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# Culture and Perspectives on a Sexual Assault Policy

Cape Breton University



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### LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Cape Breton University recognizes that Cape Breton Island is in Mi'kma'ki, the ancestral and unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq People.

### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

There are many people to thank for their contributions to the CAPSAP research project that has generated this report. To begin, we would like to thank Dr. KelleyAnne Malinen, principal investigator on this inter-university project. Her ongoing commitment and leadership has given us the opportunity to contribute to impactful change across the province. In addition, to Brooke Van Tassel for her never ending help and work on this project, Derrick Hayes for his help with research assistant recruitment; Gurmit Kaur, for her help with research assistant recruitment; Scott Thomas, Donalda Johnston and Helen Luedee for their participation at the research assistant training session; Lydia McIsaac, Kalie Wang, Terry Gibbs, Jill Ellsworth, Donalda Johnston, Scott Thomas, Karen Bernard, Christina Sanford and Rachel Doucette for being on our expert panels; Nicole MacDougall and John Mayich for institutional support. We want to acknowledge the hard work of the research assistants who recruited participants and facilitated focus groups: Julie Baribault, Sachu Krishna, Thram Phan, Yan Li, Annabel Alu, Elizabeth Umwali, Chenxi He, Umair Ashfaq, Gurmit Kaur, Ryan Magee and Quang Tran. Special thanks to Julie, Gurmit and Annabel for transcribing focus group audio.



## TERMS

In this report, “They” is sometimes used as a gender-neutral singular pronoun.

**Critical Review:** Actively and skillfully conceptualizing, analyzing, synthesizing, evaluating, and applying information gathered from complex subject matter.

**Definitions for the following terms are as they appear in the CBU Sexual Assault Policy:**

**Sexual Violence:** means sexual act or acts targeting a person’s sexuality, gender identity, or gender expression that is committed, threatened, or attempted against a person without the person’s Consent and may occur in person, in writing, by phone, or by any means of communication, including online and social media.

**Sexual Violence Includes:**

1. Sexual assault: sexual contact with another person without that person’s consent.
2. Sexual harassment: conduct of a Sexual Nature whereby sexual activity is made an explicit or implicit term or condition of an individual’s employment or status in a course, program, or activity; or, is used as a basis for an employment or educational decision affecting an individual; or the effect of which is to impair that person’s work or educational performance where it is known or ought to be known that the conduct is unwelcome.

**Conduct of a Sexual Nature:** any conduct which seeks the sexual attention or sexual favor of the person to whom it is directed; treats the other person as an object of sexual desire; is discriminatory or hostile to a person because of the person’s sex or gender identity; and that creates for such a person an intimidating, hostile, or offensive working, learning, extracurricular or, in the residences, living environment.

**Consent:** free, informed, expressed and ongoing agreement to engage in sexual activity and cannot occur when a person is incapable of consenting to the activity, for example, when a person is rendered incapacitated by alcohol or drugs, is unconscious, or where the sexual activity has been induced by conduct that constitutes an abuse of a relationship of trust, power, or authority. Consent to sexual activity can be revoked at any time.

**Disclosing:** telling a CBU employee or ally of an incident of Sexual Violence for the purpose of seeking support.

**Procedural Fairness:** a process absent of bias where the respondent is informed of the allegations made against them; that includes a meaningful opportunity to defend against such allegations, including the right to be given sufficient notice of interviews or meetings where they are expected to present evidence or their perspective on the facts or on evidence; gathered as part of the process; and leading to a decision that includes an explanation of the grounds on which it is based.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report explains research findings from Phase 2 of CAPSAP (Culture and Perspectives on a Sexual Assault Policy) at Cape Breton University. CAPSAP is a project which explores domestic, international and culturally diverse student responses to a Policy Against Sexual Assault. The study is based on focus groups that are homogeneous for gender and cultural region of origin. CAPSAP identifies and explores culturally specific lenses for sexual assault as well as applicable policy and supports. Results from the CAPSAP study have been used to formulate recommendations for culturally sensitive and anti-racist university policy against sexual assault, services and programming that are found in this report. We acknowledge that some of the recommendations may already be in motion at CBU.

A public health lens with a constant comparative method of analysis was utilized. A deductive approach was used; whereby, codes, sub-themes and themes were continuously reviewed, expanded and collapsed through ongoing team discussions until the key ideas and trends emerged. The codes, sub-themes and themes combined with supporting literature informed the development of the recommendations outlined in this report. The research team arrived at several sub-themes, which elicited seven overarching themes: Increasing Awareness for All, Utilizing Website and Marketing Strategies, Ongoing and Consistent Education, Enhanced Reporting, Extensive Policy Communication, Improved Sustainability, and Continuous and Transparent Evaluation. The recommendations were discussed with research assistants to ensure they captured the authenticity and accuracy of the focus group discussions. Lastly, the recommendations were vetted by three panels consisting of local experts in the fields of social justice, human rights, mental health, sexual assault, international student experience, marketing, and Indigenous health.

