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# CAPSAP Report: Saint Mary's University



**Culture and  
Perspectives on a  
Sexual Assault Policy**

**CAPSAP REPORT SMU**

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## **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 SMU Policy Against Sexual Assault:**

**Sexual Violence:** any act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, or other act directed against a person’s sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim.

**Sexual Assault:** any unwanted act of a sexual nature imposed by one person upon another and includes such activities as kissing, fondling, oral or anal sex, intercourse, or other forms of penetration, without consent. Sexual assault can occur between strangers but it can also occur in a dating relationship or between spouses.

**Consent:** an agreement to engage in sexual activity. It must be fully voluntary, clearly communicated, and ongoing. All sexual activities that are engaged in must be consented to. If there is consent given for a particular sexual activity, this consent does not automatically extend to other sexual activities. Consent can be withdrawn at any time, including during a sexual activity that has been previously consented to.

**Complainant:** the member of the University community who has made a Report of an incident of Sexual Violence.

**Respondent:** refers to the person or persons whom a Complainant alleges in a Report as having committed sexual violence.

**Disclosure:** when an individual(s) inform someone at the University community that an incident of Sexual Violence has occurred. It is sharing the experience with another person. Disclosure means simply letting someone know about what has occurred. Disclosure is different and separate from Reporting. Disclosure does not automatically mean, or lead to, Reporting. Some Complainants may be comfortable only with Disclosure and they may wish to leave the incident at that. Others, upon being informed of the options they have, may wish to move from Disclosing to Reporting.

**Report:** this occurs when a Complainant reveals in a formal manner to a member of the University community that they have experienced Sexual Violence with the expectation that a specific action will result from this reporting. A Report can be provided to the police, campus security, faculty, staff, or student staff. A Report differs from a Disclosure in that a Report is a request for a specific action to be initiated. There is a range of actions that can be initiated in response to the specific case as brought forward by the Complainant. The key piece with reporting is that the Complainant needs to request that action be taken; no action can be taken without the request and agreement of the Complainant.

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This paper explains research findings from Phase 2 of CAPSAP (Culture and Perspectives on a Sexual Assault Policy) at Saint Mary's University. CAPSAP is a project which explores international, and African Nova-Scotian student responses to a Policy Against Sexual Assault, comparing these to settler Canadian student responses. Despite numerous efforts, we never managed to retain an Indigenous RA to the point of having them even begin recruitment. We remain committed to the principles and values of inclusion of this group in the CAPSAP work and see that presence as integral to developing a fuller insight into University sexual violence policies and prevention, and their efficacy. As a team of researchers and academic staff members across different institutions, we continue to work on developing a plan of engagement that involves Indigenous students on all campus locations, SMU included.

The current Phase 2 study is based on focus groups that are homogenous 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 the recommendations for culturally sensitive and anti-racist university policy against sexual assault, services and programming that are found in this report.

The analysis that was generated from the collected data was based on a qualitative research method, focused on understanding the meaning that students have constructed and how they make sense of their academic, institutional and family community and their experiences with regard to the SMU Sexual Violence and Prevention Policy and the topic of sexual violence more generally. Qualitative research methods are advantageous when the intention of the research

project is to access the views and perspectives of hidden populations (such as in this case, students who come from different cultural backgrounds) on topics that many students see as very sensitive and confidential, and when the researcher intends to ascertain and theorize the students' perspective on the Policy and sexual violence). Discourse analysis was applied to the interpretation and analysis of the collected texts to ascertain common themes and patterns. The researchers' own background and expertise in the subject area helped shape the analysis and the recommendations.

## **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, Indigenous, 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 violence and assault as well as applicable policy and supports. Phase 1 examined MSVU students responses to their Policy Against Sexual Assault, while Phase 2 expanded CAPSAP's reach to include the other universities mentioned as-well as Indigenous and African-Nova Scotian domestic cultural groups.

