

REPORT SUMMARY

CRUCIAL VOICES

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REPORT ON SFCC STUDENT
CONSULTATIONS FOR THE
NATIONAL ACTION PLAN TO END
GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE **2020-21**

SFCC's 10 Priorities for Post-secondary Education

Who We Are

Students for Consent Culture Canada (SFCC) is an organisation dedicated to supporting intersectional and grassroots anti-sexual-violence advocacy on campuses across Canada. We serve as a hub of resources, tools, and institutional memory to foster student engagement and leadership. As a part of the National Action Plan to End Gender Based Violence, from November 2020 to March 2021, SFCC consulted with a diverse range of key informants, organisations, and individual students from across the country, in interviews, group consultations and online surveys.

What Students Told Us

Our student consultations painted a troubling but ultimately hopeful picture. Their experiences show that having policies in place is only the starting point for addressing and reducing gender-based violence (GBV) on postsecondary campuses. Students reported failures to support and accommodate survivors, victim-blaming and discriminatory treatment, exclusion from meaningful consultation, and serious gaps between policy and practice. These experiences magnified the harms of gender-based violence, eroded trust in their institutions, and in a number of cases, led students to postpone or cut short their education.

What gives us hope is that students are not accepting the status quo, but calling for postsecondary institutions to do better across Canada. Survivors are advocating for gender-based violence prevention, accommodation, support, consultation, and leadership that are inclusive and accessible to all. This means coordinated, streamlined services and reporting mechanisms. It means more comprehensive and equity-informed training for students, staff and faculty, and an increase in direct financial support of student survivor advocacy and peer-led services. Our participants told us that student-led initiatives had a positive impact on their sense of safety, yet this work is generally performed for little or no compensation. We want this to change. Most of all, mitigating and ending gender-based violence will require strong commitments from all levels of government to fund prevention and support efforts, and to hold institutions accountable for fostering safe and accessible educational environments.

Priorities for Action

Here is our priority list for funding, legislation and policy, drawing directly from our student consultations:

1. Create and oversee national, provincial and territorial standards for campus sexual violence policies.
2. Commit to long-term, system-wide investment in GBV education and training.
3. Decriminalise sex work in Canada, in consultation with sex workers, including students.
4. Foster and fund leadership of Indigenous community, staff and students in GBV policy and practice.
5. Centre the voices of all students living with disabilities in GBV policy and practice.
6. Mandate the creation and sustainable funding of trauma-informed Sexual Violence Response Offices.
7. Build institutional capacity to meaningfully foster equity and support a diverse range of student survivors.
8. Coordinate privacy law reform nationally to protect survivors and prohibit its use as a silencing tool.
9. Adequately resource campus support and accountability work, including student-led initiatives.
10. Meaningfully consult and fairly compensate students and survivors in policy, prevention and support work.



10 Priorities for Action on Gender-Based Violence at Postsecondary Institutions in Canada

Developed from SFCC's student consultations for Canada's National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence. All quotes come directly from participants in our national survey and consultation sessions.

1. Create and oversee national, provincial and territorial standards for campus sexual violence policies.

Our consultations documented low levels of trust in colleges and universities on the issue of gender-based violence (GBV). Once policies are created, they need oversight to ensure transparency, equity and consistency. See SFCC's 11 minimum standards for recommendations.

"The sexual violence policy...did not properly safeguard the information of the survivor."

"The institution operated to protect itself first and the student second."

"The policy isn't bad, but I don't trust the institution to implement it correctly."

2. Commit to long-term, system-wide investment in gender-based violence education and training.

Training should be developed, updated and led by GBV experts and advocates who reflect the diversity of the postsecondary student population. Recommendations from students include:

- Offer consent, critical masculinity, bystander and healthy sexuality training for all students
- Expand sexuality and consent education prior to entry into postsecondary education
- Integrate anti-violence training and anti-oppression training
- Mandate annual training on disclosures, harassment, digital literacy for all faculty and staff
- Implement evidence-based online/digital safety training and accountability processes

"Nowhere in [training] do they... talk about the disproportionate rates of sexual violence and gender-based violence and harm towards trans folk and queer folks and BIPOC folks. So, it feels very, very white and very limited."

"Students should be able to not only lead training (and be paid), but shape it."

3. Decriminalise sex work in Canada, in consultation with sex workers, including students.

Many postsecondary students engage in sex work to meet the high costs of education. Sex workers we spoke with advocate for a repeal of the Nordic model that criminalises their livelihood. They want to be full participants in developing decriminalisation legislation.

"Listen to sex workers at all stages. Do not move forward without meaningful, ongoing consultation with sex workers."

4. Foster and fund leadership of Indigenous community, staff and students in GBV policy and practice.

Postsecondary institutions should implement *Missing and Murdered Indigenous Woman and Girls Report* recommendations and *Native Women's Association of Canada's MMIWG Action Plan*, with an emphasis on creating a National Action Plan, led by Indigenous communities and grounded in Indigenous legal systems. We join students and advocates in calling for trauma-informed and culturally relevant support for Indigenous students and elders on campus.

