

Who Experiences Sexual Violence in Muslim Communities?

A Prevalence study of Muslims 18-45 in US and Canada

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In all correspondence with the IRB regarding this project, please refer to IRB project number #2849 or IRB application number #8503.

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Definitions

Sexual violence (SV): is any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, or other act directed against a person's sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting. It includes rape, defined as the physically forced or otherwise coerced penetration of the vulva or anus with a penis, other body part or object.

Sexual harassment: includes unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical harassment of a sexual nature in the workplace or learning environment, according to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC). Sexual harassment does not always have to be specifically about sexual behavior or directed at a specific person. For example, negative comments about women as a group may be a form of sexual harassment.

Sexual assault: refers to sexual contact or behavior that occurs without explicit consent of the victim. Some forms of sexual assault include:

- Rape (penetration of the victim's body) or attempted rape
- Fondling or unwanted sexual touching
- Forcing a victim to perform sexual acts, such as oral sex or penetrating the perpetrator's body

Rape: is defined as any completed or attempted vaginal, oral, or anal penetration with the use of force and/or threats to physically harm an individual who may or may not be drunk, high, drugged, or unable to consent.

Sexual coercion: is described as unwanted sexual penetration that occurs after a person is pressured in a nonphysical way and

refers to the experience of being “worn down” by someone who repeatedly asked for sex or showed they were unhappy, feeling pressure by being lied to, being told promises that were untrue, having someone threaten to end a relationship or spread rumors, or using influence and authority to create pressure.

Unwanted sexual contact: is defined as unwanted sexual experiences that involve touch but not sexual penetration, including being kissed in a sexual way or having sexual body parts fondled, groped, and/or grabbed.

Gender-based violence (GBV): can be inflicted by an individual or through societal oppression and may take the form of sexual assault, intimate-partner violence, dating violence, trafficking, police violence, and/or stalking. GBV is rooted in gender inequality, the abuse of power, and sexist norms. Every form of violence limits our ability to make choices about our lives.

Intimate partner violence (IPV): refers to any behavior within an intimate relationship that causes physical, psychological or sexual harm to those in the relationship. Examples of types of behaviour are listed below.

- Acts of physical violence, such as slapping, hitting, kicking and beating.
- Sexual violence, including forced sexual intercourse and other forms of sexual coercion.
- Emotional (psychological) abuse, such as insults, belittling, constant humiliation, intimidation (e.g. destroying things), threats of harm, threats to take away children.
- Controlling behaviours, including isolating a person from family and friends; monitoring their movements; and restricting access to financial resources, employment, education or medical care.

Sexual penetration: means any contact, however slight, between the sex organ or anus of one person by an object, or by another person's sex organ, mouth or anus. Sexual penetration also includes any invasion into a person's sex organ or anus by any part of the body of another person, by any animal or by any object.

Sexual misconduct: is an umbrella term that encompasses any inappropriate behavior of a sexual nature or that is sex-based, including sexual abuse, sexual assault, sexual exploitation, sexual harassment, stalking, voyeurism, and any other such conduct that is nonconsensual or has the purpose or effect of threatening, intimidating, denigrating, or coercing a person

Oral sex: also referred to as fellatio or cunnilingus, it involves oral stimulation of a partner's genitals or anus.

Gender Expansive, Genderqueer, Gender Nonconforming:

Someone whose gender identity and/or gender expression expands beyond, actively resists, and/or does not conform to the current cultural or social expectations of gender, particularly in relation to male or female.

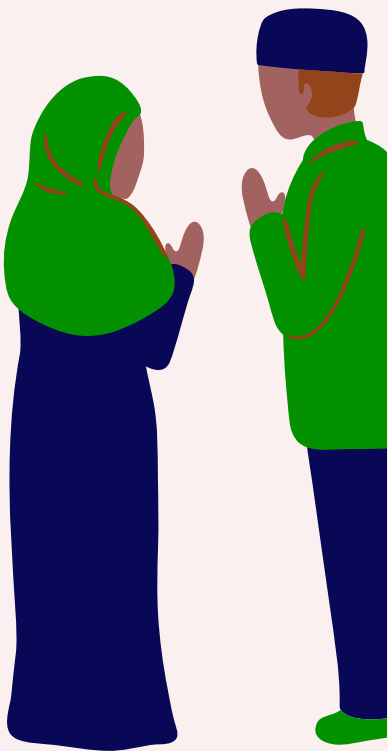
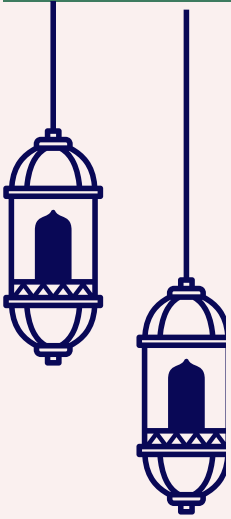
Transgender: is a broad term that can be used to describe people whose gender identity is different from the gender they were thought to be when they were born. "Trans" is often used as shorthand for transgender.

A Review of Existing Literature

While there is research on public health problems like sexual assault, intimate partner violence, and stalking, further research on how it manifests in marginalized communities is needed. In order to develop solutions that will improve quality of life, it is crucial to understand the scope of sexual violence and the attitudes that prevail in those communities.

To better understand sexual violence (SV) and its impacts on Muslims in the United States and Canada, this report shares the findings of a national study examining the prevalence of sexual violence among Muslims ages 18-45.

The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS) estimates that 43.6% of women (nearly 52.2 million) experience some form of unwanted sexual contact in their lifetime in the United States, and 21.3% (estimated 25.5 million women) reported completed or attempted rape at some point in their lifetime (Smith et al., 2018).



With only 32.6% of participants identifying with non-white racial or ethnic groups, the NISVS data is limited in that it only depicts the landscape of national rates of sexual violence, stalking, and intimate partner violence (Smith et al., 2017).

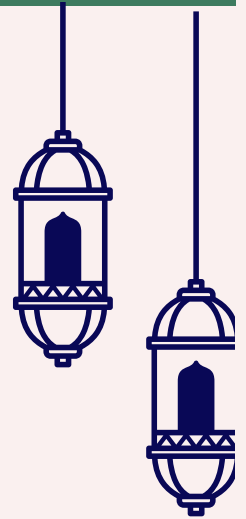
Underrepresented racial and ethnic communities encounter unique challenges when seeking support, including institutional racism, unjust legal treatment, and biased policies. It is crucial to investigate the distinct effects on these marginalized groups and understand their firsthand experiences to accurately represent their daily lives.

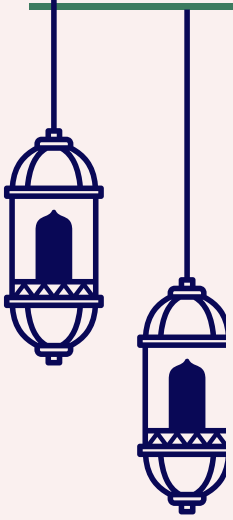
Historically, research has centered on the experiences of white populations and has left out faith identity entirely. **More research is required on understudied groups across different gender identities, religious backgrounds, sexual orientations, racial and ethnic groups, and economic standing.** Without this research, it is difficult to develop prevention methods and programs that are tailored to the needs of diverse communities experiencing sexual violence.

Due to data limitations, a lack of access to diverse Muslim samples, and obstacles to disclosure for Muslim survivors, scholarship on Muslim communities has found it difficult to describe the prevalence of sexual violence. Studies that do collect information on religious identity also tend to report on Muslim experiences less frequently, including those of Muslim survivors.

Muslims are the most racially diverse group in the United States, making it difficult to collect generalized data about Muslim experiences and further limiting the resources and programming available to Muslims. Studies on the prevalence of various forms of gender-based violence in Muslim communities have become more intensive in recent years (Oyewuwo-Gassikia, 2020). A 2014 study on intimate partner violence found that high rates of psychological (75%), physical (97%), and sexual (91%) abuse were experienced by most Muslim immigrant women in the sample (90%) of the study (Ammar et al., 2013).

According to a 2011 survey by the Peaceful Families Project, 31% of the 801 American Muslims surveyed reported experiencing abuse in an intimate partner relationship, and 53% said they had ever witnessed domestic violence (Peaceful Families Project, 2011). A 2022 study of 91 Muslim college students from five campuses found that the majority of respondents (55%) said they knew at least one other student, including themselves, who had experienced sexual violence while attending their university (Azmat et al., 2022).

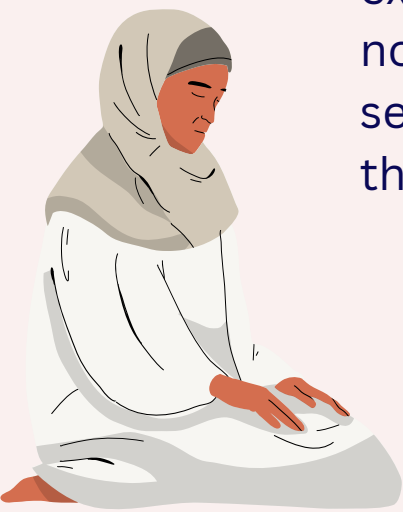




An important and pioneering study by Budhwani et al. investigates stigma, sexual abuse exposure, and depression in American-born Muslim women (Budhwani, 2017). They discovered that one in six women in their group (or roughly 15.6%) had experienced sexual abuse as a result of their collection of online surveys among 373 respondents.

More than 80 percent of respondents said they knew one or more other students, including themselves, who had been subjected to sexual harassment while attending their university (Azmat et al., 2022). Even though research is limited, it is clear that sexual violence education and prevention is a need in Muslim communities.

Additionally, they discovered that respondents who disclosed having experienced sexual abuse were more than twice as likely to develop depression. Research on the prevalence of sexual violence and harassment frequently excludes the specific experiences of Muslim survivors. While there were no definitions or follow-up questions regarding sexual abuse in the study, respondents were asked if they had ever been sexually abused by anyone.



Goals of the Research

This study aims to fill this gap by providing perceptions and prevalence rates of sexual violence across Muslim communities, as well as insights into how sexual violence affects Muslim communities, how it varies across gender groups, and considerations for root causes of sexual violence experiences for Muslims.

The study is noteworthy for its sample participants from US and Canada, which includes a diverse range of Muslims with intersecting identities (gender identity, sexual orientation, racial/ethnic groups, and so on). Unlike previous research studies, this is the first to use the NISVS tool to compare and suggest that Muslims experience sexual violence at similar rates as their peers in the United States (Smith et al., 2018).