At the time of the SMU focus groups, the Sexual Violence Policy and Procedures (No. 6-2019) had been in existence since September 2019. Through participation in focus groups and engagement with 7 open-ended questions, students explored this policy. Focus groups were held with SMU students from the following cultural regions: Canada/US/UK (female identified); China (female identified); East and Southeast Asia (female identified); Latin American (female identified); North India (male identified); South India (male and female identified); South Asia (male and female identified); Caribbean Region (female identified); Middle East and Turkey (male and female identified).

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, some studies have found that 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 stigma is 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; Babaloloa et al., 2015).

In Canada, as well as other developed countries in the Global North, a similar stigma exists. While in these geographic contexts there is more research conducted in the area of sexual violence, the impact of this research is generally not widely felt across mainstream sectors of society, and it is not adequately reflected in the way individuals and institutions think about and approach the topic of sexual violence. Unwillingness to report is widely present (see for example, the traction that the #MeToo movement gathered here, in response to decades long silences by those who experienced forms of sexual harassment and assault). Numbers of cases

and perpetrators that have been legally prosecuted remains very low, showing biases within the legal system itself, and gender based sexual violence, especially as it affects girls and women. In Canada approximately every six days a woman is killed by her intimate partner. 67% of Canadians know a woman or a girl who has experienced physical or sexual abuse, and half of all women in Canada have experienced at least one incident of physical or sexual violence since the age of 16 (for more statistics on gender based violence in Canada, see the *Canadian Women's Foundation* website and reports, accessible at <https://canadianwomen.org/>).

One new set of focus groups were introduced in CAPSAP phase, and that is the African Nova Scotian set. Initially, CAPSAP focused on international student's perspectives while domestic cultural groups were not considered. Resulting feedback and discussion from phase one emphasized the importance of including these domestic cultural groups, especially in our province of Nova Scotia. Indeed, Nova Scotia's virtual resource on sexual violence states that "feelings and reactions to sexual violence may be different and/or heightened for survivors of intergenerational trauma." Thus, ongoing and historical racism, colonialism and subsequent sexual violence experienced by both Indigenous and African-Nova Scotian students impacts their experiences with and perceptions of sexual violence and the policies against such acts. Following the work of Crenshaw and other feminists of color, and drawing on Phase 1 results, we see racism and colonialism as major categories of barriers faced by racialized students confronting sexualized violence. The CAPSAP project will help to dismantle these barriers by uplifting the voices of marginalized and often silenced cultural student groups. Recommendations cultivated to address these experiences and concerns will aid in the development of educational and awareness workshops for students and faculty as-well as applicable policies and supports.

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 SMU to discuss the SMU Sexual Violence Policy, the CAPSAP project has raised awareness, and provided insight into how culture shapes whether and how students are likely to use the policy, what kinds of support students may require in the process, and how to best communicate information about sexual assault and the Sexual Violence Policy so that it reaches members of the university community across cultures. This research has begun to inform culturally sensitive policy implementation at all of the universities involved.

## METHODOLOGY

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 identified through collaboration with administrators, Tom Brophy, Senior Director of Student Services at SMU, Lindsay Anderson, Assistant Director, Student Culture and Experience, Ysaac Rodriguez, Manager of International Student Services SMU International Centre, and Marla Cranston, the Faculty of Arts Communication Officer. Gender non-binary folks were not included because it was impossible to create culturally specific non-binary focus groups due to small numbers. Initiatives under CAPSAP 3 have been designed to include individuals who identify in non-binary gender terms. The cultural communities represented in SMU focus groups include: China; South Asia; North India; South India; Canada; USA; UK; Turkey and the Middle East; East Asia; the Caribbean, the Bahamas, and Bermuda; South America; West Africa; East Africa; African Nova-Scotia; and North African. We were able to recruit female-identified focus groups participants for all but one cultural region of interest: North Africa. On the other hand, we were unable to recruit male Facilitator RA's or participants from East Asia, the Caribbean, the Bahamas, Bermuda, South America, West Africa, East 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 SMU 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; and 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.