"[We need] definite inclusion of voices of our clan mothers, our matriarchs, our pipe carriers... the roles of our women being validated in these institutions. So when you're running a program...having Indigenous people come in and discuss what are the rules of respect, actually having Indigenous matriarchs and leaders come in...as a collaborative process."

5. Centre the voices of all students living with disabilities in GBV policy and practice.

Disability and gender-based violence are linked in multiple ways: women and non-binary people living with a disability are at greater risk of experiencing GBV, and surviving GBV often has its own disabling impacts. All survivors deserve accessible, trauma-informed mental health support, reporting, and accommodations. The expertise, experience, and recommendations of students living with disabilities must be central in gender-based violence work on campus.

"I think that we need to be actively recruited and consulted and compensated. Like when we're talking about universities consulting students, there needs to be an active effort to [say], "we're not going to leave out neurodivergent, mad and disabled students." And also not treat us like tokens."

"One of the main issues is the burden of proof placed on victims to prove both their assault and its impacts on their mental and physical well-being. It should not be placed on a survivor's shoulders to beg for accommodations and retraumatize themselves."

6. Mandate the creation and sustainable funding of trauma-informed Sexual Violence Response Offices (SVROs).

Postsecondary institutions must offer streamlined, student-directed accompaniment through reporting, support and accommodations. When SVROs have adequate funding and staffing, they can play a major role in coordinating this support. They can also help minimise or eliminate the role played by policing and security in favour of specialised, survivor-focused staff.

"We have a centre...which has some great people, but they have low capacity - I think 4 staff people for a school of 20,000+ students, let alone training for staff and admin."

"These centres exist but aren't supported. It's just... the will is not there."

7. Build institutional capacity to meaningfully foster equity and support the diverse range of students impacted by GBV.

Fostering equity means fighting racism, ableism, transphobia, homophobia, classism and anti-sex work discrimination. Institutions need to move beyond superficial claims about diversity, to address imbalances and abuses of power. Students report a broad lack of cultural competency among counsellors and other staff, and reject token measures, such as hiring one counsellor of colour without addressing systemic racism.

"It's so important to consider an array of voices and experience, because violence doesn't look the same for everyone."

"Because of the prevalence of white cis people in fields like [counselling] it's like you can't talk to them candidly about racism, about being queer, etc. so what else is there to talk about?"

8. Coordinate privacy law reform at the national level to protect survivors and prohibit its use as a silencing tool.

Participants report the use of non-disclosure agreements and defamation lawsuits to intimidate and silence survivors, and being impeded from knowing the outcomes of GBV complaint processes. Advocates worldwide condemn using these measures under the guise of "privacy protection."

"Privacy restrictions...work in the favour of the perpetrator of sexual violence and not the survivor. In the case of predatory professors, anyone who tries to warn a fellow staff member or student that a professor has a history of abuse is violating privacy law."

"I would like to see privacy laws reformed so that survivors can know the specific punishments/ conditions levied against their abusers. Currently, many universities state that they cannot share certain details of sexual violence investigations because they are governed by provincial and federal laws."

9. Adequately resource campus support and accountability work, including student-led initiatives.

We call for federal funding that moves beyond symbolic commitments to campus GBV support. Participants frequently link the presence of active and vocal survivors on campus to increased feelings of safety. They also describe long wait times for counselling, and sexual violence response staff with high turnover rates that students attributed to burnout.

"Lack of supports is apparent, but so is lack of care for the supports that do exist. The staff we do have are overworked and burned out and it's clear the admins don't see a problem."

"[F]unding is super important, not because it allows programs and people to keep their livelihoods and feel supported, but also, we live in a capitalist society. Money talks. Money makes people move. And without that money, people just don't move. And oftentimes, anti sexual violence work...feels like an afterthought from a lot of government initiatives, university initiatives, because there's no money backing it."

10. Meaningfully consult and fairly compensate students and survivors involved in GBV policy, prevention and support work.

Students tell us they often feel tokenised and silenced in institutional policy committees. Meaningful consultation means being open to student views and experiences, and making genuine efforts to improve the lives of student survivors in ways that are accessible to their participation. For many of the most marginalised students, improving accessibility would include paying for their time.

"We're often asked on campus to do a lot of free labour. And it's like we're supposed to be grateful for being given a platform. And sometimes you just take it because the alternative is no representation."

"What is really missing is students' voices. Students should get more input in terms of how they wish these issues to be addressed."

THIS SUMMARY REPORT CAN BE CITED AS:

Protetch, N. and Rosser, E. 2021. "Report Summary: Crucial Voices Report on SFCC Student consultations for the National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence, 2020-2021". Prepared for Students for Consent Culture Canada. Canada's National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence.

This project has been funded by Women and Gender Equality Canada.



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