## INTRODUCTION

It is widely estimated that one in four university women experiences sexual assault during their postsecondary education. Moreover, over half of Canadian University students (59.7%) report having a poor understanding of the Sexual Violence supports, services, and reporting procedures at their university (CCI Research, 2019). This research, entitled “Culture and Perspectives on a Sexual Assault Policy” (CAPSAP), explores international, African Nova-Scotian and settler Canadian student responses to a Policy Against Sexual Assault at four Nova Scotian universities; Mount Saint Vincent University, Cape-Breton University, Dalhousie University, and Saint Mary's University. CAPSAP research identifies and explores culturally specific lenses for sexual assault as well as applicable policy and supports. Phase one examined MSVU students' responses to their Policy Against Sexual Assault, while Phase two expanded CAPSAP's reach to include the other universities mentioned as-well as African-Nova Scotian focus groups.

At the time of the CBU focus groups, the campus sexual assault policy had been in existence since 2016. A revised policy was in the advanced stages of being drafted, therefore participants explored this draft policy. Resulting information was used to formulate recommendations for policies and services that are consistent with culturally sensitive and anti-racist practice. Using a grounded theory method of analysis, CAPSAP explored cultural and gendered influences that may shape whether and how the new policy will be taken up by students. After analyzing the transcripts, the data was critically examined to propose recommendations for university-level sexual assault services.

The resulting information was used to formulate recommendations for improvements to the existing policy and services that are consistent with culturally sensitive, survivor-centric and anti-racist practice. CAPSAP 2 explored cultural and gendered influences that may shape whether and how the policy will be taken up by students. After analyzing the transcripts, the data was critically examined to propose recommendations for university-level sexual assault services.

## RATIONALE AND CONTEXT

Much of the research on understandings of sexual violence focuses on students in the US without distinguishing among the diverse cultures from which student participants may hail, and the research offers little in the way of culturally comparative data. Research that has examined how sexual assault is understood or experienced outside of Canada or the United States shows some patterns of thought that are similar to those found in mainstream Canadian culture and others that are distinct relative to mainstream Canadian or U.S. thinking.

The ideas that sexual intimacy is owed to one's partner, and that victims of sexual violence carry blame, shame, and stigma are experienced not only by Canadians but by many citizens in many other cultural communities around the world. However, research exploring survivor perspectives also provides many reasons to believe that students from diverse regions will relate to a Policy Against Sexual Assault in diverse ways. The literature includes discussion of victim-blaming. Research explores women's perceptions of survivors' believability and/or responsibility as well as blame and ostracization of survivors (Shan, 2013). Fear of victim-blaming is discussed in relation to the criminal justice system and community relationships, such as between friends and



family members. The fear of being blamed is well understood to have a silencing effect on survivor speech (Chan, 2009; Dussich, 2001; Babalola, John, Cernigliaro, & Dodo, 2015; Toktaş & Diner, 2015). Research suggests that many students and survivors do not trust the courts to arrive at just conclusions (Shan, 2013; Chan, 2015; Babalola et al.; 2015). Moreover, women of African descent are less likely to disclose their assaulters than white women because of their distrust in the police and a criminal justice system that disproportionately fails to take seriously violence against women of colour and disproportionately prosecutes, convicts, and sentences men of colour (Shan, 2013). This fear of institutions is also located within immigrant communities. Immigrant survivors often choose to keep their assault secret for fear of being deported (Shan, 2013). Research also suggests fear of the consequences of disclosing has generated a culture of silence among survivors in Asian countries.

In some cultures, sexual assault research is in its infancy or avoided altogether. Cultural stigmas are seen by scholars as stifling research and discouraging survivors from disclosing or reporting due to a fear of repercussions. For example, concerns that “reporting would cause trouble,” that “police would be rude or would violate their confidentiality,” or that “the offender’s revenge would get them in trouble” have resulted in Chinese survivors hesitating to seek medical care and other professional help (Chan, 2015, p.79). The ideas of confrontation and litigation are understood to be primarily Western ideas, not universally shared (Chan, 2015; Dussich 2001; Babalola et al., 2015).

Intercultural communication is also relevant to CAPSAP, since we are seeking to identify modes of interaction likely to constitute effective (or ineffective) sexual assault supports for groups of students in culturally diverse contexts. We take up intercultural communication in a mode critical of the drive toward universality and the eradication of difference characterizing some work in this area. We work in a register that privileges the importance of listening to those who are “other” relative to Canada’s settler colonial mainstream instead of working to assimilate racialized and cultural “others” to that norm (MacDonald & O’Regan, 2013). We are mindful, in the words of Kim and Hubbard (2007) that “If intercultural communications/discourse is a form of social interaction, then it necessarily involves power” (230).

As indicated by Lee & Wong (2019), universities are responsible for upholding the rights of the accused and the survivor while also ensuring that the survivor is sufficiently supported during their healing process. Universities also seek to foster a culture of consent and ensure that their campuses are safe, no doubt motivated in part by the drive to minimize liability. By providing an opportunity for students from a range of cultural backgrounds represented at CBU to discuss a draft of the new CBU Sexual Violence Policy, the CAPSAP project has raised awareness, and provided insight into how cultural region of origin shapes whether and how students are likely to use the new policy, what kinds of support students may require in the process, and how to best communicate information about sexual violence and the Sexual Violence Policy so that it reaches members of the university community across cultures.