Research Questions

What is the prevalence of sexual violence and harassment in Muslim North American communities? And how does the prevalence vary by gender identity?

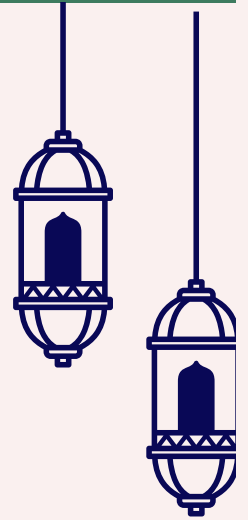
How do Muslims in North America perceive the prevalence of sexual violence and harassment across Muslim communities?

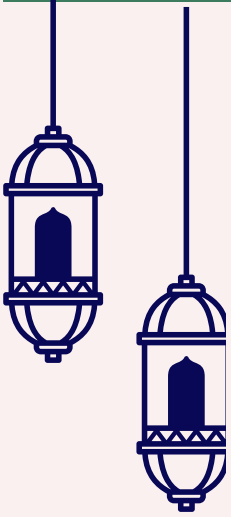
Methods

Quantitative methods were used to measure the prevalence of various forms of sexual violence of Muslims in North America. To be more precise, a large-scale, cross-sectional survey was carried out to ascertain the extent to which Muslims are subjected to various types of sexual violence, particularly when compared to the general population.

Participants in the study included self-identified Muslims between the ages of 18 and 45 who are current residents of the United States or Canada and are fluent in English. These characteristics were chosen to capture a diverse sample of Muslims across age groups, geographic regions, and racial and ethnic groups in North America to measure the prevalence of sexual violence among Muslims. The research sample was obtained through convenience and snowball non-probability sampling, with the goal of reaching 1,000 Muslim participants.

The research team relied on their networks in the United States and Canada, which included healthcare professionals, faith-based centers, sexual and domestic violence organizations, Muslim student organizations, and individuals, to broaden the sample's size and representativeness.





To expand recruitment efforts, targeted outreach was made to social service organizations, federally qualified health centers, mosques, and Islamic centers in both the United States and Canada. To reach a representative sample of Muslims in North America, outreach efforts focused on recruiting Black Muslims, queer and trans Muslims, and Muslims of various socioeconomic statuses and education levels, as these groups are frequently excluded or underrepresented in Muslim-centered research.

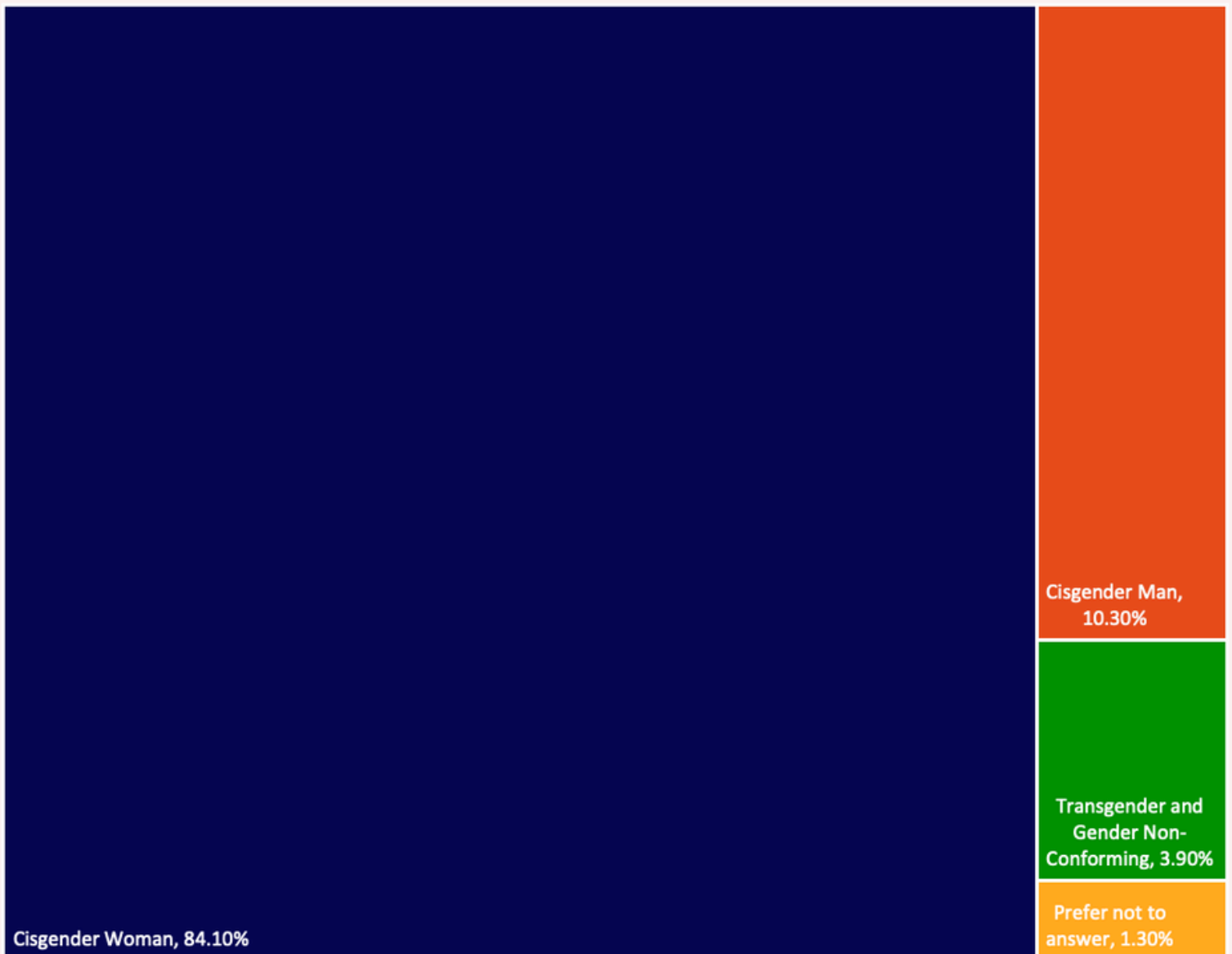
Findings

The findings of this research give us a closer look at the prevalence and perception sexual violence among Muslim communities. We took a close look at who took part in the study to grasp how different folks experience and perceive sexual violence. We also delved into how the participants view the prevalence of sexual violence in the community. Lastly, we dug into the real numbers, finding out how often sexual violence occurs and the ripple effects it has. Additionally, the following pages explore the findings from the study in detail, providing a deeper understanding of our data.

