarly, teaching a unit addressing sexual violence and teaching a unit addressing intimate partner and family/whānau violence were also coded as dummy variables. The age variable was coded as an ordinal variable, dividing the respondents into different age groups: 18–24, 25–34, 35–44, 45–54, 55–64, and 75 or older. Recognising the potential problems associated with multicollinearity in regression analyses, we conducted diagnostic assessments using the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) in SPSS. The highest VIF value we found was 1.18, and the lowest tolerance value was 0.84. These results suggest multicollinearity was not an issue in our data (Freedman 2009). Furthermore, having at least 10 outcomes for each predictor variable in the regression equation is advisable to avoid affecting Type I error, relative bias, or other model performance metrics (Vittinghoff & McCulloch, 2007). All our models met this condition.

## **Findings**

### ***The Occurrence of Student Disclosures of Crime, Violence, and Trauma***

Of those who participated in our survey, 66.9% reported receiving one or more student disclosures of crime, violence, and trauma in the two years prior to taking the survey. These findings indicate most criminology educators at universities in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand have encountered student disclosures. A substantial proportion of those educators who had received disclosures had experienced multiple instances of students sharing their experiences in the last two years. Indeed, the mean number of student disclosures reported by educators was calculated to be 3.71. This figure indicates, on average, criminology educators in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand had encountered approximately 3 to 4 instances of student disclosures in the previous two years.

A notable proportion of our participants experienced a higher frequency of student disclosures (see Table 2). Frequencies of 3 to 8 disclosures were reported by a considerable percentage of educators, ranging from 6.7% to 14%. Additionally, 12.4% reported receiving 10 or more student disclosures in the two years prior to the survey. These findings demonstrate multiple student disclosures are not uncommon among criminology educators.

**Table 2**

*Frequency of Student Disclosures of Crime Victimization Among Criminology Educators in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand*

Number of disclosures received	Frequency	Percentage
0	58	33.0
1	19	10.8
2	25	14.2
3	12	6.8
4	12	6.8
5	14	8.0
6	6	3.4
7	1	0.6
8	3	1.7
10	9	5.1
11	4	2.3
12	4	2.3
14	1	0.6
15	2	1.1
20	4	2.3
30	2	1.1

Table 3 presents the most frequently disclosed types of crime, violence, and trauma reported by students to criminology educators in the two years preceding the survey. The findings reveal sexual violence ranked highest amongst disclosures, with 39.8% of participants ( $n = 70$ ) receiving at least one student disclosure of sexual violence in the two years preceding the survey. Domestic and family/whānau violence follows closely, with 35.2% of educators ( $n = 62$ ) reporting that at least one student had disclosed experiences of domestic and family/whānau violence to them in the preceding two years. The table highlights that sexual violence and intimate partner violence were prominently disclosed to educators at a significantly higher rate, compared to other crimes. This included assault, disclosed at least once to 8.5% of educators ( $n = 15$ ), and police misconduct and brutality, disclosed at least once by students to 5.5% of educators ( $n = 10$ ).

**Table 3**

*Crime Categories Disclosed by Students to Two or More Participating Criminology Educators*

Type of crime disclosed	Frequency	Percentage
Sexual violence	70	39.80
Domestic and family/whānau violence	62	35.20
Assault	15	8.50
Police misconduct and brutality	10	5.70
Theft/burglary	9	5.10
Child sexual abuse	9	5.10
Harassment	8	4.50
Robbery	7	4.00
Bullying/cyberbullying	3	1.70
Hate crime	3	1.70
Cybercrime	2	1.10
Discrimination	2	1.10
Institutional abuses	2	1.10
Fraud	2	1.10

These findings provide strong empirical support for Hypothesis 1, indicating student disclosures of crime, violence, and trauma are common for criminology educators at universities in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand. The results emphasise the need for educators to be equipped with the necessary knowledge, skills, and resources to address and respond to student disclosures effectively.

### ***Predictors of Criminology Educators Receiving Student Disclosures of Crime, Violence, and Trauma***

Among educators aged 18 to 24, the mean number of student disclosures was 4.60. The mean number of student disclosures in the next age bracket of 25 to 34 slightly decreased to 4.15. As the age bracket increased from 35 to 44, the mean number of student disclosures decreased to 3.64. Educators aged 45 to 54 reported a mean number of student disclosures of 3.53—a slight decline, compared to the previous age bracket. The trend continued with educators aged 55 to 64, where the mean number of student disclosures dropped to 2.84. Finally, educators aged 65 to 74 had the lowest mean number of student disclosures, recording an average of 1.20. These findings suggest a potential relationship between criminology educators' age and student disclosure frequency, with younger educators receiving more student disclosures than older educators.

