

# SEXUAL VIOLENCE ON CAMPUS

Fact Sheet | December 2015

## FACTS & FIGURES

One in five women experience sexual assault while attending a post-secondary institution.<sup>1</sup> It is no understatement that sexual assault continues to be a very serious issue at every single college and university campus in Ontario.

Although women can and are perpetrators of sexual violence, men are disproportionately the instigators and perpetrators of sexual assault and violence, most often against women. While the vast majority of incidents go unreported, women account for nine out of ten police reported sexual assaults in Canada.<sup>2</sup> In nearly all cases of sexual violence against women, the abusers are male<sup>3</sup> and the effects of sexual violence go far beyond physical injuries. The long-term effects on women's mental health and well-being can be very serious. People who have been sexually assaulted often experience fear, guilt, shame, depression, anger and low self-esteem.<sup>4</sup>

Young women experience the highest rates of sexual violence in Canada. The police-reported rate of sexual assault against women aged 18 to 24 is twice the rate for women aged 25 to 34, and four times higher than women between 35 and 44.<sup>5</sup> According to a 2009 Statistics Canada General Social Survey, 70 per cent of self-reported sexual assaults were against women and almost half of all self-reported sexual assaults were

against people aged 15 to 24.<sup>6</sup> Young women report the highest rates of being stalked, with stalkers being known to victims in over two-thirds of cases.<sup>7</sup> Women are three times more likely to experience serious spousal violence and the rate of female reported intimate partner crime is four times greater than males.

It is important to note that women from marginalized backgrounds and identities are especially at risk of sexual assault and acts of sexual violence disproportionately target Aboriginal women, women of colour, queer and trans women,

women with disabilities and women who are new to Canada.<sup>8</sup> Aboriginal women are more than three times as likely to be victims of violence than non-Aboriginal women.<sup>9</sup>

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Studies indicate that 83 per cent of women with disabilities will experience some form of violence in their lifetime and are three times as likely to be forced into sexual activity by the use of threat or force. Racialized women are less likely to report incidents of sexual assault or seek help due to previous community experiences of racism from the police.<sup>12</sup>

9/10

of reported sexual assaults in Canada are against women.

1/2

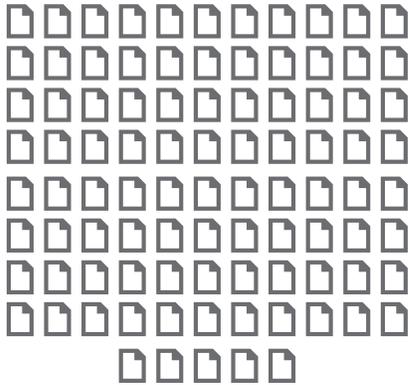
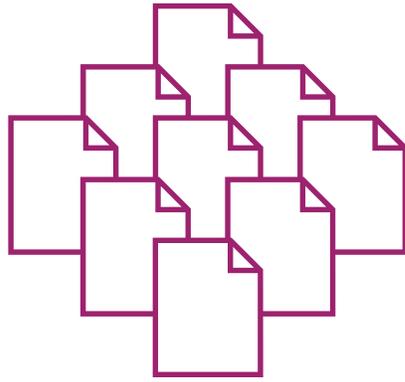
of self-reported sexual assaults are against people aged 15 to 24.

3x

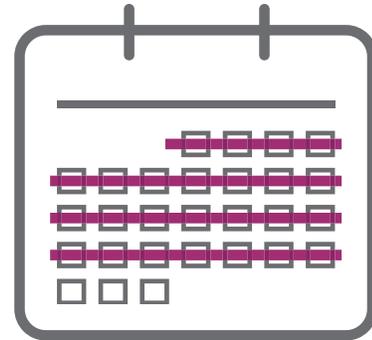
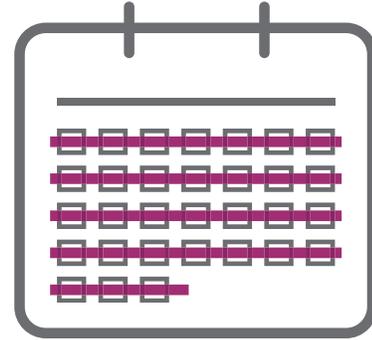
Aboriginal women are 3 times as likely to be victims of violence than non-Aboriginal women.

83%

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As of November, 2014, only **9 out of 102** Canadian colleges and universities had sexual assault policies.