The analysis that was generated from the collected data was based on a qualitative research method, focused on understanding the meaning that students have constructed and how they make sense of their academic, institutional and family community and their experiences with regard to the SMU Sexual Violence and Prevention Policy and the topic of sexual violence more generally. Qualitative research methods are advantageous when the intention of the research project is to access the views and perspectives of hidden populations (such as in this case, students who come from different cultural backgrounds) and when the researcher intends to ascertain and theorize prominent issues (such as in this case, the students' perspective on the Policy and sexual violence). Discourse analysis was applied to the interpretation and analysis of the collected texts to ascertain common themes and patterns. The researchers' own background and expertise in the subject area helped shape the analysis and the recommendations.

## COVID-19 IMPACT

In order to adapt to social distancing protocols introduced to slow the spread of the COVID-19 virus, we changed several aspects of our 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 distributed work among 10 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.



## Student Perspectives on Policy-Related Issues, with Recommendations

The student comments and observations shared with the research team over the course of the fieldwork provide a wealth of information and an important insight into how they think about the Policy, as well as sexual violence more broadly, in relation to their own lives and experiences. Students also provided many suggestions and ideas about how to make the policy more relevant and visible to their own peer groups, as well as how to make it more inclusive and culturally responsive.

There were sixteen (16) SMU focus groups in total, between three (3) and seven (7) male and female identified participants in each, from the following cultural areas: Canada/US; African Nova Scotian; East Asia; South Asia; Latin America; China; the Caribbean; North India; South India; North Africa; the Middle East and Turkey.

Thirteen (13) relevant themes emerged in the course of analysis of student comments. Those themes are recorded below (some captured within a single statement in bold, some with a brief context following the statement in bold), with recommendations following each theme.

Under each theme, a selected number of statements that the students made during the focus groups are provided. These are important as first-person student statements that illustrate the meaning and scope of each theme, as well as how students in various cultural groups think about the policy and issues in sexual violence more broadly.

It is the researchers hope that the themes and recommendations will be read and given full consideration alongside the student comments.

### **1. Visibility and relevance of the Policy from the student perspective is very low**

*Consistent feedback from across the different groups indicated that students are either not familiar with the SMU policy at all and had never seen it or heard about it prior to the CAPSAP focus group, or have heard about it briefly as part of welcome week activities, but know no details about it. A few students indicated that they have heard the Policy being referenced in Bystander training sessions but had no detailed familiarity with the policy and its benefit to them. One student stated that old versions of the policy are accessible via the SMU Sexual Support website (<https://www.smu.ca/svs/welcome.html>), which makes the Policy less accessible and has the potential to create confusion. Many students affirmed the importance of the policy, but many struggled to understand its definitions, scope and the processes it describes. Students provided many suggestions as to how to make the policy more visible and relevant, some of which included: making the website more comprehensive and user friendly; creating posters highlighting relevant sections/definitions; holding regular events aimed at educating students about sexual violence and prevention; establishing peer support, training student leaders to receive disclosure and provide immediate referral to further resources or persons. All of their*

*comments pointed toward the need for the University to take a proactive approach to education around sexual violence, the Policy, and prevention in a general sense. Many students express a distrust in the institution in its ability or willingness to provide meaningful support.*

“I think it definitely reflects more of an institutional concern. The policy is not really accessible or relevant for students, especially a student in crisis...In general, policies at universities, they want to like check a box so that if something were to happen they can cover themselves”  
Canadian/UK/US female identified student).

“When I was in high school something happened, something like this, and the school did nothing, like they literally heard about it but they didn’t do anything...Coming from high school and then coming to university where you can get all of these resources, and you’re still shocked because you do not have this in your country...we don’t know how to use it, and this is how every person gets scared to share information and ask for it, so I think it’s very good to have this but also very scary because we have not received this before” (Latin American female identified student)

“There should be posters on campus...a conference at the beginning of term” (Chinese female identified student)

“Educating or creating awareness of sexual violence should take place even before reporting ...People should be educated before they have to report” (South Indian female identified student).

“I was wondering if there is any prevention...because I remember in the Women’s Centre there was this event in the gym that helped us with defense stuff, so is there any prevention attached to the sexual violence policy to encourage people to get to know more about it before it happens”  
(Latin American female identified student).