1. Participant Demographics

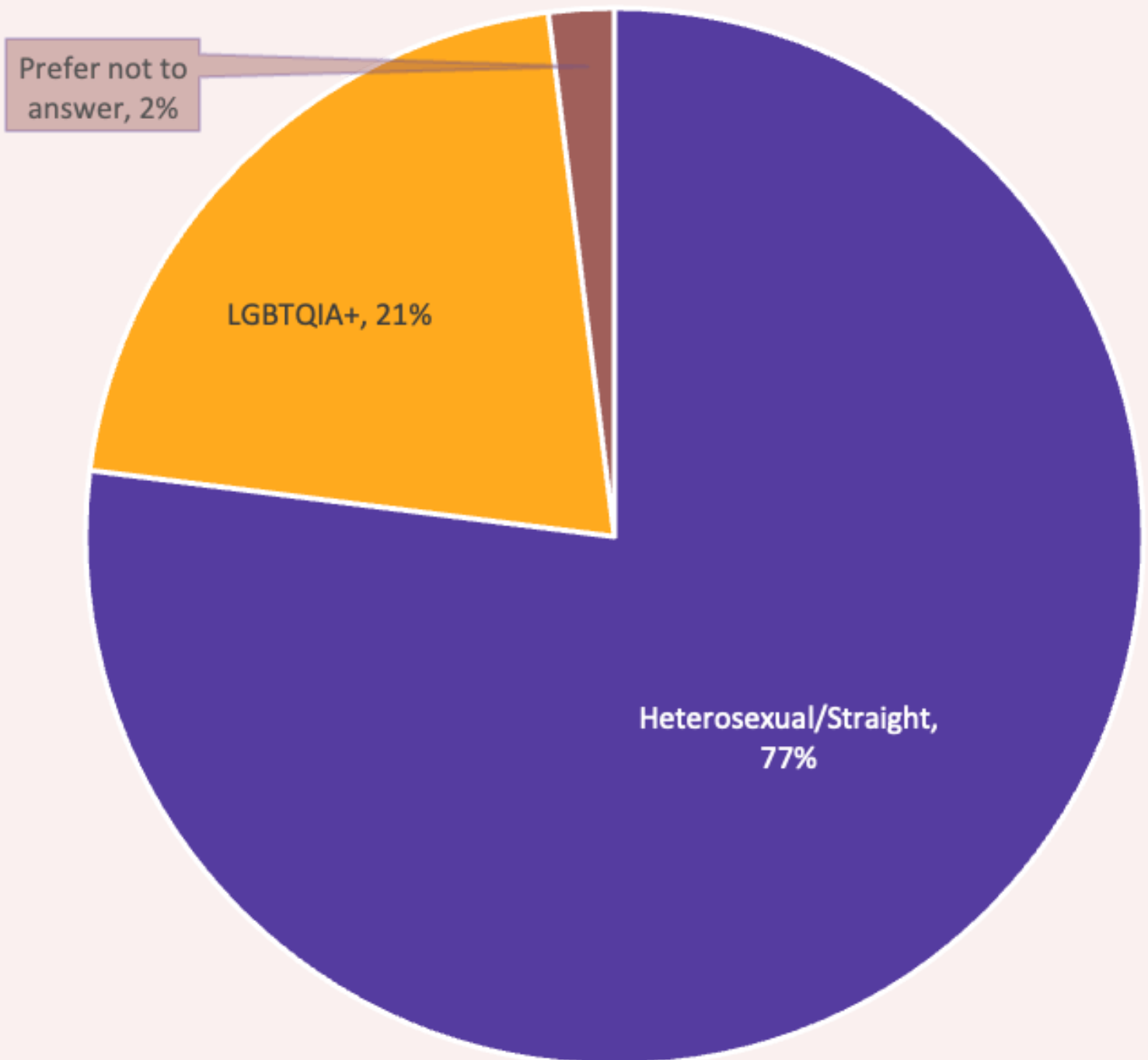
a. Gender Identity

The majority of respondents surveyed (n=718) identified as Cisgender Women



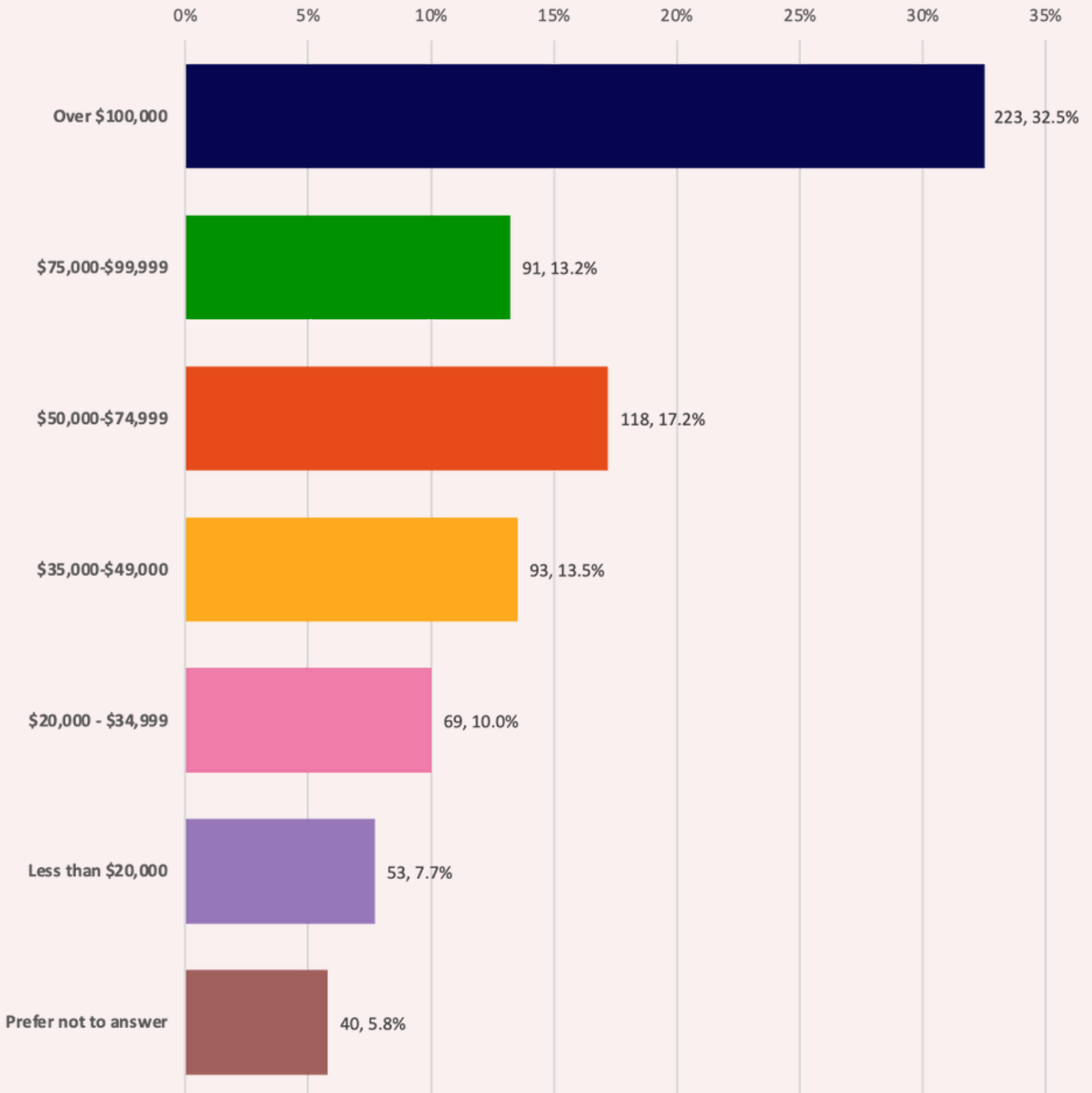
b. Sexual Identity

A little over 20% of the sample (n=714) identified as something other than Heterosexual/Straight



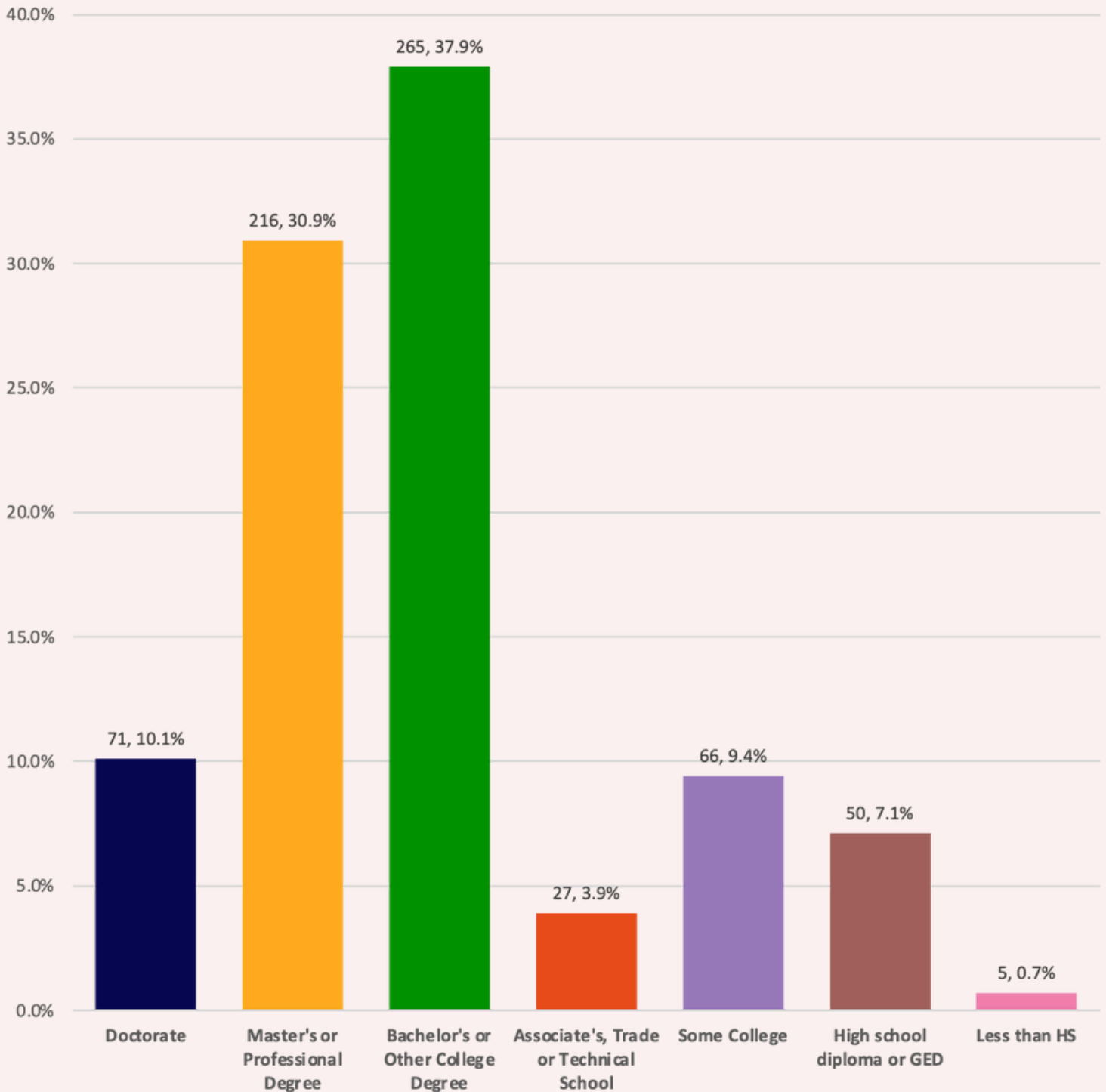
c. Income

Almost one-third of the sample (n=687) reported household incomes over \$100k.