The mean number of student disclosures for women educators was 4.75 in comparison to male criminology educators, who had a lower mean number of student disclosures, with an average of 2.82. Individuals identifying as non-binary, genderqueer, or gender-fluid reported a mean number of student disclosures of 4.75, on par with the average reported by women. Furthermore, criminology educators who used a different term to describe their gender exhibited a significantly higher mean number of student disclosures, averaging 7.50.

Building on these findings, a negative binomial regression analysis was undertaken to examine if age or gender were statistically significant predictors of criminology educators receiving student disclosures. As Table 4 demonstrates, teaching about domestic and family/whānau violence ( $\text{Exp}(B) = 1.996$ ,  $p = <.001$ ) and teaching about sexual violence ( $\text{Exp}(B) = 1.552$ ,  $p = 0.037$ ) were found to be statistically significant predictors of receiving higher numbers of disclosures from students. Criminology educators who covered the topic of domestic and family/whānau violence in their teaching were around 2 times more likely to receive a higher number of student disclosures from their students than those who did not teach this topic. Similarly, criminology educators who taught about sexual violence were approximately 1.5 times more likely to receive a higher number of disclosures from their students than those who did not. Additionally, sharing support services on online learning portals ( $\text{Exp}(B) = 1.692$ ,  $p = 0.018$ ) and utilising content or trigger warnings in lectures, tutorials, workshops, or other classes ( $\text{Exp}(B) = 2.092$ ,  $p = 0.026$ ) were found to be statistically significant predictors of receiving higher numbers of disclosures from students. Educators who shared support services on their unit's online learning portal were around 1.7 times more likely to receive a higher number of student disclosures than those who did not. Educators using content or trigger warnings were around 2 times more likely to receive student disclosures than those who did not do so.

**Table 4**

#### *Predictors of Educators Receiving Student Disclosures of Crime Victimisation*

	<b>B</b>	<b>SE</b>	<b>Exp(B)</b>	<b>Wald Chi-Square</b>	<b>Sig.</b>
Man	-0.220	0.229	0.803	0.914	0.339
European	0.010	0.278	1.010	0.001	0.972
Age	-0.089	0.096	0.915	0.839	0.360
Sharing of support services on the institutional online learning portal	0.526	0.222	1.692	5.581	0.018
Content or trigger warnings in lectures, tutorials, workshops or other classes	0.738	0.330	2.092	4.988	0.026
Teaches unit discussing sexual violence	0.439	0.210	1.552	4.346	0.037
Teaches unit discussing domestic and family/whānau violence	0.691	0.2284	1.996	9.152	<.001



### ***Predictors of Educators Receiving One or More Disclosures of Sexual Violence and One or More Disclosures of Domestic and Family/Whānau Violence***

Logistic regression analyses were also conducted to examine the relationship between educator characteristics (gender, sexuality, age, and ethnicity) and the likelihood of receiving at least one student disclosure of sexual violence, or at least one disclosure of intimate partner violence. The analyses controlled for factors including strategies for teaching sensitive topics and teaching a unit concerning the type of crime, violence, or trauma disclosed (i.e., teaching a unit on sexual violence was included as a predictor variable in the regression analysis examining the relationship between educator characteristics and the likelihood of receiving at least one student disclosure of sexual violence).

Unsurprisingly, teaching a subject that discusses sexual violence emerged as a statistically significant predictor of educators receiving at least one disclosure of sexual violence ( $\text{Exp}(B) = 2.978, p = 0.002$ ). As illustrated in Table 5, educators who taught a unit discussing sexual violence were 2.978 times more likely to receive such disclosures, compared to those who did not cover this topic. However, even after accounting for this variable, several demographic and teaching practice-related factors remained significant predictors of educators receiving disclosures of sexual violence. Notably, educators who identified as men ( $\text{Exp}(B) = 0.434, p = 0.041$ ) were approximately 0.434 times less likely to receive at least one disclosure of sexual violence, compared to educators who identified as women, non-binary, or another gender.

