

# **Brief To The Standing Committee on The Status of Women**

By The Canadian Women's Foundation

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Violence Against Young Women and Girls: Its Relation to Campus Violence  
& Rape Culture

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## **Introduction**

Thank you to the Standing Committee on the Status of Women for this opportunity to address violence against young girls and women in Canada, in particular in relation to campus violence. We commend the Committee's focus on this timely and critical issue, in particular given the understanding that young women are uniquely vulnerable to violence as they undergo critical developmental changes in their lives. The current discourse in the zeitgeist, especially over the past week, speaks to the urgency to act on this matter and the need to counteract pervasive misogynist and sexist behaviour and attitudes which harm girls and women in their abilities to lead fulfilling and meaningful lives. This opportunity is one that we cannot miss.

## **Who We Are**

The Canadian Women's Foundation is a national public foundation dedicated to improving the lives of women and girls in all phases of their lives. The Foundation's role is unique in Canada as it is focused on three core goals: stop violence, end poverty and empower girls and women. We aim to work toward systemic change at the national level by advocating for strategies and policies that will contribute to gender equality across Canada. Preventing and eliminating violence against women and girls is our priority as it is key to enabling women to lead productive lives, function at their highest capabilities, free from harm, so that they can fully contribute to the communities in which they live. We invest in the strength of women and the dreams of girls.

## **What We Do**

For over 25 years, we have invested in more than 1400 communities across the country assisting women and girls to move out of violence and poverty, into confidence and leadership roles. Community programs we have funded have impacted approximately 250,000 people. These programs have focused on: violence prevention; the development of healthy relationships among teens; the empowerment of girls and women through skills development, mentoring, and work experiences; poverty elimination support programs and services for women transitioning from poverty; enhancing capacity building in organizations devoted to women's empowerment; and programming focused on inclusive leadership training.

The Foundation not only funds organizations and programs, but actively pursues training and the development of knowledge transfer tools for the purpose of implementing approaches with effective, sustaining and positive outcomes, that will lead to systemic change in the lives of women and girls.

Chief among the tools we develop and resources we contribute to, are those that prevent violence against girls and women that enable social change and eliminate gender inequities. Some will be mentioned in this brief.

## Violence Against Women and Girls

At the Canadian Women's Foundation, our vision is for all women in Canada to live free from violence. We help women in Canada move out of violence by funding emergency shelters and through programs that help survivors rebuild their lives. We work toward ending the crime of sex trafficking in Canada, by helping women and girls to escape from traffickers and by working with local stakeholders to create action plans. We also invest in coeducational school-based violence-prevention programs that teach girls and boys to stop the violence — for good. We understand how the ripple effects of investing in such programs improves women's well being, their economic prospects and social conditions while conversely we understand the personal, social and economic costs of allowing the status quo to persist, in particular with respect to violence against women and girls.

This is what the numbers tell us about the cost of violence against women in Canada:

- Half of all women in Canada have experienced one incident of physical or sexual violence since age 16 <sup>1</sup>
- 67% of all Canadians have personally known at least one woman who has experienced physical or sexual abuse<sup>2</sup>
- Sexual assault is a gender-based crime: over 93 % of reported adult victims are female and 97% of accused are men<sup>3</sup>
- Women aged 18 to 24 experience the highest rates of sexual violence in Canada<sup>4</sup>
- Cyber violence including online threats, harassment and stalking is on the rise<sup>5</sup>
- Young Women (age 18-24) are most likely to experience the most severe forms of online violence<sup>6</sup>
- Less than 1% of sexual assaults experienced by women lead to an offender being convicted. The estimate is based on a 2012 analysis of self-reported sexual assault data and court statistics. The majority of offenders walk free.<sup>7</sup>

The vast majority of sexual assault is unreported to police. In one poll, the most common reason women gave for not reporting sexual assaults to police was feeling young and powerless (56%). Forty per cent of respondents said they remain silent because of feeling shame and 29% blamed themselves for the assault. Others worried that reporting would bring dishonour to their families, feared retaliation from their attacker, or said they didn't have faith in the criminal justice system. Of survivors, who