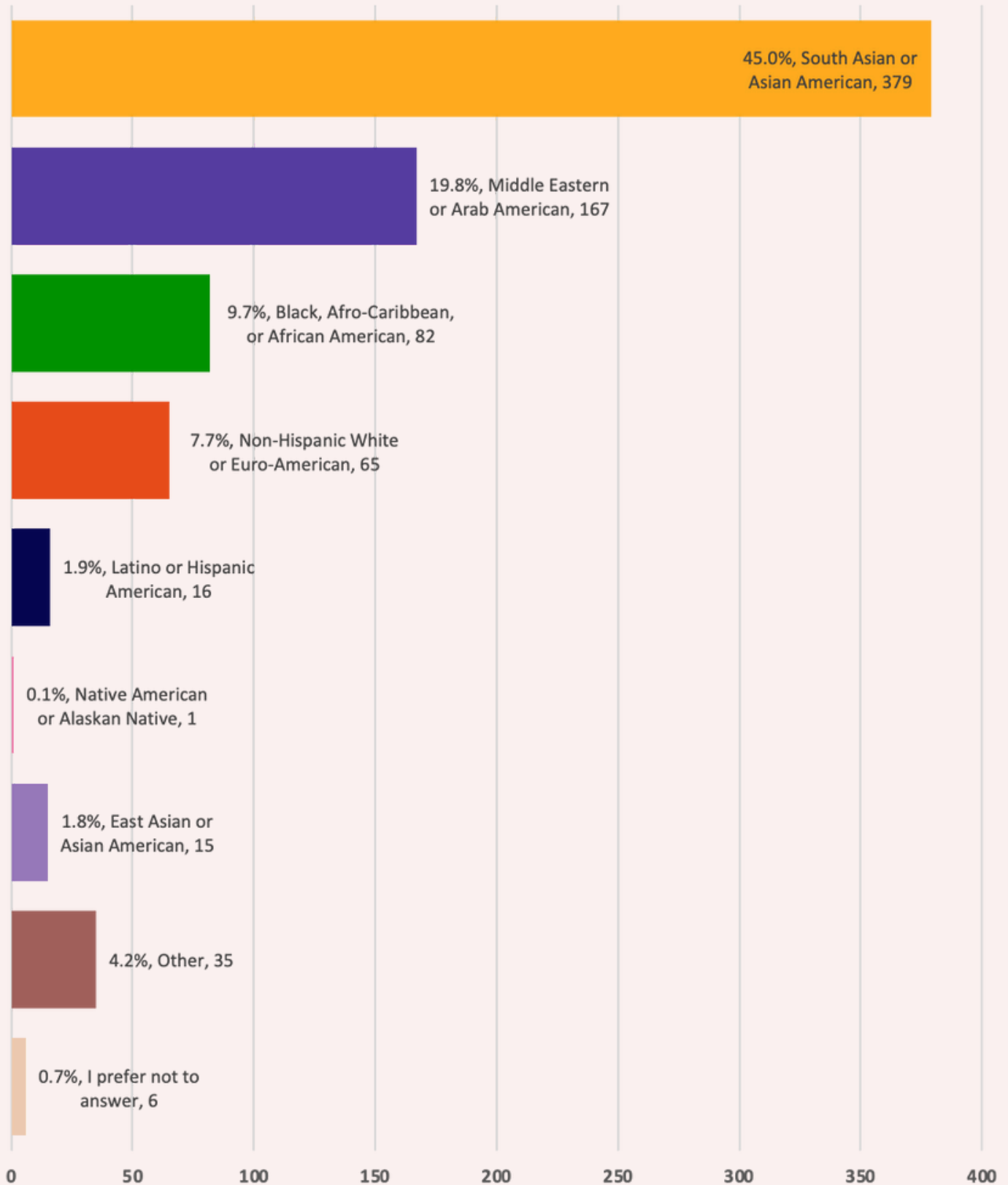
d. Education

Majority of respondents (n = 700) have a Bachelor's Degree or higher level of educational attainment.



e. Race/Ethnicity

The sample size is 843.



SUMMARY

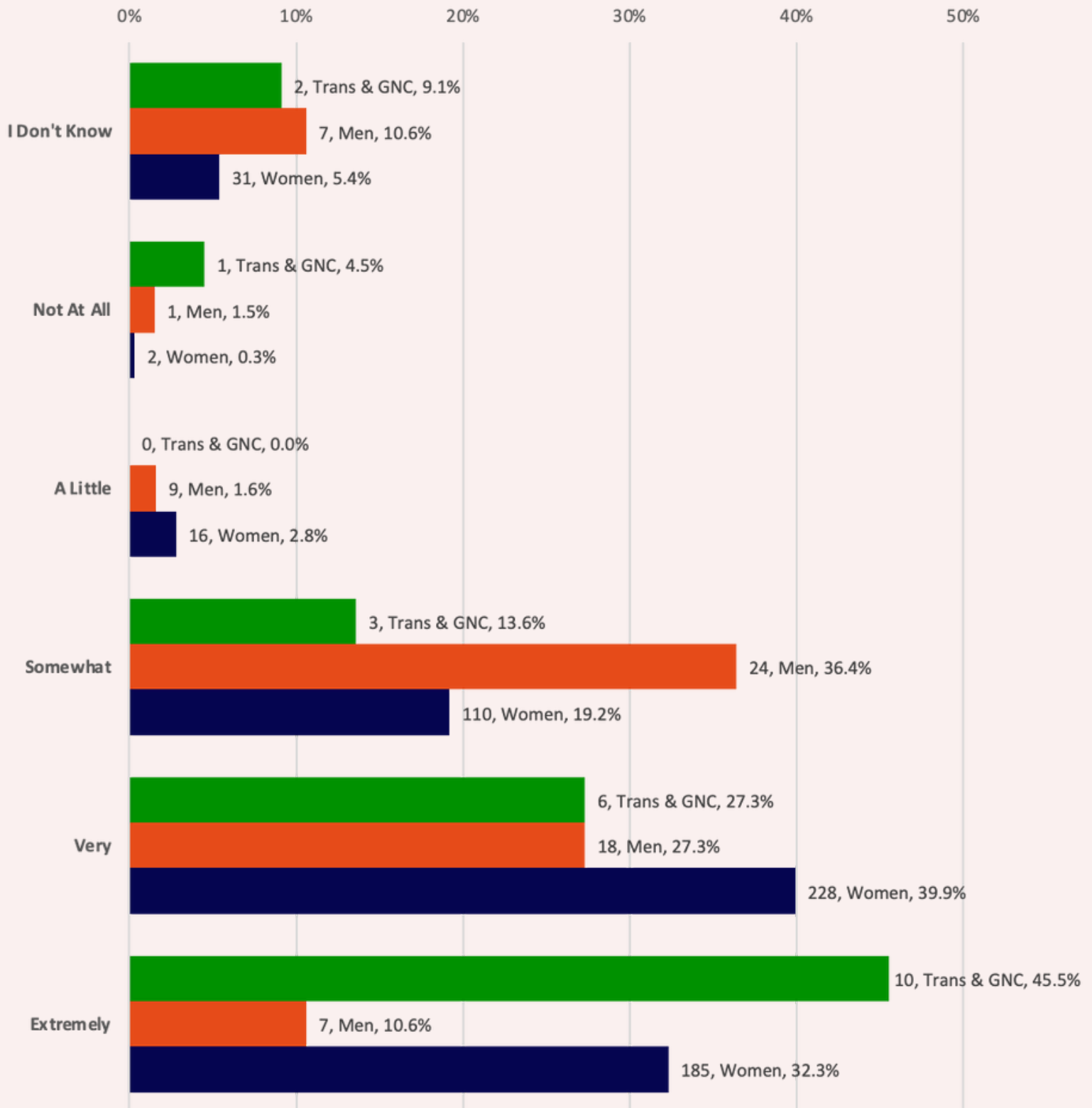
The demographics data shows an over representation of cisgender women, heterosexual participants, households earning over \$100,000, people with at least a bachelor's degree, and South Asians. While these groups were the most represented, they do not make up the majority of Muslims. ***For example, Black Muslims outnumber South Asians as the largest group of Muslims in the United States, but they are underrepresented in this data. Likewise, those with lower educational attainment or income also are underrepresented in this data.***

We suspect this happened because the survey was released just as the COVID-19 pandemic began and resulted in self selecting respondents who had more access to internet, time, and capacity to take a survey.

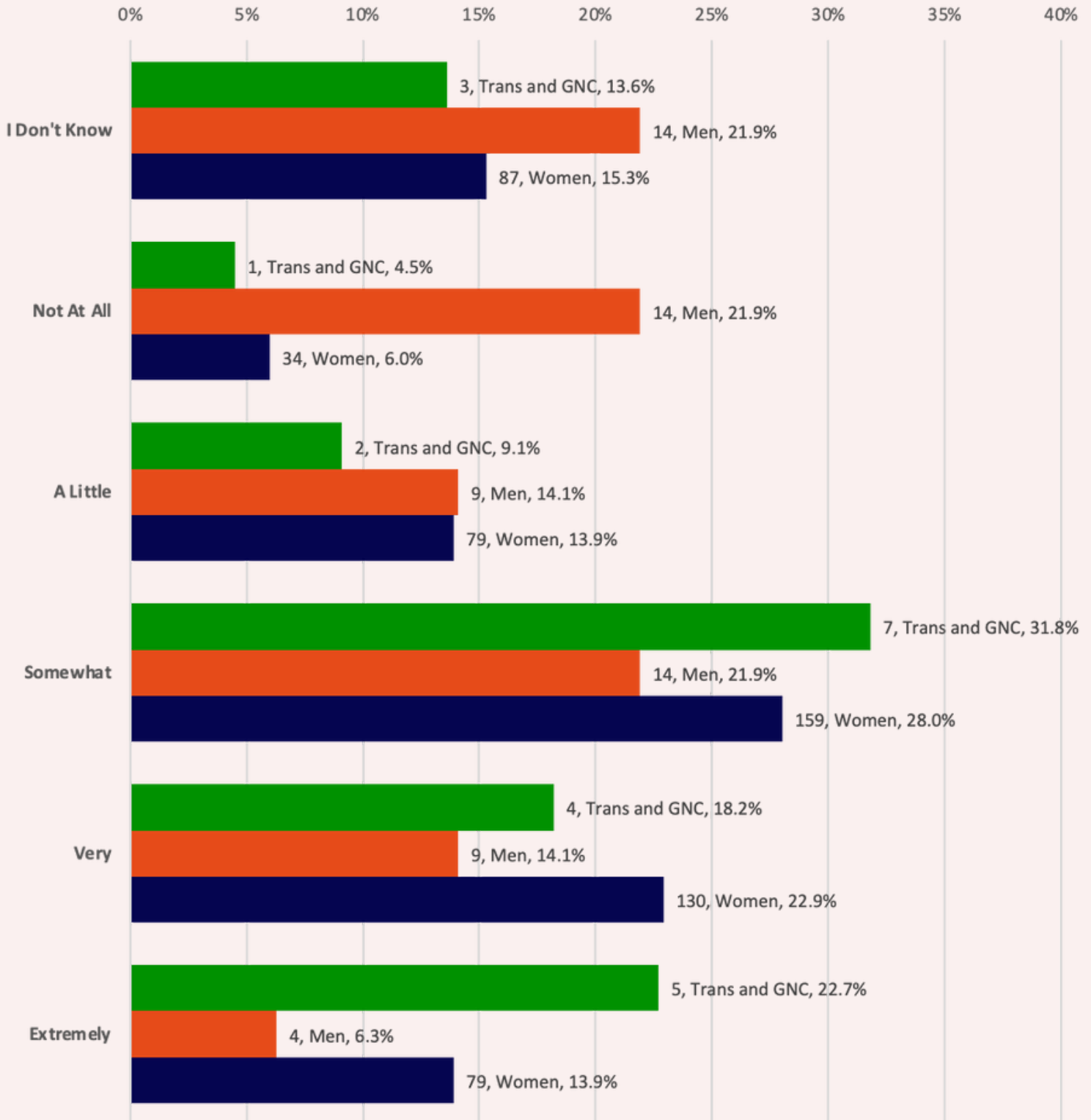
Also, its worthy to mention that during this time, many individuals were experiencing the ***triple pandemic (COVID-19, economic downturn, heightened racial justice discourse)*** which may have further marginalized underrepresented groups, limiting their engagement with the survey.

2. Perceived prevalence of sexual violence

Q: How much of a problem do you think sexual assault or sexual misconduct is in the larger Muslim community in general?