**Table 5**

*Binary Logistic Regression Predicting Student Disclosures of Sexual Violence to Educators*

	<b>B</b>	<b>SE</b>	<b>Wald</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>Sig.</b>	<b>Exp(B)</b>
Man	-0.835	0.409	4.167	1	0.041	0.434
European	0.633	0.518	1.494	1	0.222	1.884
Age	-0.264	0.162	2.656	1	0.103	0.768
Shares support services on unit's learning management system	1.136	0.413	7.569	1	0.006	3.115
Uses content or trigger warnings in lectures, tutorials, and other classes	0.535	0.595	0.809	1	0.369	1.708
Teaches unit discussing sexual violence	1.091	0.357	9.339	1	0.002	2.978

Additionally, sharing support services on a subject's online learning management system was a statistically significant predictor ( $\text{Exp}(B) = 3.115, p = 0.006$ ), indicating educators engaged in this practice were significantly more likely to receive at least one disclosure of sexual violence. Educators who engaged in sharing support services on the subject's online learning management system were approximately 3.115 times more likely to receive such disclosures. The model summary statistics revealed that the included variables accounted for approximately 18.6% of the variance in the likelihood of receiving student disclosures of sexual violence (Cox & Snell R Square = 0.186, Nagelkerke R Square = 0.251).

Teaching a subject that discussed domestic and family/whānau violence emerged as a statistically significant predictor of participants receiving at least one disclosure of domestic and family/whānau violence ( $\text{Exp}(B) = 5.281, p = < 0.000$ ). Participants teaching domestic and family/whānau violence were approximately 5.281 times more likely to receive such disclosures than educators who did not address this subject (see table 6). Of the teaching practice-related variables, using content or trigger warnings in lectures, tutorials, and other classes emerged as a significant predictor ( $\text{Exp}(B) = 6.674, p = 0.020$ ). Educators who used such warnings were approximately 6.674 times more likely to receive a disclosure of domestic and family/whānau violence than educators who did not. Finally, educators who had European ancestry were 3.331 times more likely to receive at least one student disclosure of domestic and family/whānau violence than educators who did not identify as having European ancestry ( $\text{Exp}(B) = 3.331, p = 0.035$ ).

The domestic and family/whānau violence model showed a significant fit to the data, as indicated by the Omnibus Tests of Model Coefficients ( $\chi^2 = 39.065, df = 6, p < 0.000$ ). The Cox & Snell R Square was 0.207, suggesting that the included

predictor variables can explain approximately 20.7% of the variance in receiving disclosure of domestic and family/whānau violence.

**Table 6**

*Binary Logistic Regression Predicting Student Disclosures of Domestic and Family/Whānau Violence to Educators*

	<b>B</b>	<b>SE</b>	<b>Wald</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>Sig.</b>	<b>Exp(B)</b>
Man	-0.098	0.421	0.054	1	0.816	0.907
European	1.203	0.570	4.458	1	0.035	3.331
Age	-0.211	0.169	1.560	1	0.212	0.810
Shares support services on unit's learning management system	0.713	0.421	2.876	1	0.090	2.041
Uses content or trigger warnings in lectures, tutorials, and other classes	1.898	0.815	5.423	1	0.020	6.674
Teaches unit discussing domestic and family/whānau violence	1.664	0.420	15.705	1	0.000	5.281

## Discussion

The findings from this study show the prevalence of crime, violence, and trauma disclosure by students to criminology educators is high. Notable characteristics informing to whom students are disclosing their experiences are identified. The study's findings partially support Hypothesis 2, which suggested women educators would receive significantly more student disclosures of crime, violence, and trauma than men. The study found women educators had a higher mean number of student disclosures, compared to men educators. However, this difference did not reach statistical significance.

The study's findings support Hypothesis 3, which proposed educators who teach subjects about gender-based violence would receive significantly more student disclosures, compared to educators who do not teach these subjects. The study revealed that teaching about sexual violence and domestic and family/whānau violence were both statistically significant predictors of receiving disclosures of crime, violence, and trauma from students. Educators who covered these topics in their teaching received more student disclosures, compared to those who did not teach about them. By examining our data further, this finding supports Branch et al.'s (2014) theory that women receive higher rates of student disclosures of crime, violence, and trauma due to the nature of the content they teach. Women in our sample were more than twice as likely to teach subjects discussing domestic and family/whānau violence (34.3%,  $n = 37$ ), compared to the men who participated in our survey (14.3%,  $n = 7$ ). Moreover, women (47.2%,  $n = 51$ ) were slightly more likely than men (40.8%,  $n = 20$ ) to teach subjects that discussed sexual violence.