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.canadianwomen.org/facts-about-violence>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.canadianwomen.org/facts-about-violence>

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.citizenship.gov.on.ca/owd/english/ending-violence/campus\\_guide](http://www.citizenship.gov.on.ca/owd/english/ending-violence/campus_guide)

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.canadianwomen.org/facts-sexual-assault-sexual-harassment>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.canadianwomen.org/facts-sexual-assault-sexual-harassment>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.canadianwomen.org/facts-sexual-assault-sexual-harassment>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.canadianwomen.org/facts-sexual-assault-sexual-harassment>

did report a sexual assault to police in the same poll, 71% said the experience was negative.<sup>8</sup>

We have noted that sexual assault is the only violent crime in Canada not declining with women's risk of violent victimization at about 20% higher than men's in 2014, according to self-reported data from the General Social Survey on Victimization.<sup>9</sup>

However, it is instructive to point out that where declining rates of police reported domestic violence is found, we can attribute it to the following mitigating factors: increased social equality and financial freedom for women, enabling women to leave abusive relationships at earlier stages; and sustained efforts by grassroots groups and organizations to end domestic violence. They have improved public awareness, developed more treatment programs for violent men, improved training in the judicial, court and police sector; have police lay charges rather than victims, provide more coordination of community services, and were involved in the creation of domestic legislation in some parts of Canada.

These indicators demonstrate that varied coordinated forms of intervention from the community level to the legislative arena, have a profound effects not only in reducing the rate of domestic violence but in transforming social attitudes, behavior and institutional response.

### **Early Intervention - Teen Healthy Relationship Program**

Patterns of abuse are learned early, and research suggests that the earlier children receive healthy relationship education the more lasting the outcomes. Over the past 15 years the Foundation has focused its resources on its co-ed Teen Healthy Relationship program, as teen relationship violence has been noted to be a hidden epidemic in Canada. In 2013, the Foundation granted four-year grants to eligible non-profit organizations across Canada to provide school-based healthy relationship programming to young people aged 11 – 19 years. Subsequently in its next funding cycle the Foundation supported 17 groups Canada-wide. “Educators see the value in teen healthy relationships programming preparing 11, 12 and 13 year olds for intimate relationships before they have (typically) started dating.”<sup>10</sup>

Through these projects, teens are taught skills where they learn: warning signs of unhealthy relationships; foundational behaviours for healthy ones; boundary setting; gender stereotypes; assertiveness training, preventing dating violence; ways to show mutual respect; where to get help; and tips for making safe dating choices. These are delivered through a combination of classroom work, discussion, role-play and craft. Projects are facilitated by teachers, community members, or youth, or by a combination

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<sup>8</sup> <http://www.canadianwomen.org/facts-sexual-assault-sexual-harassment>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.canadianwomen.org/facts-sexual-assault-sexual-harassment>

<sup>10</sup> Learning As We Go Year Two Report: National Evaluation of the Canadian Women's Foundation Teen Healthy Relationship Program, Tracy Byrne, Sarah Cunningham, Inside Out Policy Research, October 2015, p.12

of these three. Involvement of youth and peers contributes to the program's success, as research also illustrates that meaningful youth participation in program design, contributes to the development of more relevant and effective programs and services, and provides youth with the opportunity to gain skills and a sense of empowerment, by making healthy connections with peers and adults.<sup>11</sup>

As a co-educational program, the project is designed to include boys as leaders, engaging them in conversations and activities that deconstruct power dynamics (race, class, gender, privilege in general) and does not engage in blaming men and boys for the violence.

Participant surveys have reported a significant increase of knowledge in three areas:

- 68% of respondents reported that they better understand that all genders should have the same opportunities
- 59% reported that they know where to go to get help with a problem; and
- 71% reported that they are better able to recognize what a healthy relationship is<sup>12</sup>

Additional key indicators of program success noted changes in participants' behaviour that support mutually respectful relationships with others, and the acquisition of skills that can contribute to individuals' capacity for healthy relationships.