“What is important is to expand our programs and encourage students to speak out about sexual violence, prevention, getting them trained, making some of this information mandatory in some way-- if not in curriculum then in the resources” (Caribbean female identified student).

“The entire world has changed over the last 30, 40 years...Comparing to other schools...like Dalhousie and St. FX, like their policies are expansive and cover, um, a lot of things and a much more suited for like the current climate of students and sexual violence on campus. Our Policy is at least, 15 years behind” (Canadian/UK/US female identified student).

## **Recommendations:**

**Improve visibility of Policy for students and adopt a systematic approach in making all students familiar with the SMU Policy on Sexual Violence and Prevention.**

**Foster regular dialogue on the topic of sexual violence, prevention and campus resources, in various formats and modes of delivery throughout the academic year.**

**Normalize discussions relating to sexual violence as part of healthy campus culture through regular exposure to relevant educational resources, initiatives, etc.**

**2. There are no resources on contraception and its uses that are readily available in the Policy, or in other educational materials**

“In India, contraception is not something that is publicly spoken about, and so I am not sure how many people are aware of it...I feel that providing information about contraception on a website or in some other form would be useful because for example, if a woman has sexual contact with her partner and both of them were intoxicated and they don't even know that it's sexual violence or something just happened, and so in such cases she many not report but she would need medical help right away and would need information...For our ethnic group it will matter to have the right information” (South Indian female identified student).

**Recommendation:**

**Information about contraception, as well as its uses as they relate specifically to sexual violence and assault, should be included in all education and awareness-raising initiatives and all campus resources on sexual violence and prevention.**

**3. Students expressed confusion around definitions of sexual harassment, sexual violence and consent, and were unsure where some of the boundaries rest**

*Comments made by male participants from North India in particular highlighted the importance of defining the terms more clearly. Their comments show often that they struggle with the difference between sexual violence and sexual harassment. Other students too see the levels of sexual violence inflicted seen as important in delineating the boundary between harassment and violence: rape was seen as something that requires medical attention, for example, by many students. Others yet were uncertain as to how one can ascertain whether something was consensual, or if it crossed the line into sexual violence and harassment.*

“A lot of people define sexual assault in many different ways by different people, and I don't really know what constitutes sexual assault. There are some circumstances where I think the person should not come to the University but should go directly to the police” (South Asian male identified student).

“I don't really see anything that defines sexual harassment in the policy or threats.” (Caribbean female identified student).

“For me personally, I think language and sexual harassment is still considered sexual assault. But if it’s not too serious, you don’t have to call the police”. (Chinese, female identified)

“The University should give us some examples in a conference as to when we can use the policy, and in which situation it’s just words, and we don’t need to use it.” (Chinese, female identified)

“The policy should address male students as well as female. Male students need to have more education about this policy. They might not know if they did the wrong thing” . (Chinese, female identified)

“I am from the Caribbean and in the Caribbean we don’t really talk about sexual assault, we rarely talk about sex, we rarely talk about consent. ..Every relationship is different, but a lot of behaviors get normalized in our culture, I don’t want to say abuse, but a lot of issues come from a cultural dynamic” (Caribbean female identified student).

“People don’t tend to understand there is a fine line between being with a partner and that turning into sexual violence, you know, like when you are drunk, and you are with your partner, and you get into the sexual act but then you decide not to and say no but sometimes people don’t understand, so educating those people it very important” (South Indian female identified student).

“Educating people about consent and what it actually means and what it covers, like, you can have consent and not have consent after a while, that is a very fine line” (South Indian female identified student).

### **Recommendations:**

**Develop a short video that defines key terms through multiple examples and scenarios and encapsulates the key points of the Policy.**

**Increase opportunities for students to learn about consent, sexual harassment, and sexual violence throughout the academic year.**

#### **4. Students noted a lack of clarity in the scope of the Policy and the processes outlined within**

“I am not sure how useful it would be to someone in crisis” (Canadian/UK/US female identified student).

“How is the policy enforced, and does it, like, take precedence over the Code of Conduct, or does the Code take precedence over it?” Canadian/UK/US female identified student).