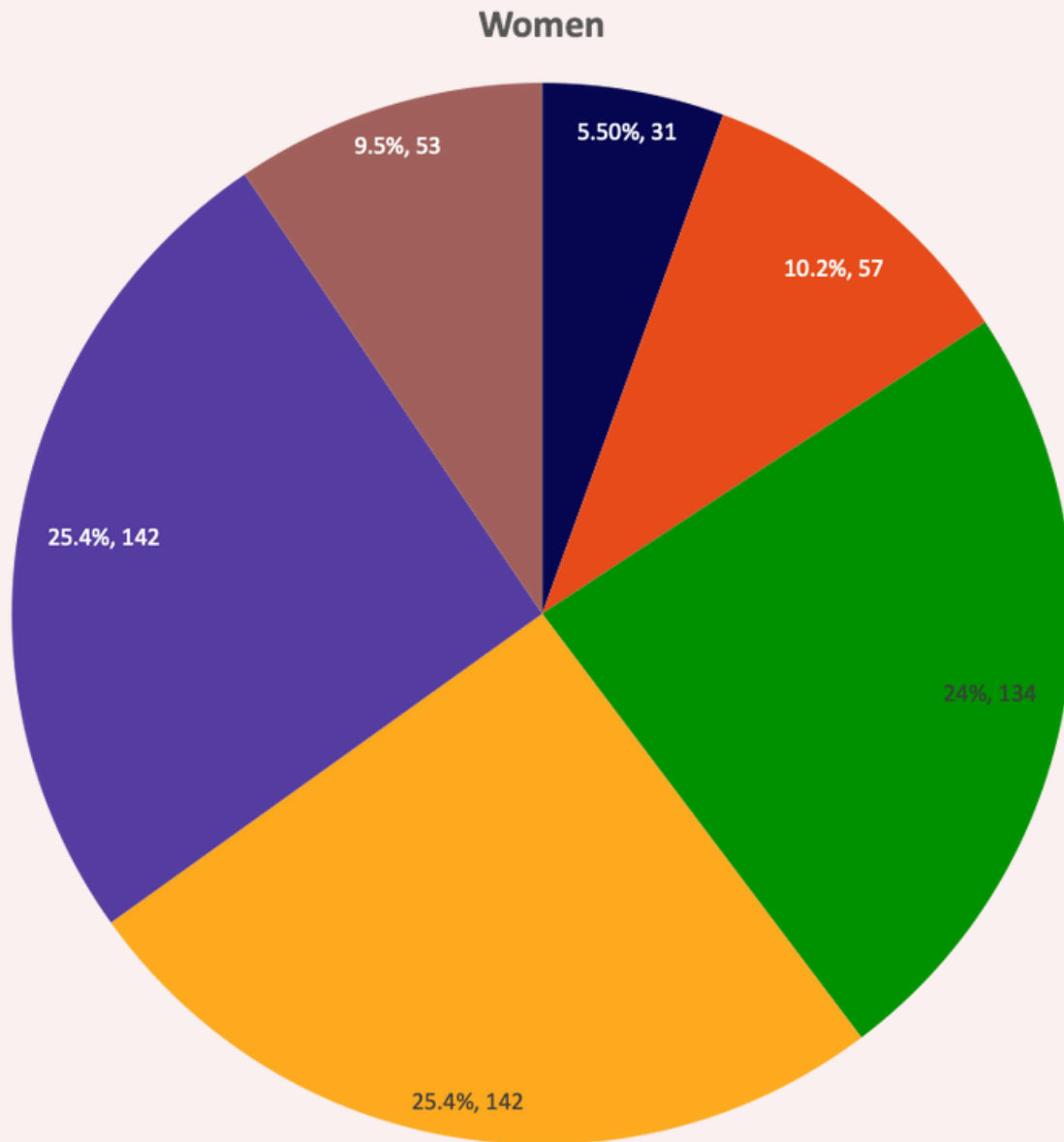


Q: How much of a problem do you think sexual assault or sexual misconduct is in your religious community?



Q: How likely do you think it is that you will experience sexual assault or sexual misconduct in your religious community?

■ Extremely ■ Very ■ Somewhat ■ A Little ■ Not At All ■ I Don't Know

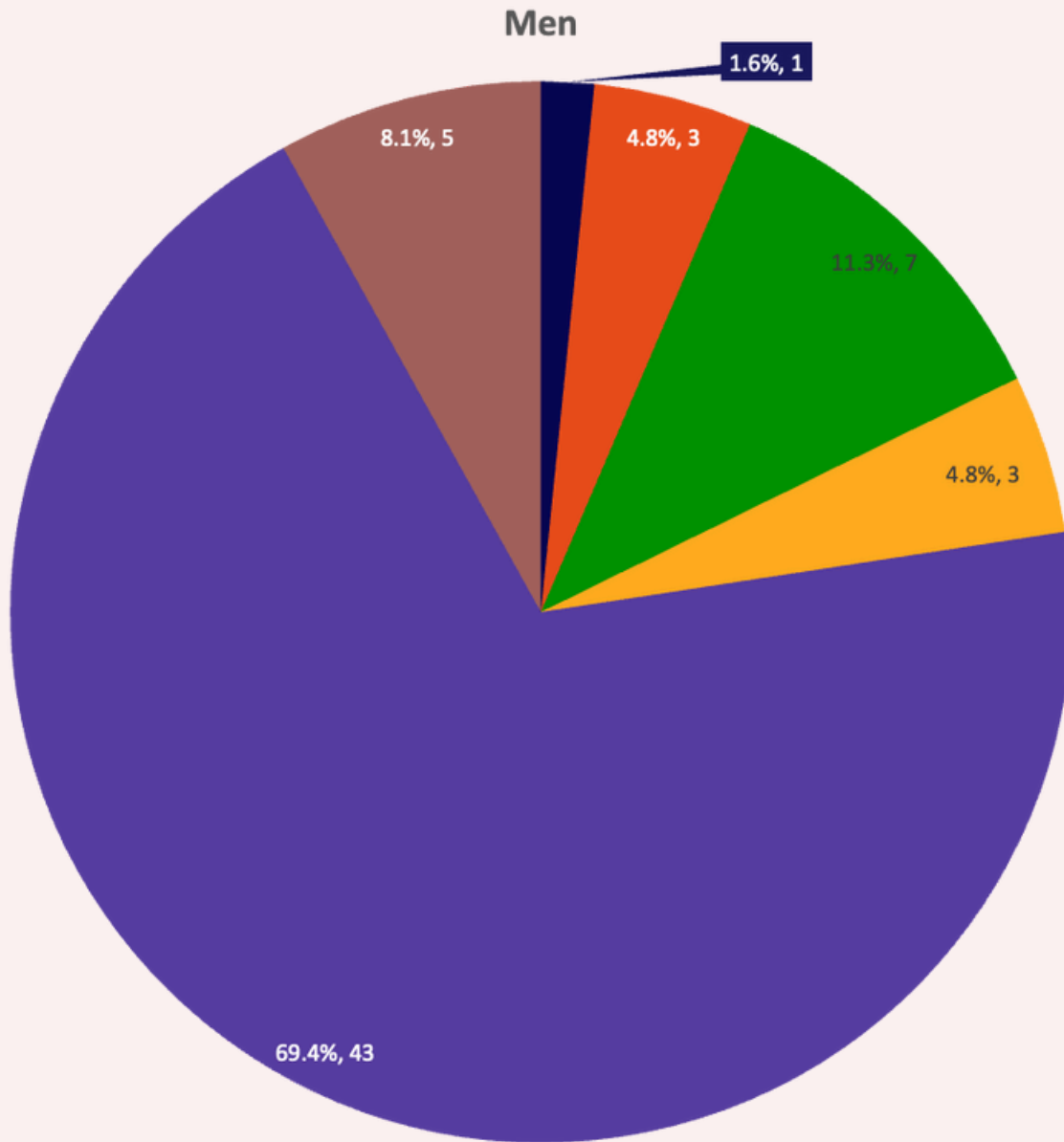


SUMMARY

Our data demonstrates that 5.50% of women in the sample think that they will experience sexual assault or sexual misconduct in their religious community in comparison to 25.4% that think they will not experience sexual assault or sexual misconduct.

Q: How likely do you think it is that you will experience sexual assault or sexual misconduct in your religious community?