Further evaluation of the program revealed that:

- 90 %of students said the programs taught them how to keep their relationships healthy, even years after leaving school. <sup>13</sup>
- More than 60 % said that the programs influenced their choice in partners, or helped them decide to leave an unhealthy relationship. <sup>14</sup>

With almost 3 million Canadians aged 13 to 19 the Foundation believes that teen healthy relationship programs should be incorporated in high schools across Canada and would be instructive in the development of campus violent prevention programs.

Early intervention underscores the importance of talking and learning about healthy equal relationships before heading to college and university, as a way of preventing campus sexual violence. Such interventions would dispel myths that have contributed to a misogynist rape culture and the normalization of sexual abuse, especially on Canadian campuses.

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<sup>11</sup> Learning As We Go Year Two Report: National Evaluation of the Canadian Women's Foundation Teen Healthy Relationship Program, Tracy Byrne, Sarah Cunningham, Inside Out Policy Research, October 2015October 2015, p.19

<sup>12</sup> Learning As We Go Year Two Report: National Evaluation of the Canadian Women's Foundation Teen Healthy Relationship Program, Tracy Byrne, Sarah Cunningham, Inside Out Policy Research, October 2015, p.24

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.canadianwomen.org/teen-dating-violence-epidemic>

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.canadianwomen.org/teen-dating-violence-epidemic>

## **Rape Culture and Sexual Abuse on Campus**

Campus violence and rape culture occur against a backdrop of prevailing myths of victim blaming for sexual assault, the cultural normalization of sexist attitudes, institutional behaviours, ignorance about the laws of consent, poor institutional prevention programs and the lack of clear mechanisms to respond to sexual assault. Ironically, the years on campus are when students first experience autonomy from home and stronger peer influences. These are impressionable years, when young peoples attitudes about equality, diversity and sexuality are fomented and when an understanding of sexual violence can be shaped.<sup>15</sup>

Over the past few years, media attention on campus based violence, harassment and rape culture has highlighted the vacuum of consistent proactive approaches for dealing with the prevention of sexual assault and harassment including consistent, safe, procedures for victims and survivors to report their experiences and have them appropriately dealt with. The Foundation too, in a cursory scan in 2014 of 7 universities across Canada, found a patchwork of procedures for dealing with sexual violence on Canadian campuses.<sup>16</sup> Despite clear data on the vulnerability of young women to assault and harassment, there have been glaring gaps in adequate responses to campus violence institutionally, legislatively and pedagogically.

## **The Data**

This is what we can glean from the data about the vulnerability of young women who attend college and university campuses in Canada<sup>17</sup>

- 4 out of 5 university female undergraduate students on Canadian campuses have been victims of violence in a dating relationship
- On campus sexual assaults increase during the first 8 weeks of class
- One fifth of male students agreed that forced sex is acceptable if someone spends money on a date, is stoned or drunk or has been dating someone for a long time
- One survey showed that 60% of Canadian college aged males indicated that they would commit sexual assault if they were certain they wouldn't get caught.
- In 75% of reported cases, the attacker was known (45% as a casual acquaintance or friend). 25% were attacked by strangers.
- The rate of dating violence is underestimated
- According to statistics Canada 70% of self-reported sexual assaults are against women and almost half of self-reported sexual assaults are against people aged 15-24

## **Prevailing Myths and Confusion**

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<sup>15</sup> [http://www.citizenship.gov.on.ca/owd/english/ending-violence/campus\\_guide.shtml](http://www.citizenship.gov.on.ca/owd/english/ending-violence/campus_guide.shtml)

<sup>16</sup> Canadian Women's Foundation, CBC National Sexual Assault on Campuses Research

<sup>17</sup> Canadian Women's Foundation, CBC National Sexual Assault on Campuses Research

Two survey polls that the Foundation undertook illustrate both prevailing attitudes and confusion around the law of consent and by extension might show how these views might impact behaviours of young people, especially on campus.