Many on-campus assaults occur within the **first 8 weeks** of the school year.

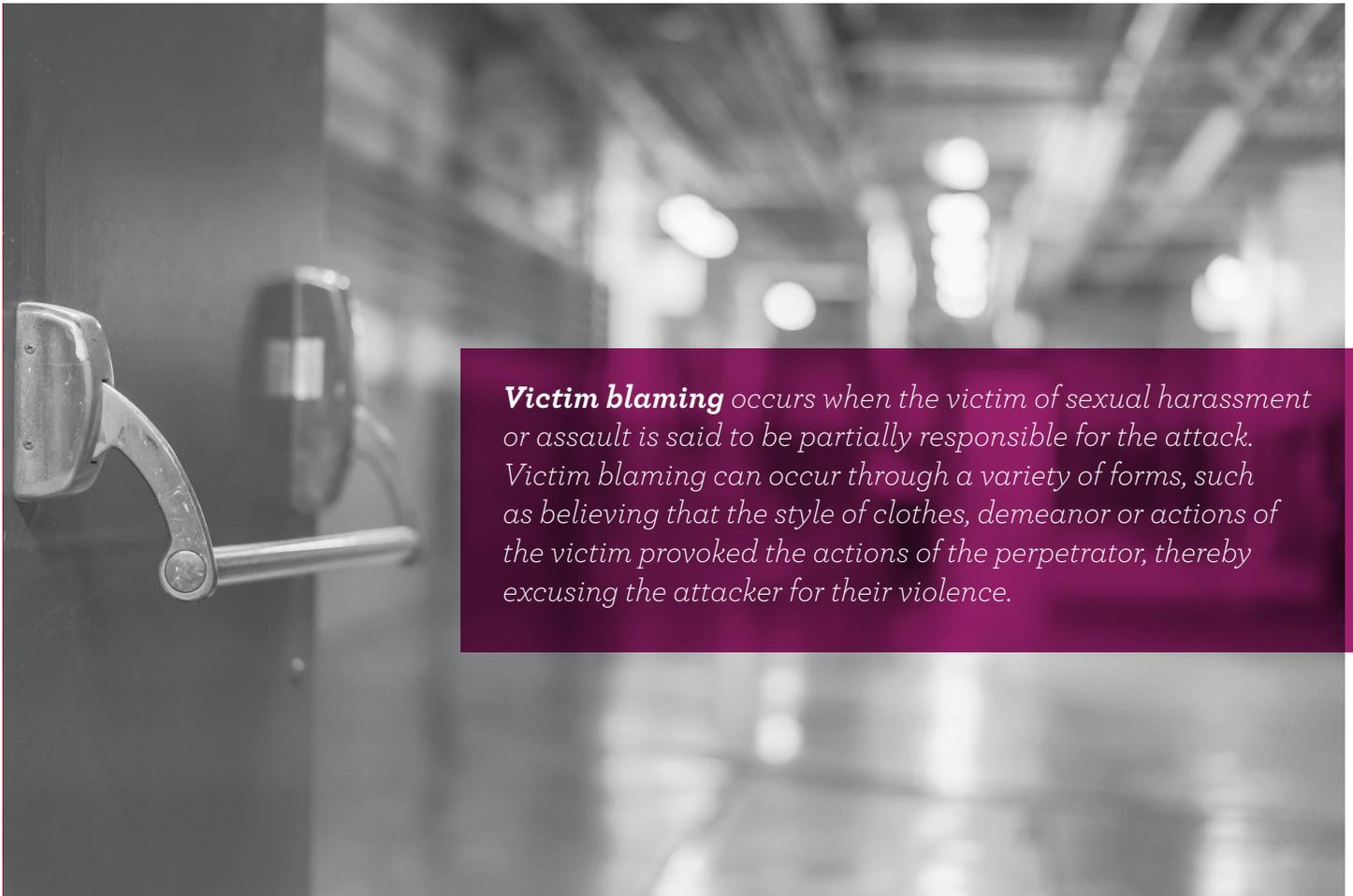
## SEXUAL VIOLENCE ON COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY CAMPUSES

Post-secondary institutions are meant to be safe spaces with the mission to educate students and engage the community in critical thought and discussion. Although colleges and universities foster academic growth and host social activities, they can also create environments where women face sexual violence starting from the first day they step foot on campus.