■ Extremely
 ■ Very
 ■ Somewhat
 ■ A Little
 ■ Not At All
 ■ I Don't Know

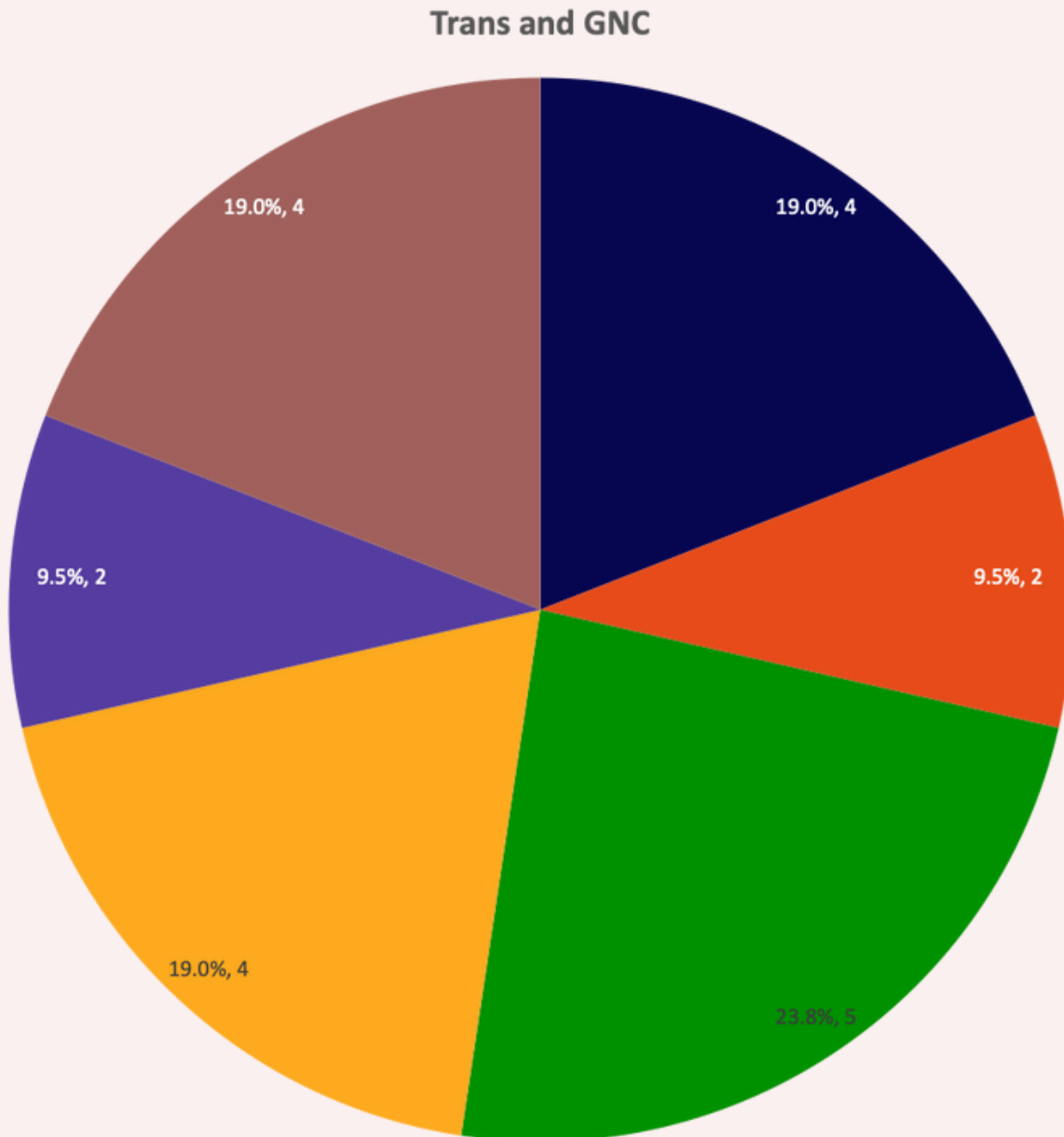


SUMMARY

Our data demonstrates that only 1.6% % of men in the sample think that they will experience sexual assault or sexual misconduct in their religious community in comparison to 68.4% that think they will not experience sexual assault or sexual misconduct.

Q: How likely do you think it is that you will experience sexual assault or sexual misconduct in your religious community?

■ Extremely ■ Very ■ Somewhat ■ A Little ■ Not At All ■ I Don't Know



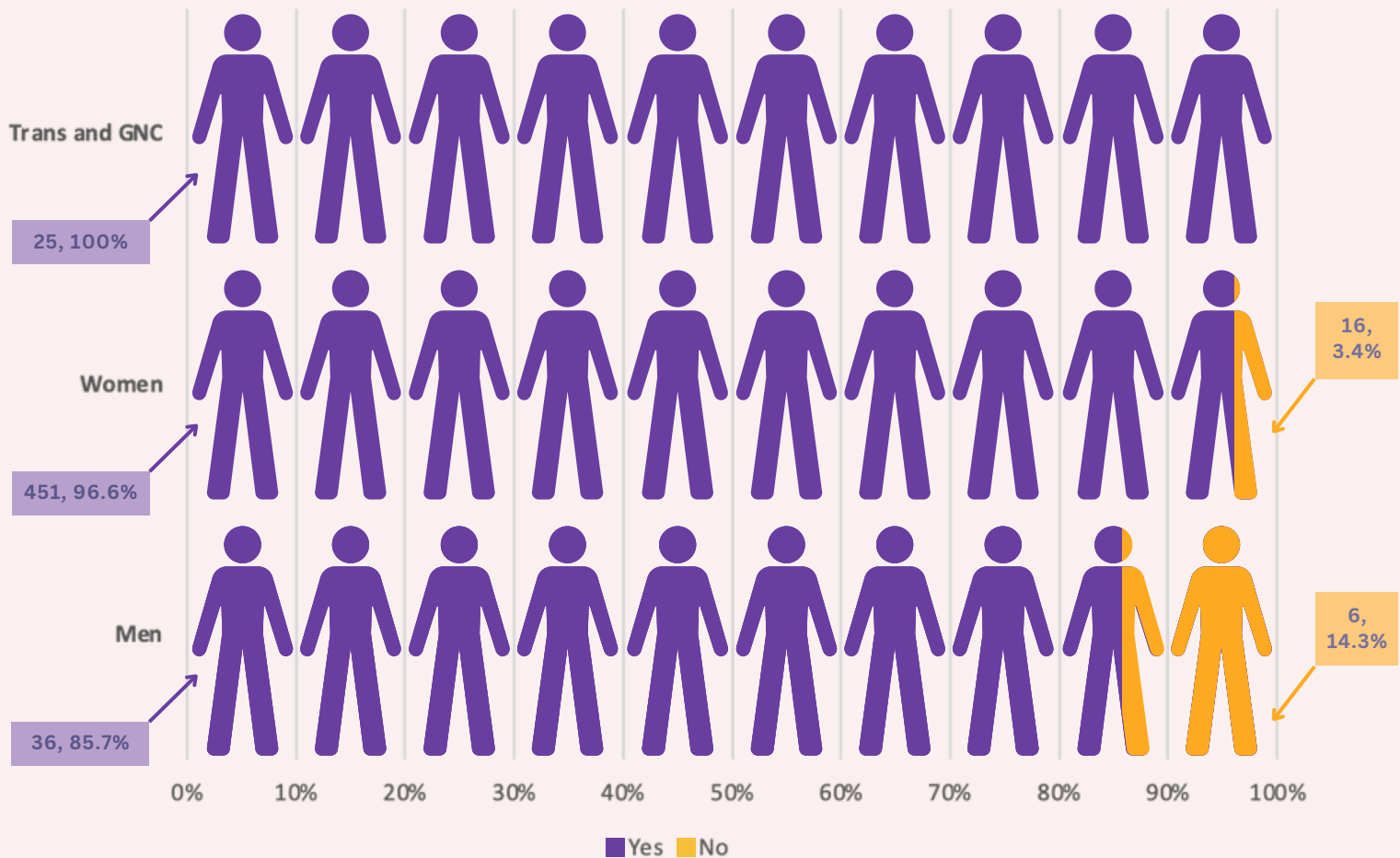
SUMMARY

Our data demonstrates that 19.0% of Trans and GNC in the sample think that they will experience sexual assault or sexual misconduct in their religious community in comparison to 9.5% that think they will not experience sexual assault or sexual misconduct.

3. Prevalence of sexual violence:

This question combined of all the different forms of sexual violence experienced by participants

1. Number of People Who Experienced Sexual Violence



SUMMARY

Our data demonstrates an overwhelming number of women in the sample have experienced **some form of contact sexual violence** in their lifetime, and 100% of all TGNC people have experienced some form of sexual violence.

Also notable is that 85.7% of men report experiencing some form of sexual violence.

2. Number of People Who Experienced Sexual Harassment



SUMMARY

Our data demonstrates 94.9% of Muslims (95.7% women, 83.3% men, and 100% TGNC people) reported having experienced sexual harassment.

2.1. Number of People Who Experienced Sexual Harassment by Type

2.1.1. Offensive Sexual Joke:

Q: Has someone ever made sexual remarks or told jokes or stories that were insulting or offensive to you?



SUMMARY

According to our data, 84.7% of Muslims (86.7% women, 56.1% men, and 95.7% TGNC people) have experienced offensive sexual jokes or insulting remarks.

2.1.2. Inappropriate comments about body:

Q: Has someone ever made inappropriate or offensive comments about you or someone else's body, appearance or sexual activities?



SUMMARY

According to our data, 90.2% of Muslim participants (91.2% women, 75.6% men, and 96.0% TGNC people) have experienced inappropriate comments about their bodies or someone else's body.

2.1.3. Crude sexual comments about sexual matters:

Q: Has someone ever said crude or gross sexual things to you or tried to get you to talk about sexual matters when you didn't want to?



SUMMARY

According to our data, 73.9% of Muslim participants (75.0% women, 55.0% men, and 84.0% TGNC people) have experienced crude sexual comments about sexual matters.

2.1.4. Mail/texted offensive sexual remarks:

Q: Has someone ever mailed, texted, tweeted, phoned, or instant messaged offensive sexual remarks, jokes, stories, pictures or videos to you that you didn't want?



SUMMARY

According to our data, 57.0% of Muslim participants (58.6% women, 28.6% men, and 75.0% TGNC people) have experienced someone mailing or texting them offensive sexual remarks.

2.1.5. Unwanted pursuit:

Q: Has someone ever continued to ask you to go out, get dinner, have drinks, or have sex even though you said, “no”?



SUMMARY

According to our data, 52.0% of Muslim participants (54.6% women, 16.3% men, and 68.2% TGNC people) have experienced someone continuously asking them to go out, get dinner, or have sex even though they said "no".

2.1.6. Unwanted messages causing fear for personal safety:

Q: Has someone made unwanted phone calls, sent emails, voice, text or instant messages, or posted messages, pictures or videos on social networking sites in a way that made you afraid for your personal safety?



SUMMARY

According to our data, 38.5% of Muslim participants (39.6% women, 15.9% men, and 58.3% TGNC people) experienced unwanted messaging, calls, and emails in a way that made them afraid for their personal safety.

2.1.7. Someone Showing Up + Waiting For Individual Causing Fear for Personal Safety:

Q: Has someone ever shown up somewhere or waited for you when you did not want that person to be there and/or in a way that made you afraid for your personal safety?



SUMMARY

According to our data, 33.4% of Muslim participants (35.7% women, 4.7% men, and 41.7% TGNC people) have experienced someone showing up and waiting causing fear for personal safety.

2.1.8. Being Spied On/Watched:

Q: Has someone ever spied on, watched or followed you, either in person or using devices or software in a way that made you afraid for your personal safety?



SUMMARY

According to our data, 28.6% of Muslims (29.3% women, 11.6% men, and 50.0% TGNC people) have experienced being spied on or watched.

