

BOARD POSITION STATEMENT

Students require post-secondary policies that clearly outline a commitment to responding to disclosures of violence. Their policy should be consistent for all types of relationship violence and sexual assault. Survivors of all types of dating and domestic violence (e.g. emotional, physical, and sexual) are more likely to report under an inclusive policy, which identifies dating violence, as well as sexual violence.

Four out of five female undergraduate students surveyed at Canadian universities report experiencing dating violence—that is, physical, sexual or psychological assault by a dating partner—and of that number, 29% report experiencing sexual assault (DeKeseredy, 2011, p. 26; National Clearinghouse on Family Violence, 2006, p. 1)

Sexual violence on campus is a live issue. The recent focus recognizes that sexual violence impacts all members of post-secondary institutions in Alberta. ACWS commends the Alberta and federal government for demonstrating leadership by facilitating discussion with post-secondary schools on sexual violence policies across the province. This represents an invaluable step in bringing awareness to the issue.

ACWS welcomes the opportunity to take further steps in this regard by enhancing existing policies to include students who have experienced emotional, physical or sexual abuse policies in a dating or spousal relationship. Addressing the needs of these students will help them feel empowered to step forward in the context of abuse and seek the necessary, and appropriate, supports on campus, in shelters or through the criminal justice system.

Sexual violence policy should seek to support victims and survivors. The policy should encourage people who have experienced violence to access supports available on campus and off. This requires that people see how the policy might apply to their experience and be willing to disclose.

The evidence shows that all types of dating and domestic violence (including sexual violence) is under-reported. Victims/survivors of all types of dating and domestic violence (e.g. emotional, physical, and sexual) are unlikely to report under a sexual violence policy - even if they have experienced sexual violence - because the policy may not appear relevant to them.

Broadening the scope of sexual violence policies (including a requirement for prevention education to increase awareness) will encourage earlier access to support and resources. Evidence from post-secondary schools in the US suggests that this will also mitigate against the stigma associated with identifying solely as a victim of sexual violence. ¹

¹ These expanded policies now include dating violence, domestic violence, and stalking in addition to existing requirements specific to sexual assault.

Dating violence accounted for 53% of police-reported incidents of intimate partner violence, while spousal violence represented 47%.

As with violent crime in general, adults in their twenties and thirties experienced the greatest risk of violent victimization by an intimate partner. In particular, rates of intimate partner violence were highest among 20- to 24-year olds.

From Juristat, Family violence in Canada: A statistic profile, 2013

Recommendations

Students require post-secondary policies that clearly outline a commitment to responding to disclosures of violence. These policies must stipulate how authorities will contribute to awareness, education and prevention. Clear protocols of support for victims/survivors, managing disclosures, and investigative processes are essential. Policies for all types of relationship violence and sexual assault should be consistent. Institutions should be accountable for reporting outcomes, and providing services, in collaboration with community partners. Policies for employees, in addition to students, are also essential.

As part of the process of developing dating, domestic and sexual violence policies, campus communities can (and should) offer a range of activities associated with prevention and early intervention. This will increase awareness about risk, resources, consent, and strategies for bystander interventions. Focusing on healthy relationships contributes to students' capacity to differentiate between healthy and unhealthy relationships. Providing training for students and employees on responding to disclosures of all types of abuse promotes safer campus communities.

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