

Brief submitted to the Status of Women Committee for their *Study on Violence against Young Women and Girls in Canada*.

To the Attention of: Danielle Widmer, Clerk of the Standing Committee on
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Submitted Tuesday, September 6th 2016

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Summary

We commend the Status of Women Committee on their initiative to study violence against women and girls. We agree with the committee that young women and girls are particularly vulnerable to violence as they undergo critical development in their lives. This topic is especially relevant for young women attending post-secondary education, where campus culture can silence victims and encourage violence. The Government of Canada has a critical role in eliminating violence against women on university campuses. We urge the Government to conduct primary research on best practices for receiving complaints, investigating and adjudicating violence against women on campus. The Government must begin the process of standardizing university and college response to reports of violence, sexual assault and harassment. The Government can do this by providing colleges and universities with a model reporting and confidentiality protocol, obliging post-secondary institutions to have a comprehensive sexual misconduct policy (including disciplinary procedures) and to conduct safety audits on campus. Further, we recommend that the Government provide funding to colleges and universities to conduct workshops on bystander intervention and consent, and to hire and train faculty to deal specifically with complaints of sexual assault, violence and harassment. We appreciate your focus on this critical issue and urge you to take concrete steps to address the violence faced by young women every day on campuses.

CFUW Efforts to Eliminate Violence against Women

The Canadian Federation of University Women has been fighting for the equal rights of women for almost one hundred years. With over 8000 members in over 100 clubs across Canada, CFUW advocates on such initiatives as prevention of violence against women, child poverty, pay equity, and early learning and child care. Every year, CFUW and its clubs award over \$1 million in scholarships to women to help them pursue post-secondary studies.

The CFUW began as an organization for women graduates, and we have a vested interest in the well-being of young women pursuing higher education. In 1992, our members conducted a survey of 45 Canadian universities and the status of female faculty and students at those institutions.¹ The survey evaluated everything from harassment and safe environment, to recognition of work experience of female staff, salary equity, hiring and tenure, and child care facilities. The report produced from this survey, *Women in Universities*, concluded that there was widespread misunderstanding about what constituted sexual harassment, and most universities did not have a defined protocol for handling complaints. Twenty-five years after this report, we are still encountering many of the same problems on university and college campuses. CFUW plans on re-doing this survey in order to revisit these institutions and compare the results.

In this brief we will address violence, including sexual assault and harassment, faced by women and girls on college campuses, and how the Government of Canada can develop effective strategies to address this problem.

The Problem

Violence against women and girls on post-secondary campuses is enabled by factors such as rape culture, peer pressure, misunderstanding or disregard of consent, and abuse of alcohol and drugs. Violence against women on campus is further perpetuated by lack of disciplinary action. Many university and college campuses are not equipped to deal with reports of violence. There is a lack of institutional support, unclear disciplinary procedures, and non-

existent or inaccessible support services. Not to mention the mistrust victims have in institutions to treat them credibly when reporting assault.

Rape culture is a major factor enabling violence against women on campus. Last year the Canadian Women's Foundation conducted a survey and found that two thirds of Canadians don't have a clear understanding of consent.ⁱⁱ Rape culture – a set of beliefs which encourage male aggression and support violence against womenⁱⁱⁱ – is particularly notable on post-secondary campuses. In rape culture, violence against women, rape, and assault, are considered inevitable. Assault of women is joked about, down-played, and sexual coercion seems so routine that people come to see it as part of a normal experience.^{iv}

When violence occurs, post-secondary institutions are ill-equipped to deal with complaints. Many institutions are not set up with specific counseling services, safe spaces, or staff trained to take disclosures.^v As CFUW has learned in interviews with university staff, young women will often make disclosures to professors or other staff (who are not trained to handle those situations) because there are no obvious support services to turn to. In a society that teaches women “don't get raped” instead of teaching men “don't rape”, victims are isolated.

In 2014 the White House commissioned a Task Force to Protect Students from Sexual Assault.^{vi} The report they produced did a thorough study of the problem of violence against women on campus, and provided an overview of the action the White House would take to address it. We urge the committee to review this report as you conduct your study.