Results from an online survey conducted in 2013 found that many Canadians believe women need to be careful about what they wear and how much alcohol they consume - 19 % of the respondents believed that women may provoke or encourage sexual assault when they are drunk. Of these, nearly one-quarter (23 %) were people between 18 and 34 years old. The findings revealed the pervasiveness of beliefs that women are responsible for sexual assault because of their appearance and actions.<sup>18</sup>

A more recent online survey conducted in 2015, focused on Canadian understanding of “Consent” with respect to sexual activity and interactions. The survey revealed that though almost all Canadians (96%) agreed that sexual activity between partners should be consensual, two-thirds of Canadians (67%) did not understand what it means.”<sup>19</sup>

The survey also revealed that many young Canadians have a blurred understanding of consent when technology is involved. One in five (21%) people aged 18 to 34 believe if a woman sends a man an explicit photo through text or email, this always means she is inviting him to engage in offline sexual activity.<sup>20</sup>

The survey illustrates the importance for young Canadians to fully understand the meaning of consent and how it applies in both online and in-person settings and the need for greater public awareness and engagement on the issue. Sexually explicit messaging does not mean an interest or willingness to engage in offline sexual activity. Both these surveys speak to the need of creating and integrating campus based programs targeted at young people to empower them, learn their rights and above all develop a culture and climate of consent This means that there must be a clear understanding of sexual assault and consent according to the Criminal Code of Canada with the clear knowledge that sexual assault is determined by a lack of consent, and that indeed, sexual activity without consent is sexual assault.<sup>21</sup>

## **Responses to Date**

"There has been a growing recognition across all campuses in North America that sexual assault really is a crime like no other," said Sara-Jane Finlay, associate vice-president of equity and inclusion at UBC.<sup>22</sup>

## **The need for Stand Alone Sexual Assault Policies and Procedures**

Incidents reported in the media about sexual violence on campuses across Canada have

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<sup>18</sup> <http://canadianwomen.org/sexualassault>

<sup>19</sup> <http://canadianwomen.org/press-consent>

<sup>20</sup> <http://canadianwomen.org/press-consent>

<sup>21</sup> [http://www.citizenship.gov.on.ca/owd/english/ending-violence/campus\\_guide.shtml](http://www.citizenship.gov.on.ca/owd/english/ending-violence/campus_guide.shtml)

<sup>22</sup> <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/canadian-universities-sex-assault-policies-1.3479314>

revealed the paucity of effective stand-alone sexual assault policies and procedures to deal with this crisis. Bilan Arte, national chairwoman of the Canadian Federation of Students has said that administrators have made it very clear to students that they're more interested in protecting their bottom line and their reputation than they are in actually protecting the campus community.<sup>23</sup> Failures to adequately implement policy and procedure for redressing cases of sexual violence have often re-traumatized persons who have experienced assault.

Out of more than 100 universities and colleges across Canada approximately 24 now have instituted stand-alone policies.<sup>24</sup> Stand-alone policies recognize that sexual assault is different from other forms of misconduct, set out specific procedures for handling complaints and outline support services for victims. They also reduce under-reporting of campus assault.

### **Provincially Mandated Policies**

As education falls within provincial mandates new legal frameworks are emerging in response to dealing with campus sexual assault. With the passage in Ontario of Bill 132, the Sexual Violence and Harassment Action Plan Act, all publicly-assisted colleges, universities and private career colleges in Ontario are required to have stand-alone sexual violence policies by January 2017.<sup>25</sup> Additionally, the act requires universities, colleges and private colleges to review their policies every three years with student involvement as well as annual reporting mechanisms and updates from universities, including the formulation and publication of accurate data on campus sexual assault.<sup>26</sup>

Manitoba, Nova Scotia and British Columbia are also looking at mandatory stand-alone sexual assault policies but legislating policies is not enough. The implementation of effective policies requires stronger connections to student bodies and their communities, good protocols, an understanding of how the policies are implemented and a proactive approach to eliminating rape culture.