## **METHODOLOGY**

Through collaboration with Marcy MacKinnon, CBU Senior Planning Officer, cultural communities large enough to support recruitment of one, five to seven-person female-identified focus group and/or one, five to seven-person male identified focus group were uncovered. Gender non-binary individuals were not included because it was impossible to create culturally specific non-binary focus groups due to small numbers. The cultural communities represented in CBU focus groups include: China, North India, South India, West Africa, East-Africa, South-East Asia and domestic. We were unable to recruit male focus groups for East or West Africa.

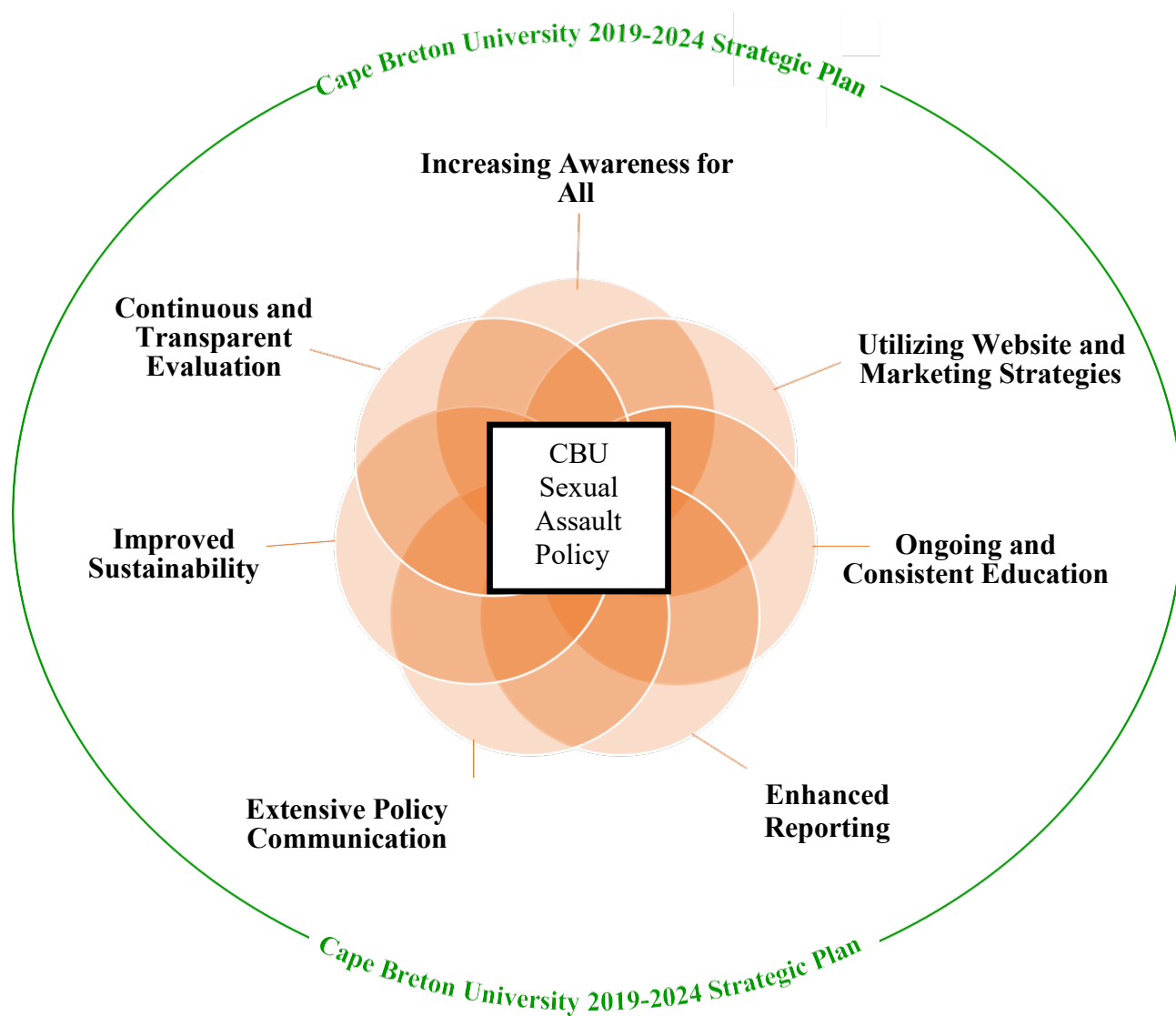
In advance of conducting fieldwork, facilitator RAs completed an eleven-hour training that prepared them for recruiting, facilitating, and transcribing and familiarized them with trauma-informed practice and our Sexual Violence Policy. After the training, facilitators recruited participants from students sharing their cultural and gender identities. Focus groups lasted 1-2 hours, including time for reviewing consent forms, and for learning about the CBU Draft Sexual Violence policy. After these steps, facilitators followed a semi-structured interview guide to engage participants in the discussion of 1) participants' prior awareness of the policy; 2) perceived relevance or irrelevance of the policy to participants; 3) whether and how participants imagine using the policy; 4) advice for those within postsecondary institutions who may support survivors from participants' cultural communities. Participants received a list of sexual assault resources and an Amazon gift certificate for \$25. The anonymized data for each participating institution was analyzed, and institutional reports (such as this) were generated focused on research-based recommendations. Transcripts were analyzed using Atlas.ti to identify cultural differences and similarities in perceptions of sexual assault and of policies against sexual assault. The analysis was subject to review by CAPSAP collaborators with expertise in gendered violence and/or cultural diversity.