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Many on-campus sexual assaults occur during the first eight weeks of classes. More than 80 per cent of rapes that occur on college and university campuses are committed by someone known to the victim, with half of these incidents occurring on dates. In a campus survey of undergraduate students at the University of Alberta, 21 per cent of students reported having at least one unwanted sexual experience at some point in their life. Over one-third of those who experienced unwanted sexual experiences said that their most serious experience happened while being a student at the university, with over one-half reporting that it happened in their first year of studies.

In November 2014, only 9 out of 78 Canadian universities had sexual assault policies. Since then, Ontario colleges and universities have been mandated to develop stand-alone sexual assault policies that are renewed at least every four years and created and renewed with significant input from students. Within *It's Never Okay: An Action Plan to Stop Sexual Violence and Harassment*, the province has committed to ensure that each campus has clearly stated complaint and response protocols, training and prevention programs and 24/7 support available for community members who experience sexual assault.



**Victim blaming** occurs when the victim of sexual harassment or assault is said to be partially responsible for the attack. Victim blaming can occur through a variety of forms, such as believing that the style of clothes, demeanor or actions of the victim provoked the actions of the perpetrator, thereby excusing the attacker for their violence.

## REPORTING ON CAMPUS

Statistics related to sexual and gendered violence are often based on incidents that are formally reported to police. However, unlike other types of crime, sexual assault gets reported at a significantly lower rate. Less than one in ten incidents of sexual violence are reported to the police and date rape is the most under-reported crime in Canada. This high level of under-reporting shows that statistical reports largely underestimate the prevalence of sexual violence.

Women are less likely to report sexual assault and other forms of violence because of the stigma associated with being an individual who experienced sexual violence. It is estimated that four out of five women who are sexually assaulted do not report due to feelings of humiliation or the fear of being re-victimized in the legal process.

An investigation by CBC revealed that over 700 sexual assaults were reported between 2009 to 2013 at Canadian colleges and universities. That number is incredibly low when statistics illustrate that one in five women will experience sexual assault while attending a post-secondary institution and one in three women will experience some form of sexual assault in her lifetime. This is especially important since up until March 2015, colleges and universities did not have to publicly report on incidences of sexual violence on campuses.

For example, a student survey at the University of Ottawa reported that as many as 44 per cent of female identified students experienced some form of sexual violence or unwanted touching while attending the institution whereas the number of reported incidences to the university over a five year period revealed only ten students had reported an assault. In the past, while some institutions had higher rates of sexual assault compared to others, it could have meant that particular institutions were doing a better job at encouraging students to come forward and reporting incidences of sexual violence.

One of the reasons why individuals do not come forward and report incidences of sexual assault is that often, the public rhetoric holds women accountable for inviting gendered violence by failing to take proper precautions or dressing or behaving in a way that provoked the assault. Victim blaming shifts the responsibility from the perpetrator to the individual who experienced sexual assault.

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## BUILDING A CONSENT CULTURE ON OUR CAMPUSES

A consent culture is a culture in which the prevailing narrative of sex is centered on mutual understanding, respect, and agreement of each other's desires and limitations. It is a culture that does not force anyone into anything, respects bodily autonomy and is based on the belief that a person is always the best judge of their own wants and needs.

Consenting to one kind or instance of sexual activity does not mean that consent is blanketly given to any other sexual activity or at any other time. No one provokes or invites sexual assault and sex without consent is rape. Consent is always ongoing, freely given, informed and enthusiastic.

According to the Canadian Women's Foundation, while the majority of Canadians believe all sexual activities should be consensual, only one in three Canadians understand what consent actually looks like. The survey also revealed that approximately 20 per cent of people between the ages of 18 to 34 believe that receiving an explicit photo from a partner also means that this is an invitation to engage in sexual activity in person.

Male students, whether perpetrators of sexual violence or not, often have extremely problematic attitudes that contribute to high rates of gender-based violence on campuses. One survey showed that 60 per cent of Canadian college-aged males indicated that they would commit sexual assault if they were certain that they would not get caught. Another national survey found that 20 per cent of male students believed forced sex was acceptable if someone spent money on a date, if the person's date was under the influence of drugs or alcohol or if individuals had been dating for a long time. These attitudes further reveal the need for consent education to eradicate systemic sexual violence.

To create a culture of consent on campuses and eradicate the prevailing culture of rape, the whole community must participate in fostering an environment where women feel safe and blameless when coming forward to report incidents of sexual assault. Consent education is integral to making this cultural shift on our campuses.

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