3. Number of People Who Experienced Sexual Assault



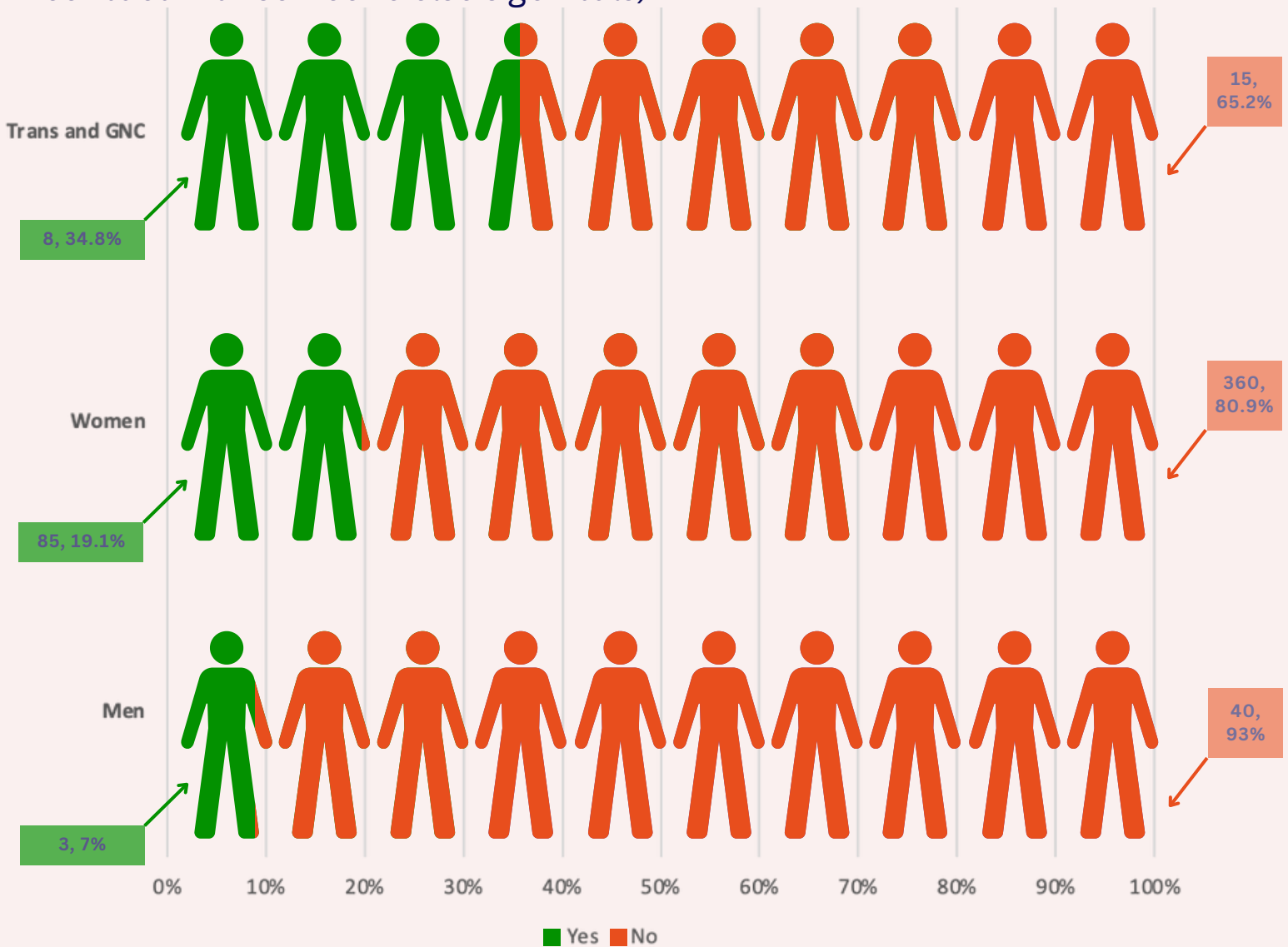
SUMMARY

Our data demonstrates 59.9% of Muslim participants (62.1% of women, 30.2% of men, and 72.7% of TGNC people) have experienced completed or attempted sexual assault (rape, attempted rape, unwanted sexual touching, and groping) sometime in their lifetime.

3.1. Prevalence of sexual assault by type

3.1.1. Failed attempt:

Q: Has someone used physical force or threats of physical force in an unsuccessful attempt to do the following with you: Sexual penetration (when one person puts a penis, fingers, or object inside someone else’s vagina or anus) or oral sex (when someone’s mouth or tongue makes contact with someone else’s genitals).



SUMMARY

According to our data, 18.8% of Muslims participants in this survey (19.1% women, 7.0% men, and 34.8% TGNC people) have experienced a failed attempt of someone using physical force/threat to penetrate or oral sex.

3.2.1. Non-failed attempt:

Q: Has someone used physical force or threats of physical force to do the following with you: Sexual penetration (*when one person puts a penis, fingers, or object inside someone else’s vagina or anus*) or oral sex (*when someone’s mouth or tongue makes contact with someone else’s genitals*).



SUMMARY

According to our data, 22.9% of Muslims (23.5% women, 11.4% men, and 33.3% TGNC people) have experienced a non-failed attempt of physical force or threat to penetrate or oral sex.

3.2.2. Non-failed attempt: kissing, touching, grabbing, and/or groping.

Q: Has someone used physical force or threats of physical force to do any of the following with you: Kissing, touching someone’s breast, chest, crotch, groin or buttocks, grabbing, groping or rubbing against the other in a sexual way, even if the touching is over the other’s clothes

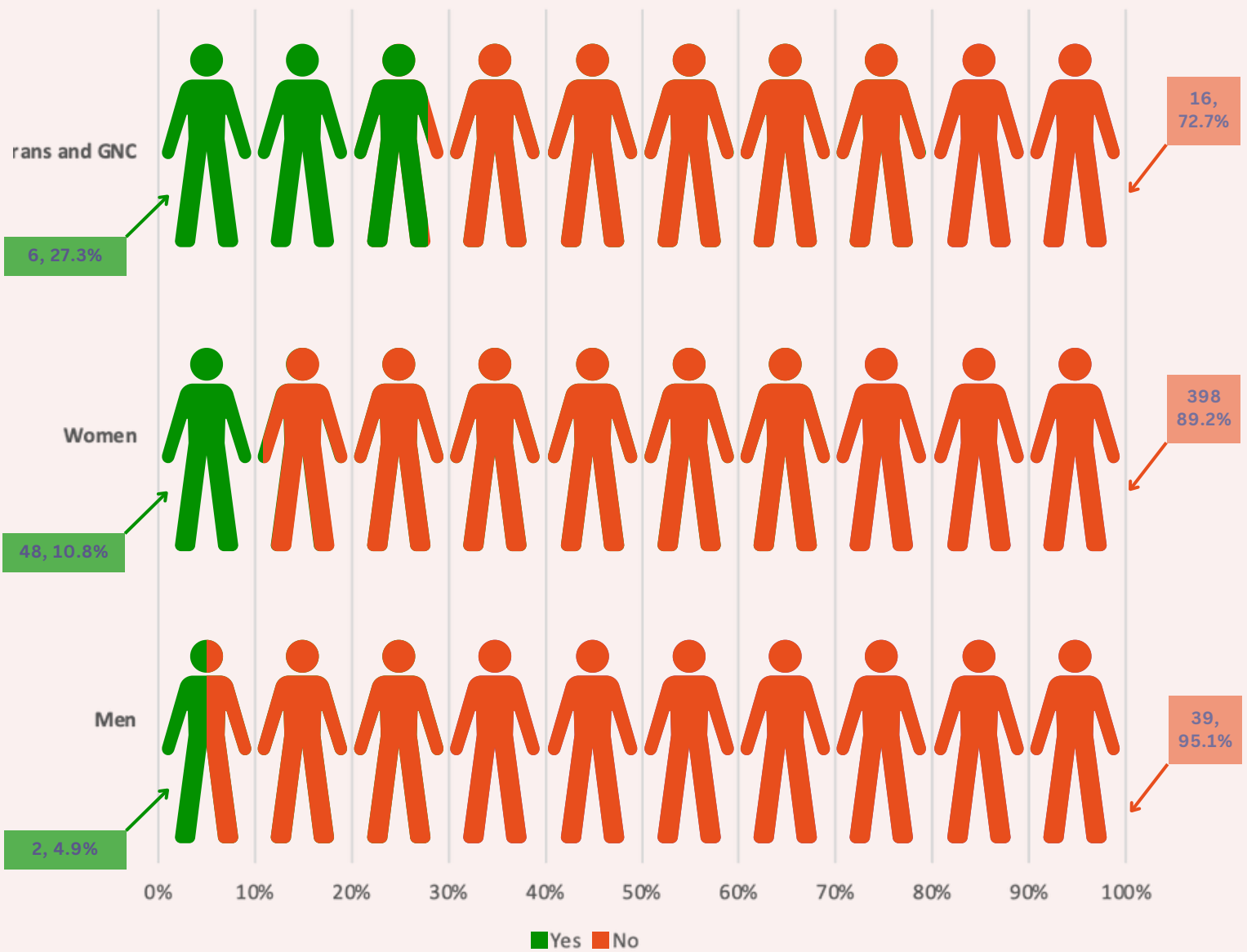


SUMMARY

According to our data, 46.5% of Muslims (47.9% women, 20.9% men, and 70.0% TGNC people) have experienced non-failed attempt of kissing, touching, grabbing, and/or groping.

3.2.2. Non-failed attempt: Sexual Penetration or Oral Sex while Incapacitated/Unable to Consent.

Q: Has any of the following happened to you while you were unable to consent or stop what was happening because you were passed out, asleep or incapacitated due to drugs or alcohol: Sexual penetration (*when one person puts a penis, fingers, or object inside someone else’s vagina or anus*) or oral sex (*when someone’s mouth or tongue makes contact with someone else’s genitals*).

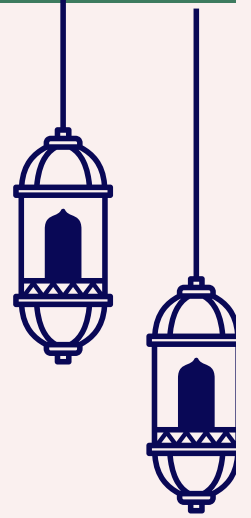


SUMMARY

According to our data, 11.0% of Muslims (10.8% women, 4.9% men, and 27.3% TGNC people) have experienced non-failed attempt of sexual penetration or oral sex while unable to give consent or incapacitated.

Discussion

Overall, our research found that the vast majority of Muslims in our sample had experienced some form of sexual violence, with high rates of sexual assault and even higher rates of sexual harassment. While the majority of Muslims had experienced sexual violence, the majority of participants saw it as a problem in the Muslim community as a whole rather than in their local religious communities.