## **COVID-19 IMPACT**

In order to adapt to social distancing protocols introduced to slow the spread of the COVID-19 virus, we conducted several changes to phase one methodology. Focus groups were migrated online and facilitated via Collaborate. To protect the identities of participants, participants joined with audio only using pseudonyms such as Participant 1 and Participant 2. They were also required to use headphones for the focus group so that even if another party enters the room in from which a participant is taking part, participants joining from other locations will not be seen or heard. Second, rather than having each facilitator RA transcribe her or his own focus group, which would have required exchange of transcription pedals, we designated 10 transcriptionists among all facilitator RAs. This balance had the added benefit of providing additional work to RAs who had additional time on their hands in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, while alleviating the workload of RAs who have less time on their hands in the context of the pandemic.

## THEMATIC ANALYSIS

Seven themes emerged from the research regarding CBU's 2019 sexual violence policy draft. This report examines each theme, outlines supporting student voices and provides recommendations for policy improvement. In addition, the report demonstrates how each theme is connected to the 2019-2024 Strategic Plan.







## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY IMPROVEMENT

### Increasing Awareness for All

- Include a link to the CBU sexual violence policy in course syllabi/Moodle templates.
- Offer more frequent education opportunities for CBU faculty and staff on a trauma-informed approach to sexual violence disclosures.
- Broaden the faculty and staff orientation of health and safety to include sexual violence policy education.

### Utilizing Website and Marketing Strategies

- Change the CBU's sexual violence weblink to a concise URL (e.g., [www.cbu.ca/SVP](http://www.cbu.ca/SVP)), connected to the main page.
- Consistently promote the sexual violence policy and strategies for sexual violence prevention through creative mediums and in diverse languages.
- Engage CBU Marketing and Communications department to creatively develop and frequently promote sexual violence prevention materials.
- The CBU sexual violence website should list the community-based SANE program as the first point of contact for non-historical sexual assaults.
- Develop an updated abbreviated version of the sexual violence policy (e.g., flow-chart diagram).
- Translate the abbreviated version of the sexual violence policy (e.g., flow-chart diagram) into the most spoken languages on campus
- Increase visual exposure of key support persons such as head of security, human rights officer, counsellors, Max Bell Centre Health Services staff, and chaplain by utilizing video screens throughout campus.

### Ongoing and Consistent Education

- Promote open dialogue related to sex, sexuality, and healthy relationships.
- Promote safe spaces for supportive and open dialogue to foster intercultural learning opportunities.
- Deliver mandatory education of Canadian law about sexual violence and sexual consent during student orientation.
- Deliver mandatory education of diverse cultural communication norms (verbal and non-verbal) during student orientation.
- Deliver comprehensive education related to debunking common rape myths, gender norms, and victim-blaming attitudes.
- Ensure that sexual violence education and awareness material includes statistics about false allegations.
- Commit to sustainable funding for the integration of intersectional and trauma-informed sexual violence services and education.
- Work with broader movements such as The Moose Hide Campaign to end gender-based violence (<https://www.moosehidecampaign.ca/>).
- Promote and consistently offer Bystander Training.
- Support and promote research and evaluation on the impact of a culturally responsive sexual violence policy.

### Enhanced Reporting

- Increase accountability to all stakeholders (e.g., students, faculty, government) regarding disclosures and reporting.
- Provide alternate methods of reporting and disclosing using a trauma-informed approach (e.g., text messaging or web-based).
- Improve processes for Third-Party disclosures.

### Extensive Policy Communication

- Ensure that the primary service responder to an acute assault is the community-based SANE program.
- Stronger emphasis and language within the policy regarding confidentiality and anonymity.
- Provide a clear statement within the policy that dismisses survivor fears related to reporting and the impact on immigration and/or visa status.
- Broaden the *Immunity Clause* to include drugs and other illicit substances.
- Include an official statement prohibiting retaliation against students who file a report and clearly outline consequences for retaliation.
- Outline a list of possible respondent consequences (legal and institutional level).
- Deliver regular and scheduled updates for victims and respondents.

### Improved Sustainability

- Initiating strong relationships and collaborating with community-based organizations committed to understanding sexual violence and diversity.
- Improve security standards for entrance into campus residence
- Development of a culturally representative peer liaison program.
- Hire a Violence Prevention and Survivor Support coordinator.
- Provide fully funded counselling services

### Continuous and Transparent Evaluation

- Implementation of annual campus climate surveys to inform the 3-year policy review process.
- Ensure a variety of platforms for data collection and feedback from students, faculty, and staff (e.g., online surveys, focus groups, town halls, etc.).
- Provide a formal, annual report to key stakeholders (e.g., students, government, etc.) outlining relevant statistics such as number of disclosures, category of incident (e.g., sexual assault, sexual harassment, exploitation, etc.) referral sources (e.g., health services, RAs, faculty, etc.), actions taken, and prevention strategies.
- Implementation of a robust monitoring and evaluating framework for ongoing assessment.
- Stay informed of the most up-to-date recommendations for responding to and preventing sexual violence on Canadian university campuses.