In the last five years, there has been a significant focus on the prevalence and rates of sexual violence victimisation among university students in Australia and in Aotearoa New Zealand (Beres et al., 2020; Tarzia et al., 2023). Drawing on a sample of 43,819 students at Australian universities, Heywood and colleagues (2022) studied the prevalence of sexual violence and sexual harassment among university students. The research found 16% of students had experienced sexual harassment in a university setting since beginning their studies, and 4.5% had experienced sexual assault in a university setting since starting their studies. Further, 43.5% of students indicated that they knew nothing or very little about where to seek university support or assistance for sexual assault, and only 25.5% sought support from the university (Heywood et al., 2022). Sanci et al.'s (2022) study of 14,880 undergraduate and graduate students in Australia found that, over the course of their lives, 8.5% of students had experienced unwanted sexual contact, 7.3% were victim-survivors of rape, and 7.0% were victim-survivors of an attempted rape. In a study of 1,540 university students in Aotearoa New Zealand, Beres et al. (2020) found 28% of students had experienced one or more forms of sexual assault, with 15% of students experiencing rape over the course of their lives. Of these students, 45.3% disclosed the incident to a friend or family, and 7.6% disclosed to a health professional. Only 1.6% disclosed to a university sexual violence support service, whilst 7% disclosed to another university service and 6.5% disclosed to an off-campus service. Thirty-two per cent did not disclose the violence to anybody (Beres et al., 2020, p. 61). While less is known about the prevalence of domestic and family/whānau violence experienced by university student populations in Australia and Aotearoa—either non-recent, recent, or current—the political landscape over the past decade has drawn sharp attention to its commonality by way of national action plans in both Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand. This indicates the likelihood that many students studying at university have experienced, or are currently experiencing, domestic and family/whānau violence (see *National plan to end violence against women and children 2022–2032* (DSS, 2022)).

Given the high prevalence of sexual violence experienced by university students and the general prevalence of domestic and family/whānau violence in the community (DSS, 2022; New Zealand Government, 2021), coupled with the high levels of student disclosures of crime, violence, and trauma of this nature, the findings from our study are significant. They illustrate the critical role university educators play in supporting students. For example, universities can attempt to lower rape myth acceptance through educational programs. Several evaluations of such programs have found they can decrease rape myth acceptance (Currier & Carlson, 2009)<sup>3</sup> and increase empathy and support for victim-survivors of sexual violence (Zapp et al., 2021). Such programs may also increase reporting of sexual violence on campuses. Qualitative responses to Lindquist et al.'s (2016) survey of 3,951 undergraduate women at four historically black colleges found many students believed increasing education and/or awareness raising about sexual assault ( $n=346$ ) would increase reporting of sexual assault to police. University educators can also play an important role in connecting victim-survivors of violence, crime, and trauma to appropriate internal support and criminal justice agencies (Sheffield, 2011).

Carello and Thompson (2022, p. 1) argued trauma must be reframed as “experiences that individuals, families, and communities must cope with and recover from rather than as individual pathology or character flaws that must be cured or fixed”. While there is much debate about the utility of trigger or content warnings (see for example, Bryce et al., 2023; Cares et al., 2021), these warnings are not enough for a “conscious” trauma-informed classroom (Gubele, 2023). Trauma-informed pedagogy requires educators to adopt measures in the classroom that “do not exacerbate and may even mitigate trauma in the course of learning” (Le Pichon & Lundy, 2023, p. 30). It is not “ticking the box” at the start of a lesson, but rather ensuring that trauma-informed practices are weaved throughout the curricula. This encourages educators to prioritise “connection, reciprocity, support, and safety” in their teaching (Concannon & Dvorak, 2023, p. 69).