Finding 1: High Prevalence of Sexual Violence in Muslim Communities

Sexual violence in Muslim communities affects a large proportion of the Muslims in our sample. The majority of Muslim participants in this study (95.9%) have experienced some form of sexual violence, including harassment (94.9%) and assault (59.9%). It's startling to see such a high percentage of participants subjected to harassment, including offensive sexual jokes, inappropriate body shaming and sexualized comments, and various forms of stalking. While rape (22.9%) and attempted rape (18.8%) were less common among Muslims, 46.5% reported unwanted kissing, touching, grabbing, and groping.

The high rates of verbal sexual harassment (94.9%) and non-penetrative sexual assault (46.5%) are both concerning and suggest that Muslims are more likely to experience verbal and non-penetrative forms of sexual violence than penetrative rape. This does not lessen the level of harm experienced by the vast majority of Muslims, but it does capture a more subtle pattern of violent behavior among Muslims that is more likely to be silenced or ignored (Holland et al., 2021). In particular, violent behaviors such as unwanted groping, kissing, touching, or grabbing are frequently equated with penetrative rape (Holland et al., 2021). This is consistent with the NISVS data from the CDC, which also shows higher rates of sexual harassment and non-penetrative assault - indicating that more subtle patterns of violence are prevalent.

Because of widely held beliefs about rape and what is perceived as rape, these forms of violence are frequently not classified as sexual violence, causing many survivors to fail to acknowledge their experience of harm (Armstrong et al., 2018; Littleton et al., 2007).

Recognizing the harm of these forms of sexual violence frequently encourages ignorance about the prevalence and extent of sexual violence in Muslim communities, fostering victim-blaming, less disclosure of incidents, and a decreased awareness of the prevalence of sexual violence. (Cleere & Lynn, 2013).

While the #MeToo movement and efforts to reduce stigma around sexual violence have resulted in more recent shifts in social attitudes toward sexual violence, our findings reveal deeply held beliefs about sexual, verbal, and emotional abuse that deserve attention and communal divestment from these violent behaviors. (Jaffe et al., 2021).

Finding 2: Prevalence of Sexual Violence Varies by Gender Identity

According to our findings, there are significant gender differences in how North American Muslims experience sexual violence, such as sexual penetration, oral sex, groping, stalking, and harassment. Women and transgender (TGNC) Muslims, in particular, face higher rates of sexual violence than Muslim men. In fact, almost all of the women in our sample (96.9%) had experienced some form of sexual violence, including sexual harassment (95.7%) and sexual assault (62.1%).

While the number of trans, genderqueer, and gender questioning people was small, it is worth noting that the majority, if not all, of the gender expansive Muslims have been victims of sexual violence. However, as shown in the findings above, Muslim men in this sample also face high rates of sexual violence (85.7%), including assault (30.2%) and harassment (83.3%).

Although the study sample size is far smaller than the national sample, it is worth noting that when compared to national rates in the United States, rates in North American Muslim communities appear to be higher. According to the National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS), 43.6% of women in the United States have experienced some form of contact sexual violence, which includes "rape, being forced to penetrate someone else, sexual coercion, and/or unwanted sexual contact." (Smith et al., 2018).

In comparison, 24.8% of men in the United States have experienced some form of contact sexual violence. When comparing various types of sexual violence across gender, similar trends emerge. When compared to national rates of attempted penetrative rape (6.3% of women, 1.4% of men), Muslim women (19.1%) and men (7%) have higher rates of attempted but unsuccessful sexual assault.

Completed penetrative rape was reported by 23.5% of Muslim women and 11.4% of Muslim men, far exceeding national rates (13.5% of women and 1.6% of men). Unwanted sexual contact occurred at comparable rates for Muslims (47.9% women, 20.9% men) and the general population (37% women, 17.9%). The rates of incapacitated penetrative rape were similar among Muslims (10.8% women, 4.9% men) and the national rate (11% women, 5.5% men).

While we cannot make a direct comparison due to sample size differences and the especially high number of female participants in our study, the significantly higher rates in this sample of North American Muslims require immediate attention. Gender differences in national trends reveal unsurprising gender differences in Muslim communities as well. As with the NISVS data and other studies, it is widely acknowledged that sexual violence and sexual violence myths have a greater negative impact on women and gender marginalized people than on men. (Allen, Ridgeway, & Swan, 2015; Hong et al., 2017).

Finding 3: Perceptions of Sexual Violence across Muslim Communities

According to the study's findings, Muslims' perceptions of the prevalence of sexual violence differ when asked to consider the larger Muslim community, local community, and personal risk of experiencing sexual misconduct.

Our data shows that individuals believe the prevalence of sexual misconduct in the larger Muslim community is higher than in their local community, when compared to their perceived personal risk of facing sexual violence. These findings suggest that, while Muslims are aware of the prevalence of sexual violence among Muslims in general, they are less likely to perceive it as a local or personal risk.

However, the rates of sexual violence against Muslim men are greater than the national average and higher than anticipated. The fact that 85.7% of Muslim men in the sample have been sexually assaulted, which is greater than the national average of 24.8%. This sample fully contradicts the notion that Muslim men do not consider sexual violence a concern for Muslim communities or themselves. Rather, these data demonstrate Muslim men's profound denial that they do not suffer sexual violence or that it is not a problem that impacts Muslim communities.

In addition, our data shows that individuals believe the prevalence of sexual misconduct in the larger Muslim community is higher than in their local community, when compared to their perceived personal risk of facing sexual violence. These findings suggest that, while Muslims are aware of the prevalence of sexual violence among Muslims in general, they are less likely to perceive it as a local or personal risk.

These perceptions demonstrate how Muslims can distance themselves and their local Muslim community from sexual violence as a personal issue. It also reveals a denial culture, a lack of education, recognition, and a high stigma associated with discussing sexual violence and how it directly affects Muslim people in our own communities. (Begum & Rahman, 2016, Oyewuwo-Gassikia, 2016).

Survivors, particularly Muslim survivors, are often directed to seek solace in religious spaces, but many religious leaders are not educated or equipped to address incidents of violence in a safe or survivor-centered manner, frequently causing further harm to survivors. Silencing, victim-blaming, and reductive strategies to address or prevent sexual violence at the community level are among the poorly informed solutions. (Mohajir & Qureshi, 2020).

The perceptions of sexual violence among Muslims varied greatly according to gender identity. Men (39.5%) were the most likely to perceive sexual violence as a problem in the larger Muslim community, local community, or personal level of risk. Women (91.4%) and gender expansive and TGNC (86.4%) Muslims were more likely to perceive sexual violence as 'extremely, very, or somewhat' of an issue at various levels of community or personal risk. These gender differences support previous research indicating that women and other marginalized gender groups are disproportionately victims of sexual violence. (Branch et al., 2013; Hong et al., 2017; Sorenson et al., 2014).

Furthermore, survivors are more likely to share their experience with other women, so women are more likely to know others who have experienced sexual violence. (Sabina & Ho, 2014; Sorenson et al., 2014). As a result of their increased exposure to sexual violence in their personal and local communities, it is not surprising that women and gender-expansive Muslims perceive high rates of sexual violence.

It's not surprising that Muslim men see sexual violence as less of a communal issue. In a previous survey of Muslim students on campus, more than half of men (61.5%) reported not knowing any fellow students who had experienced some form of sexual violence, compared to slightly more than one-third of women (39.7%). (Azmat et al., 2022). **In the same study, Muslim participants were asked to rate their level of agreement with culturally specific sexual violence attitudes, and statistically significant differences between genders were discovered. (Azmat et al., 2022).**

Muslim men, in particular, were more likely than Muslim women to believe rape myths. Further research on Muslim men's sexual assault attitudes revealed that while they could recognize the general harm of sexual violence, they were less likely to recognize the covert forms of sexually violent behavior. (Khayr, 2019).

Many studies on men's perceptions of rape myths have found similar patterns, with men accepting rape myths, having a limited understanding of sexual violence, and being more likely to sexually harm others. (Burgess, 2007; Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994; Payne et al., 1999). Similar studies have revealed that as a result of these rape myths, women are less likely to disclose to men due to fear of violence or blame, limiting men's exposure to sexual violence awareness. (Ullman et al., 2020). **Because they do not understand the severity of sexual violence or recognize its occurrence, Muslim men are not educated or aware of how they may be harmed, may be harming others or harming themselves.**

Overall, our findings highlight the high prevalence of sexual violence and its various manifestations among Muslims aged 18 to 45 in communities across North America. Furthermore, the disparity between perceived and actual prevalence of violence highlights several factors we've identified that may contribute to these unusually high rates, including denial or minimization of sexual violence affecting Muslims; a lack of language to recognize harm as sexual violence; barriers to disclosure; and a profound lack of education and acceptance of myths or misinformation about sexual violence across Muslim communities.

Future Recommendations

Summary:

1. **Additional research** on Muslims of diverse backgrounds, accounting for race, gender, sexuality, class, survivorship, and more
2. **Additional tailored programming** around specific identities to support muslims who are dealing with SV and marginalized issues
3. Supporting non-Muslim service providers to **broaden services to Muslim communities**
4. **Training Muslim leaders** to respond to gender based violence in trauma-informed and faith inspired ways

This study provides an important snapshot of the prevalence of sexual assault and harassment in Muslim communities in the United States and Canada, as well as gender disparities affecting Muslim survivors and barriers to reporting incidents of harm. While this study provides an initial understanding of sexual violence in Muslim communities, more research into the prevalence of sexual violence in Muslim communities and the barriers to reporting are required to inform direct service provision, policies, and funding allocation. Future research could look into sexual violence in Muslim communities from various racial/ethnic groups, their sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, and educational level.

Additionally, increasing sexual education and awareness programs that will equip Muslims with the language and resources they need to recognize sexual violence and know where and how to seek help when it occurs. This type of education is required not only to help oneself, but also to assist a friend or family member who is experiencing violence. Furthermore, non-Muslim organizations and programs should consider how to broaden their reach to include Muslims.

Lastly, as part of the on-going efforts to create a cultural change at the community and institutional levels, it requires continual training and education for those in positions of leadership in order to develop a thorough understanding of the spectrum of sexual violence, particularly in Muslim communities. This includes anti-racism, gender equity, and anti-oppression trainings that examine how oppressive structures contribute to gender-based violence. It is critical to consider how staff at institutions that serve Muslim survivors support or do not support the full diversity of their communities. The more leaders who work to reduce institutional barriers to disclosure, the closer we will be to prevention.

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