## Increasing Awareness for All

A positive culture of respect and acceptance is the responsibility of all CBU constituents. These values are well supported by the CBU sexual violence policy. The policy applies to students, faculty, staff, and administrators, necessitating policy knowledge by all constituents. Additionally, it must be acknowledged that faculty, staff and administrators are in a position of trust with students; therefore, education related to power relationships and sexual violence will assist in prevention efforts. CBU is committed to raising awareness and increasing education on sexual violence to enhance prevention efforts. Although some students noted that those in a student leadership role (i.e. resident assistants) might have policy awareness, most focus groups identified a lack of policy visibility and awareness of sexual violence prevention.

## Student Voices

*“I have no clue about the sexual assault policy.”* (East African, female-identified)

*“So, I have been at CBU for about two semesters now and to be honest, neither have I been ever informed about this policy or a previous policy. So even though they have good measures in place, I think there is a lack of awareness.”* (North Indian, female-identified)

*“I didn’t know the fact that the policy exists. I’ve never actually seen um, one um, anywhere.”* (Canadian, male-identified)

*“Because all international students come from different culture, different background, different religion, different norms, so its good to uhm, let everyone know how Canadian uhm, response to this kind of things.”* (Chinese, female-identified)

## Recommendations for Policy Improvement

- Include a link to the CBU sexual violence policy in course syllabi/Moodle templates.
- Offer more frequent education opportunities for CBU faculty and staff on a trauma-informed approach to sexual violence disclosures.
- Broaden the faculty and staff orientation of health and safety to include sexual violence policy education.

## Connections to CBU Strategic Plan 2019-2024

### INVEST IN OUR STUDENTS

- STRATEGY 1.3 Promoting wellness and fostering a sense of belonging
- STRATEGY 1.4 Improving campus life and providing a Canadian experience that is uniquely Cape Breton

### INDIGENIZE THE L’NU WAY

- STRATEGY 3.4 Making university education and resources increasingly accessible to L’nu learners

### EMPOWER FACULTY AND STAFF

- STRATEGY 5.3 Increase opportunities for mentoring and professional development

## Utilizing Website and Marketing Strategies

Increasing policy awareness and knowledge contributes positively to increased sexual violence reporting, treatment uptake, and prevention efforts. Institutions prioritize sexual violence with a sustainable commitment to resources and ongoing creative marketing of sexual violence policy awareness and prevention. To that end, marketing strategies should encompass sexual violence knowledge in diverse languages through frequently and widely shared campaigns. Many focus groups discussed the importance of building trust with those who they will encounter during a disclosure or report; thereby, indicating the need to familiarize students with faces and names of relevant individuals. Other students also indicated a need for trauma informed responders 24/7. A very well written policy remains ineffective if it does not meaningfully reach the student body.

### Student Voices

*“So, I think if we could make it like a video like a short infographic video or something that summarizes it would be much more like helpful for people.”* (West African, female-identified)

*“Like maybe for example taking a section of the policy and writing it out shorter and be like ‘for more information go too [www.cbu.sexualassault](http://www.cbu.sexualassault)’ or something like that.”* (West African, female-identified)

*“I think seeing a familiar face does help, you know...”* (East African, female-identified)

*“I know that I would feel more comfortable opening up to someone that I’ve seen before interacted with before...”* (Canadian, female-identified)

*“To me, it’s [the policy] a bit bulky an no one wants to read through everything.”* (West African, female-identified)

### Recommendations for Policy Improvement

- Change the CBU’s sexual violence weblink to a concise URL (e.g., [www.cbu.ca/SVP](http://www.cbu.ca/SVP)), connected to the main page.
- Consistently promote the sexual violence policy and strategies for sexual violence prevention through creative mediums and in diverse languages.
- Engage CBU Marketing and Communications department to creatively develop and frequently promote sexual violence prevention materials.
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- Develop an updated abbreviated version of the sexual violence policy (e.g., flow-chart diagram).
- Translate the abbreviated version of the sexual violence policy (e.g., flow-chart diagram) into the most spoken languages on campus
- Increase visual exposure of key support persons such as head of security, human rights officer, counsellors, Max Bell Centre Health Services staff, and chaplain by utilizing video screens throughout campus.