We urge the Government to

- 1. Conduct research into best practices** for receiving complaints of, investigating and adjudicating sexual assault on campus.
- 2. Provide colleges and universities with a model reporting and confidentiality protocol**, which would focus on giving survivors control over the process. Victims who want their school to fully investigate an incident must be taken seriously, and know who to report to. Others who are looking for a different course of action or just support must have access to safe space for confidential advice and support. The school must make it plain and clear who on campus can maintain a victim's confidence and who can't, so that victims can make informed decisions.
- 3. Pass legislation that would obligate universities and colleges to**
 - a. Have a comprehensive sexual misconduct policy.** The White House provided a checklist for schools to draft or re-draft their own sexual misconduct policies. The checklist included ensuring that students were a part of the drafting team.
 - b. Conduct safety audits on campus.**
 - c. Have transparent and specific disciplinary systems:** this means having a clear policy on sexual assault and violence on campus, complete with an outlined process for investigation, victim support and discipline for perpetrators. We urge the Government to fund research into different methods for investigating and adjudicating campus sexual assault and identify best practices.
- 4. Provide funding to universities and colleges to:**
 - a. Conduct workshops on bystander intervention and consent.** The University of Windsor adopted a highly-acclaimed program, originally developed at the University of New Hampshire, for bystander intervention.^{vii}

b. Train faculty on taking disclosures and trauma-informed training.

The culture of violence and sexual assault on university and college campus is unacceptable. Young women (and men) should be able to pursue studies in a safe environment, where the consequences for misconduct are clearly outlined and support services readily available. We urge the Government to be proactive in establishing new guidelines for post-secondary institutions regarding sexual assault, violence and harassment, as well as providing funding for critical programs to educate students and staff about consent, bystander intervention and taking disclosures. We are confident the Status of Women Committee will take this opportunity to be a leader in eliminating violence against women on campus.

Everyone should feel free and safe when pursuing post-secondary education. Violence against women on post-secondary campuses is unacceptable. The Government of Canada plays a critical role in addressing and eliminating this violence, and ensuring that post-secondary institutions are safe spaces for learning. We must take concrete, practical steps to: counter rape culture on campuses; provide faculty and staff with the resources they need to respond to disclosures of violence; support victims throughout the process of reporting, investigation and discipline, and promote education and prevention. CFUW has been a champion of university women for almost 100 years, and this issue remains a priority in 2016. We would like to reiterate our recognition for the leadership the Status of Women Committee is taking in conducting this study. We look forward to working with the Committee in the coming months on a concrete plan to reduce violence against women on campus.

ⁱ Saunders, Mary, Ph.D, Margaret Therrien, B.N., and Linda Williams, Ph.D. Women in Universities: Survey of the Status of Female Faculty and Students at Canadian Universities. Rep. Ottawa, Ontario: Canadian Federation of U Women, 1992. Print. This report describes the findings and recommendations of the Canadian Federation of University Women's (CFUW) "Survey of the Status of Female Faculty and Students at Canadian Universities", conducted in fall 1991 and spring 1992. The objectives of this project were to raise the awareness of inequalities for women at our universities, to identify creative solutions to problems and share them with all institutions, and to support initiatives for reform using CFUW's national network of clubs. The results of the CFUW survey showed that progress is being made in improving the situation of women at Canadian universities but, with a few exceptions, the pace is slow and the focus uneven. Responses were received from 55% (45 universities) of the 82 President's Office/Faculty Questionnaires distributed. Student Questionnaires were returned from 32 institutions. We have made a conscious effort in this report to name universities only where we feel they have a genuine solution which other universities should implement. Report available at: <http://bit.ly/2cBPtd3>

ⁱⁱ Strapagiel, Lauren. "Just One in Three Canadians Have a Full Understanding of Sexual Consent: Survey." National Post. National Post, 5 May 2015. Web.)

ⁱⁱⁱ Buchwald, Emilie, Pamela R. Fletcher, and Martha Roth. Transforming a Rape Culture. Minneapolis, MN: Milkweed Editions, 1993. Print.)

^{iv} Buchwald, 1993.

^v Mathieu, Emiyl, and Jayme Poisson. "Canadian Post-secondary Schools failing Sex Assault Victims | Toronto Star." Thestar.com. The Toronto Star, 20 Nov. 2014. Web.

^{vi} White House Task Force to Protect Students from Sexual Assault (April 2014) United States of America. The White House. Not Alone. By The White House Task Force to Protect Students from Sexual Assault. Washington: White House, 2014. Print

^{vii} Tamburri, Rosanna. "Bystander Intervention Program Changes Attitudes about Sexual Assault." University Affairs. University Affairs, 15 Oct. 2014. <http://bit.ly/2bXW9DL>