Through adopting trauma-centred practices and approaches to teaching that are student-centred and solutions-focused, educators can remove barriers to help-seeking and guide victim-survivors to appropriate resources (Heath et al., 2017). Such practices might include a statement in the course syllabus that guides students to appropriate resources for processing reactions to course material informed by personal experiences of crime, violence, and trauma (Bedera, 2021; Keene & Jordan, 2021). Additionally, educators can implement practices that allow space for students to disclose, as well as responding sensitively and appropriately to these disclosures when they arise, to avoid secondary victimisation (Bedera, 2021). Educators can affirm the student's decision to disclose their experience to them, validate the victim-survivor's experience, and emphasise that they were not to blame for what happened (Cares et al., 2014; Valanzola, 2021). Educators receiving disclosures should be cognisant of victim-survivors' need to retain a sense of agency about what they choose to do following a disclosure (McLean, 2023). Educators should avoid the use of directive phrases such as “you should ...,” which may be disempowering for victim-survivors (Cares et al., 2014). Discussing the students' disclosure in the context of other similar cases should also be avoided so as not to unduly influence the next steps a victim-survivor should take (Valanzola, 2021). Instead, educators can empower victim-survivors by clearly discussing available supports and communicating that the victim-survivor has control over what happens next, including whether they choose to navigate the various resources and supports available to them (Holland & Bedera, 2020).

## Limitations of the Study

Our study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the results and implications. Firstly, while the response rate of 30% aligns with expectations for list-based email surveys on salient topics, it is important to acknowledge that most potential participants did not respond to our survey. This could lead to non-response bias, as the characteristics of non-respondents may differ from those who participated, potentially affecting the generalisability of our findings. Further, as our study focused on criminology educators in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand, our findings may not be generalisable to educators in other countries with different cultural contexts and academic practices. Finally, while our study acknowledged the importance of pedagogical practices, it did not extensively explore a range of specific teaching methods and strategies educators employ. For instance, our survey instrument did not thoroughly examine teaching practices such as trauma-informed pedagogy, which emphasises creating safe and supportive learning environments for students who may have experienced trauma (Bedera, 2021; Zurbriggen, 2011). It is also acknowledged that follow-up interviews could have added further depth and nuance to the data. To address this limitation, follow-up interviews are currently being conducted as part of the broader project, with the results slated for publication in a separate article. These interviews will provide additional context and understanding, complementing quantitative findings reported here.

## Conclusion

This article has explored findings from a survey about the prevalence and predictors of disclosure of crime, violence, and trauma to criminology educators teaching at universities across Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand. Responses illustrated such student disclosures are prevalent, with educators receiving an average of 3–4 disclosures in the past two years. While gender did not predict the number of disclosures received, teaching subjects discussing domestic and family/whānau and/or

sexual violence increased the likelihood of disclosures. The study's findings raise questions about whether or how educators are supported by their institutions to respond appropriately to students, and whether universities in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand have appropriate systems and services to support students who have disclosed crime, violence, and trauma. Secondary traumatic stress and vicarious trauma are not uncommon among researchers studying gender-based violence and sexual abuse (Coles et al., 2014; Cullen et al., 2021; Gleeson, 2022; Stoler, 2002). As several scholars have noted, these can also be experienced by educators teaching about such topics (Branch et al., 2011; Nikischer, 2019; Sheffield, 2011). Teaching staff may also be survivors themselves (Bedera, 2021; Moore, 2023). Responding to vicarious trauma triggered by student disclosures requires us to interrogate whether (and to what extent) institutional support is provided to university educators. As Shulz et al. (2023) emphasised, many of the self-care strategies proposed for scholars researching and teaching sensitive topics do not account for the structural dimensions of researchers' experiences and challenges but instead amount to neoliberalised self-care practices. As such, future research ought to investigate whether and how university educators are supported to respond to student disclosures of crime, violence, and trauma and the strategies employed by educators to ensure safety in the classroom.

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<sup>1</sup> Terminology for academic positions varies by jurisdiction. In this study, ongoing educators typically hold permanent positions with tenure; contract educators are individuals on fixed-term contracts, such as post-doctoral positions lasting two years or similar appointments; and sessional educators are adjunct or contingent faculty hired each semester for individual units.

<sup>2</sup> Australia uses the term "domestic and family violence" while Aotearoa New Zealand uses the term "whānau violence"—whānau translates to family in te reo Māori language.

<sup>3</sup> Rape myth acceptance refers to the endorsement of false, harmful beliefs about sexual assault, often aimed at blaming the victim rather than holding the perpetrator accountable. These beliefs include notions that victims "deserved" or "provoked" the assault, that the assault was not "real" rape, or that the victim is lying about the assault (Payne, Lonsway and Fitzgerald 1999).

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