## **Connections to CBU Strategic Plan 2019-2024:**

### **INVEST IN OUR STUDENTS**

- STRATEGY 1.3 Promoting wellness and fostering a sense of belonging

### **CHAMPION THE ISLAND'S PROSPERITY**

- STRATEGY 2.3 Working with businesses, community groups, municipal governments, and individuals to develop leadership, improve communication, and advance mutual goals

### **INDIGENIZE THE L'NU WAY**

- STRATEGY 3.4 Making university education and resources increasingly accessible to L'nu learners

### **EMPOWER FACULTY AND STAFF**

- STRATEGY 5.1 Building a culture of appreciation and trust, and establishing channels for effective communication

## Ongoing and Consistent Education

Consistent feedback from the various cultural and gender groups revealed that students want and feel they need more education related to sex, sexuality, sexual violence, and the intersections of culture. Several groups of students belonging to the international student community indicated that these topics are often considered “taboo” in their culture and country of origin, which has resulted in many students relying on their peers for information. Their comments also demonstrate that they often struggle to differentiate between the various forms of sexual violence, such as sexual assault and sexual harassment. Additionally, participants expressed the importance of delivering intercultural education to assist students from all countries of origin, including domestic, navigate various types of relationships with one another. Students frequently referenced university orientation as a prime opportunity to offer this education but also recognized the benefits of presenting this information throughout the academic year.

### Student Voices

*“Like I find that talking about things like sex with my family was very difficult and those conversations were usually you know swept under the rug that we don't talk about this ...”* (North Indian, male-identified)

*“A shameful thing to talk about it; it's everywhere in Nigeria from either side. Talking about it, saying it publicly, especially for a girl, people call you a lot of names, your parents would not want that for you.”* (West African, female-identified)

*“I just don't think that people are aware enough of what it constitutes things like sexual violence and sexual assault. Some people might be thinking that it is being friendly, some people might be thinking that you know what this is how like things have always been where I've grown up, but things are different here, and I find that a lot of people get into trouble because they don't know that things are different ...”* (North Indian, male-identified)

*“I think it is important for people who are in relationships or people who are um partying together or when you become friends with someone from a different culture I think it is important to get for like an idea for like what an idea of consent means and what their idea of touching with their comfortable with ...”* (Canadian, female-identified)

*“Implement presentation in orientation for all the new students between all the sections. Because all international students come from different culture, different background, different religion, different norms, so it's good to uhm, let everyone know how Canadian uhm, response to this kind of things.”* (Chinese, female-identified)

*“Or for people who do such things and they are not even aware that its not okay and I feel that educating and informing people that this is right and this is not right there are actually consequences for these things, um that piece of information really makes it safer for everyone. And just keeps everyone more informed.”* (West African, female-identified)

*“I mean uhm the person/advisor they should uhm have the high awareness about cultural difference, about LGBT and things like that so when they give advice it will be you know relevant and useful uhm just like if they don't have, if the advisor don't have enough information about cultural difference uhm they will uhm give advice based on their perspective for all people, about Canadian and it's just really different from the perspective of others, that's what I mean.”* (South East Asian, male-identified)



### **Recommendations for Policy Improvement**

- Promote open dialogue related to sex, sexuality, and healthy relationships.
- Promote safe spaces for supportive and open dialogue to foster intercultural learning opportunities.
- Deliver mandatory education of Canadian law about sexual violence and sexual consent during student orientation.
- Deliver mandatory education of diverse cultural communication norms (verbal and non-verbal) during student orientation.
- Deliver comprehensive education related to debunking common rape myths, gender norms, and victim-blaming attitudes.
- Ensure that sexual violence education and awareness material includes statistics about false allegations.
- Commit to sustainable funding for the integration of intersectional and trauma-informed sexual violence services and education.
- Work with broader movements such as The Moose Hide Campaign to end gender-based violence (<https://www.moosehidecampaign.ca/>).
- Promote and consistently offer Bystander Training.
- Support and promote research and evaluation on the impact of a culturally responsive sexual violence policy.

### **Connections to CBU Strategic Plan 2019-2024**

#### **INVEST IN OUR STUDENTS**

- STRATEGY 1.1 Preparing students through quality teaching and programming to thrive in a changing world
- STRATEGY 1.3 Promoting wellness and fostering a sense of belonging
- STRATEGY 1.4 Improving campus life and providing a Canadian experience that is uniquely Cape Breton

#### **INDIGENIZE THE L'NU WAY**

- STRATEGY 3.2 Creating spaces and opportunities for recognizing truth and seeking reconciliation

#### **GLOBALIZE WITH A DIFFERENCE**

- STRATEGY 4.1 Embedding global perspectives in the curriculum and campus traditions
- STRATEGY 4.2 Expanding and promoting opportunities for international learning experiences and research partnerships
- STRATEGY 4.3 Attracting students from many countries into a broad range of programs

## Enhanced Reporting

Many students expressed concerns and fears related to disclosing or reporting an incident of sexual violence. Students most discussed shame, damaged individual and family reputation, concerns about confidentiality, fear of retaliation, and cultural differences and lack of familiarity between the victim and support person(s) as barriers to reporting. Based on their comments, it appears that students from various cultures may prioritize individual and family reputation over the care and support they should receive following disclosure or report. Furthermore, male-identified students articulated their fear of being falsely accused of sexual violence.