To that end long term studies would fill systemic gaps in knowledge and produce evidence based best practice protocols, guidelines and effective institutional practices.

### **Studies and Best Practices for Eliminating Rape Culture on Campus The SSSHRC Partnership Project Study**

The merits of specific stand alone policies and the ability to effect change from rape culture to a safer nuanced responsive environment on Canadian campuses, can only be known through multisectoral longitudinal studies examining this phenomenon. To that end the Foundation has joined other stakeholders in a multidisciplinary Partnership comprised 14 multi-sector Partners, 23 Co-Applicants, 13 Collaborators, 9 Partner

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<sup>23</sup> <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/canadian-universities-sex-assault-policies-1.3479314>

<sup>24</sup> <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/canadian-universities-sex-assault-policies-1.3479314>

<sup>25</sup> [http://www.ontla.on.ca/web/bills/bills\\_detail.do?locale=en&BillID=3535](http://www.ontla.on.ca/web/bills/bills_detail.do?locale=en&BillID=3535)

<sup>26</sup> [http://www.ontla.on.ca/web/bills/bills\\_detail.do?locale=en&BillID=3535](http://www.ontla.on.ca/web/bills/bills_detail.do?locale=en&BillID=3535)



universities and faculties (Partners) and McGill University as the host institution. ***The overarching goal of the study is to unearth, dismantle and prevent rape culture within universities, and ultimately in society, through evidence-based research that will inform sustainable curriculum and policy change.*** The research will identify proactive ways to inform the current policy vacuum, through preventive and legally defensible policy responses. These will, in turn, support educational practices that engage students in safe dialogues about this complex social phenomenon.<sup>27</sup>

Covering a 7-year term, the Partnership will result in informed and equitable university policies, as well as innovative, student-relevant curricula. Supported by the SSHRC (The Social Science Research and Humanities Council), this research will be the most comprehensive study of its kind in Canada as it is focused on investigating three core areas that have reinforced a climate for rape culture on Canadian campuses:

- Law and Policy, (examining university policies and practices within management and human rights theoretical frameworks)
- The role of the Arts and Popular Culture
- The role of News and Social media)<sup>28</sup>

The intention of the research is to fill systemic gaps in understanding rape culture and sexual violence in universities. As university policies have remained outdated and stagnant it is expected that this partnership study will enhance policy and public discourse, as well as set standards for policy direction as well as the development of best practices in this arena.

### **Enhanced Assess, Acknowledge, Act (EAAA) Study**

Proactive approaches and training to resist sexual assault and victimization on campus are proven to work and opportunities to implement them in Canadian universities are expanding. Research results from an initial study of Enhanced Assess, Acknowledge, Act (EAAA) sexual assault resistance program, found that among first year university women the program worked. Students in the study were randomly assigned to either the EAAA resistance program or brief exposure to brochures about sexual assault (control group), which is what most universities have available to students on campus. One year after completing the intervention, women in the EAAA program experienced fewer completed rapes and 63 per cent fewer attempted rapes than women in the control group.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> <https://www.mcgill.ca/definetheline/sexual-violence>, SSHRC Partnership Project: Examining the Role of News and Social media, Popular Culture and the Justice System in Reducing and Mobilizing Change, or Sustaining Sexual Violence and Rape Culture in Universities

<sup>28</sup> <https://www.mcgill.ca/definetheline/sexual-violence> SSHRC Partnership Project: Examining the Role of News and Social media, Popular Culture and the Justice System in Reducing and Mobilizing Change, or Sustaining Sexual Violence and Rape Culture in Universities

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.ucalgary.ca/utoday/issue/2015-06-15/sexual-assault-resistance-program-university-women-proves-success>

The Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) is granting additional funds to study the implementation of the EAAA program at universities across Canada over the next four to five years. It will assess the effectiveness of the EAAA program when delivered at universities outside of a highly controlled research trial and is expected to supply best practices and knowledge transfer on ways to empower students with tools in preventing and handling sexual assault as they negotiate their lives on campus.<sup>30</sup>

### **Recommendations:**

Given that one in four women will experience rape or attempted rape while attending university, the responses to date to violence on campus, rape culture and the vulnerabilities of young women, has been greatly inadequate.<sup>31</sup> Clearly there is urgency for a coordinated multisectoral approach to campus violence. Stand-alone policies and procedures are not the only ways to address the issue. Here are some suggested recommendations that reflect needs for new policy and administrative approaches, changing societal attitudes, improved ways to assist survivors, and implementation of stronger prevention programs.

- Establish mechanisms for making universities and colleges accountable if they do not adequately address campus violence, survivor needs, and any systemic prevalence of rape culture norms
- Invest in both a gendered lens and an intersectional approaches to sexual assault policy, resources and programming on campus.
- Include lived experiences of gender and sexual assault survivors in developing programs
- Implement survivor rights. (Last Friday President Obama signed the Sexual Assault Survivors' Rights Act. The bill empowers survivors by giving them more control over their own rape kits. Victims have the right to a free rape kit whether or not a police report has been filled. The kit cannot be discarded until the statute of limitations expires. The survivor must also be informed sixty days prior to the deadline; the state must continue storing the kit if the survivor requests it.)<sup>32</sup>
- Invest in more state of the art research to fill in gaps in policies, prevention programs, training, curriculum development and bystander interventions
- Invest in both a gendered lens and an intersectional approaches to sexual assault policy, resources and programming on campus.
- Include student involvement in every aspect of program content, procedures, delivery, and implementation of processes
- Include student involvement in the development, implementation and evaluation of all programs and procedures

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<sup>30</sup> Sexual Assault Resistance Education Centre, Summer 2016, EAAA Milestones

<sup>31</sup> <https://www.ucalgary.ca/utoday/issue/2015-06-15/sexual-assault-resistance-program-university-women-proves-success>

<sup>32</sup> <http://thestute.com/2016/10/14/bill-of-rights-for-survivors-of-sexual-assault-is-approved-by-president-obama/>

- Enhance information dissemination, and student advisory committees for program content & strategic direction
- Establish a range of approaches to implement programs
- Invest in early intervention programs prior to attending colleges and universities

### **The Role of Government**

The status, health, wellbeing and security of Canadian girls and young women in the formative years of their life is the responsibility of the Government of Canada. Incidents that have shed light over the past five years on the prevalence of campus violence and rape culture demonstrate that the status of Canadian young women is in peril. Statistics bear this out.

Even though education falls within provincial mandates the Canadian Government has a unique role to provide oversight, establish best practices in policy, invest in knowledge transfer, and guide in our efforts to stop and prevent sexual violence and the propagation of a rape culture. It can lead in developing and spreading a culture of consent, lead in changing attitudes toward women and girls, develop new tools online and through social media, implement effective legislation, in particular with respect to the rights of women and girls. Essentially, it can create and promote programs that lead to social change and the empowerment of women and girls so their status can never be imperiled.

### **Conclusion**

Evidence suggests that the issue of sexual violence on campus and the prevalence of rape culture has not received the attention and required resources to deal with this crisis in Canada. Though the data is astounding with respect to the vulnerabilities of young women in these settings, a complete picture does not yet exist. Until recently, there has been a patchwork of responses to the issue institutionally and legislatively, as well as gaps in evidence-based knowledge about our understanding of the issue. We urgently need to address this challenge as a society.

We already know that sexual violence is a traumatic experience with significant physical, emotional, psychological impacts that can last a lifetime, deterring women from fulfilling their dreams at the prime of their lives. The Canadian Women's Foundation believes we can reverse this trend in Canada.

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