### Student Voices

*“First of all, as we all know that this is something that can damage the honor of that friend. What if her future boyfriend knows about this. What if uh, future husband knows this right.”* (Chinese, female-identified)

*“I have a friend when he was a child, he was er, sexual harassing by, by his teacher. Er, a woman teacher, her middle-aged woman teacher. And he was so scared to talk this to his parents for, for he think it’s um...shameful. Er, he is afraid that the, the retaliation of his teacher ... the one factor of the, of those victims are afraid, too scared to report this since...for the reputation and the, the perspectives of this society to the victims.”* (Chinese, male-identified)

*“It doesn’t say anything much about the culture here cause you know that in South East Asia people especially the young people they are not really comfortable reporting such thing call sexual violence because they fear of losing faith or being disclosing their confidentiality.”* (South East Asian, male-identified)

*“I think seeing a familiar face does help, you know .... if you see somebody from your country is there with you.”* (East African, female-identified)

*“So, as a personal like fear, I’m more afraid of being falsely like having false allegation against me than actually um, being harassed, you know.”* (Canadian, male-identified)

*“My friends asked like how the, if there was a false allegation and how [unclear 0:22:03], ... Like, what action would be taken?”* (South Indian, male-identified)

### Recommendations for Policy Improvement

- Increase accountability to all stakeholders (e.g., students, faculty, government) regarding disclosures and reporting.
- Provide alternate methods of reporting and disclosing using a trauma-informed approach (e.g., text messaging or web-based).
- Improve processes for Third-Party disclosures.



## **Connections to CBU Strategic Plan 2019-2024:**

### **INVEST IN OUR STUDENTS**

- STRATEGY 1.3 Promoting wellness and fostering a sense of belonging
- STRATEGY 1.4 Improving campus life and providing a Canadian experience that is uniquely Cape Breton

### **EMPOWER FACULTY AND STAFF**

- STRATEGY 5.1 Building a culture of appreciation and trust and establishing channels for effective communication
- STRATEGY 5.4 Enriching the working environment and enhancing personal wellness

## Extensive Policy Communication

The sexual violence policy must be clear to all students by effectively communicating the resources, options and circumstances outlined in the document. Moreover, clarifying how the university handles anonymity and confidentiality may encourage students to seek help, as the data demonstrates students' fears of being exposed. The data also show that students are also fearful of retaliation from the accused. This emphasizes the importance of policy communication. Effective messaging may also decrease the fear that reporting may impact student visa or immigration status.

### Student Voices

*"I feel like it's yeah, I don't know, just this it's very important that everyone knows that the actions have consequences, so ... it's really important everyone knows, um, what, how their actions will be affected..."* (East African, female-identified)

*"How would, like, the criminal justice system, like, would it act like, in the policy, like, later, when you go to the police aspect-side. Like, investigating on that, how, would that be like, would that be eligible in a way, cause I'm not a Canadian?"* (East African, female-identified)

*"I think this policy has not shed light on the seriousness of revenge or the retaliation from the person accused. I think all the respondents will be informed of the Universities position regarding the seriousness of any allegations of revenge against the, the person who got hurt, a witness or other involved you know."* (Chinese, female-identified)

*"Yeah, I'd like to ask the same question that I told you earlier. Like how the whole system works. Like how confidential, if the person who is disclosing their issue, like would that be known to everyone or is that it'll be restricted to only those people who are supposed to be in the investigation team or...? Yeah, like that."* (South Indian, male-identified)

*"I think that anonymity is a big question that I have, because so many times when these things come out in the university and in the open, the victim you know is re-pressurized and re-traumatized, that they end up taking it back just to, because they don't want to go through the hassle and the trauma. And you know, all they go through so I think anonymity is very important when it comes to things like this because its all very sensitive, to be questioned by it by a number of other people is not right. So, the anonymity of the victim, how they will tackle that is not really mentioned."* (North Indian, female-identified)

### Recommendations for Policy Improvement

- Ensure that the primary service responder to an acute assault is the community-based SANE program.
- Stronger emphasis and language within the policy regarding confidentiality and anonymity.
- Provide a clear statement within the policy that dismisses survivor fears related to reporting and the impact on immigration and/or visa status.
- Broaden the *Immunity Clause* to include drugs and other illicit substances.
- Include an official statement prohibiting retaliation against students who file a report and clearly outline consequences for retaliation.
- Outline a list of possible respondent consequences (legal and institutional level).
- Deliver regular and scheduled updates for victims and respondents.



## **Connections to CBU Strategic Plan 2019-2024**

### **INVEST IN OUR STUDENTS**

- STRATEGY 1.3 Promoting wellness and fostering a sense of belonging
- STRATEGY 1.4 Improving campus life and providing a Canadian experience that is uniquely Cape Breton

### **CHAMPION THE ISLAND'S PROSPERITY**

- STRATEGY 2.1 Prioritizing initiatives in areas of external need and internal expertise, such as health, tourism, cultural heritage, science-based innovation, and entrepreneurship

## Improved Sustainability

Making changes to the policy requires the university to be continuously managing available resources, working with community partners, identifying emerging gaps and ensuring the policy is aligning with the fluidity of the student demographic. To ensure a sustainable and growing policy, the data clearly show that hiring a Violence Prevention and Survivor Support coordinator would allow CBU to be a leader in sexual violence prevention and student well-being. Moreover, with over 50% of students being international, their needs and perceptions go beyond current resources and significant work is needed to effectively manage the policy and the supports that directly impact student health.

### Student Voices

*"I would look for someone, maybe from the same background. Like if we are in Canada, I would go to someone who is a Nigerian. Because she would understand me better, I wouldn't go to an Indian because the way she would handle this may be different then the way we would handle it. And probably I would go to someone who is uh is uh a female like me, I am not going to go to a guy for counseling and tell him what another guy has done to me."* (West African, female-identified)

*"Yes, yes and if they have these representatives from different places because I know we have women center right in CBU, so and there are my one of my friend working there to so she said that if one person is approaching and they can't talk to you can even go to the you can even handle that to other person form the same culture. So likewise that's what I mention, if you have some representative from each cultures for the support committee that is really good because CBU such a huge University with lots of students coming from different cultural background that, that would be a better approach I guess."* (South Indian, female-identified)

*"So, my advice would they should recruit some Southern Asian people so the language is much more important because the victim should talk in their own native language so they have more confidence and they feel they are being protected. So, I would say that those people to hire and train the Southern Asian people. The victim should speak in their own language to express their concern I think that is the better way."* (South East Asian, male-identified)

*"If you have some representative from each culture for the support committee that is really good because CBU such a huge University with lots of students coming from different cultural background that, that would be a better approach."* (South Indian, female-identified)

### Recommendations for Policy Improvement

- Initiating strong relationships and collaborating with community-based organizations committed to understanding sexual violence and diversity.
- Improve security standards for entrance into campus residence
- Development of a culturally representative peer liaison program.
- Hire a Violence Prevention and Survivor Support coordinator.
- Provide fully funded counselling services





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- STRATEGY 2.3 Working with businesses, community groups, municipal governments, and individuals to develop leadership, improve communication, and advance mutual goals

### **INDIGENIZE THE L'NU WAY**

- STRATEGY 3.1 Engaging Elders and Knowledge Keepers, and embedding L'nu perspectives in the curriculum and campus traditions
- STRATEGY 3.4 Making university education and resources increasingly accessible to L'nu learners

### **GLOBALIZE WITH A DIFFERENCE**

- STRATEGY 4.1 Embedding global perspectives in the curriculum and campus traditions
- STRATEGY 4.3 Attracting students from many countries into a broad range of programs

### **EMPOWER FACULTY & STAFF**

- STRATEGY 5.1 Building a culture of appreciation and trust, and establishing channels for effective communication

## Continuous and Transparent Evaluation

Aligning with sustainable practices, evaluating the effectiveness of the policy and available resources is necessary and needs to be an ongoing initiative. An annual student and employee survey would allow the university to receive constituent perspective and gain insight into the efficacy of the policy and available resources and identify areas for improvement. In addition, institutional transparency would allow CBU to work with community resources and partners to create a more robust and effective policy. The Violence Prevention and Survivor Support coordinator will have opportunities to connect with students, staff and faculty, community partners and other universities to best evaluate and react to the continuous evaluation of the policy, sexual violence prevention and education initiatives.

### Student Voices

*“If you want to stop the sexual assault we have to look at the respondent and how can we help them to get rid of it that's I mean the survivor's treatment and mental health treatment is important but the policy need to develop a way to help the respondent to not commit a sexual assault again because uhm based on the policy stuff I believe the respondent uhm giving a net of sexual assault is because in the past he got some problem with these sexual assault that's the reason why he's do it to the other person. So the respondent is the problem we need to develop the policy to help the respondent to get rid of the mental issues of the respondent and also help the survivor after the sexual assault as well so it's both way, it's not it focus too much on the survivor I think the respondent should be taken as well.”* (South East Asian, male-identified)

*“This procedure should be reviewed every 2 years, so it depends on the staff and the people how they go about their ways, how they go through it with people.”* (West African, female-identified)

*“So I think that in evaluating a sexual assault policy everybody's understanding of sexual assault must be taken into consideration because like uh participant 7 said uh his friend uhm was uhm whatever is behaviors were, were misconstrued as like you know being sexually inappropriate even though he was just trying to be friendly so I feel that in order for these things to stop the conversation needs to be understood from everybody but what is sexual assault, what it means to you in your community, what it has meant to you before and what it means to you now that you are apart of the Canadian university, you're in the Canadian culture.”* (North Indian, male-identified)

### Recommendations for Policy Improvement

- Implementation of annual campus climate surveys to inform the 3-year policy review process.
- Ensure a variety of platforms for data collection and feedback from students, faculty, and staff (e.g., online surveys, focus groups, town halls, etc.).
- Provide a formal, annual report to key stakeholders (e.g., students, government, etc.) outlining relevant statistics such as number of disclosures, category of incident (e.g., sexual assault, sexual harassment, exploitation, etc.) referral sources (e.g., health services, RAs, faculty, etc.), actions taken, and prevention strategies.
- Implementation of a robust monitoring and evaluating framework for ongoing assessment.
- Stay informed of the most up-to-date recommendations for responding to and preventing sexual violence on Canadian university campuses.



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