“The student voice is not being heard in this document...It’s like there is a brick wall between us and this policy...shutting down any conversation about the policy on campus” Canadian/UK/US female identified student).

“If somebody needs medical services, but doesn’t have money to cover it, would the University cover those expenses?” (South Asian female identified student)

“What if the sexual assault happens to a SMU student, but not on campus? Is the same policy valid? What happens then?” (South Asian female identified student)

*Specific gaps in the Policy identified by students:*

“The policy doesn’t lay out any of the procedures about who they can go to, to discuss their options, when they do a disclosure and what happens with that....It doesn’t lay out too well what are, like, the possible sanctions that can be imposed on students....It doesn’t really say that you can give a “no contact” order for this student, like, that you have the right to, um, not be really close to them in class or that sort of thing” (Canadian/UK/US female identified student).

“How long after the incident are you able to report? Is there a timeline? You also need to know how long the process is and each step in it. Do you have to be in the same class with the person who assaulted you for the whole semester before something happens? If you are on the same floor in Residence with this person, why do you do? Who makes the decision as to what happens in each scenario? I saw this person every single day and nothing was happening” (Caribbean female identified student).

“Ok, for example, I have a doubt, you decide to report...here it says about accommodation and it says what the one who did the assault might get...but what about the process of investigation, like what does it involve? I think it’s important to know.” (Latin American female identified student).

“It should be clear that there will be consequences for perpetrators, that they will actually find who did this and the person behind it and deal with it, so that the victim doesn’t feel like they are opening up for the sake of their mental health but that justice is going to be done” (South East Asian female identified student).

“I think it’s very general and intimidating almost” (Caribbean female identified student).

“What if the incident happens off campus but it’s reported on campus? I don’t understand how that works.” (South Asian male identified student).

“Why should I want to report it to the University, and not call the police? What is the benefit of using the University to help me?” (South Asian male identified student)

“I have heard that in Canada, if you are an international student, and is a sexual complaint is filed against you, you can be deported, right?” (South Indian male identified student)

“How does this policy work in cases of social media blackmailing?” (South Indian male identified student)

“I wish the policy also mentioned Canadian law related to sexual violence, so that students who have a situation like that outside of the university know how to get help.” (Chinese, female identified)

### **Recommendations:**

**Develop a Q&A forum where students can anonymously ask questions about sexual harassment, violence, assault, and the Policy itself.**

**Create posters in accessible language that emphasize key Policy points and distribute them regularly throughout the academic year across student communication channels and across campus.**

**Within the Policy, clarify the overlapping jurisdiction between the Policy and other codes and related policies on campus, and cross-reference other relevant statutes, policies or codes, internal or external, such as the SMU Code of Student Conduct, The Criminal Code of Canada and Sexual Assault, etc.**

**Clarify the relationship of the Policy to federal and provincial legislation regarding sexual harassment and sexual violence and provide links to further resources in this regard.**

**Clarify the scope of the Policy as it applies to forms of sexual harassment in person, or in the online environment.**

**Clarify the difference between Disclosure and Reporting in the Policy, as well as other campus educational materials and campaigns.**

### **5. Students expressed that both short and long term support for survivors is very important**

*Many students commented on the importance of relocating the survivor as a positive short-term action. An issue that surfaces many times in the focus group with Caribbean female identified students is how it will be ensured that the survivor is removed from the proximity to the perpetrator (if the perpetrator is attending the same course/lab, or lives in the same residence).*

“Is there any support after all of this has already happened? Let’s say I suffered from sexual assault, I speak up and all of that stuff, but do I have support after all that?” (Latin American female identified student).

“What if the person discloses and the incident affects the victim’s mental health in a very negative way and they may not be able to function very well in their studies, how can the university support them?” (South Asian male identified student)

“I would want to have a friend with me at all times, to eat, sleep, go to class with” (Chinese, female identified)

“When someone experiences something like that, it doesn’t just affect one’s mental and physical wellbeing for a short term, but for a long term which can affect daily life, which stays there constantly, constantly on someone’s mind and affects them in their career, in their future within their family, and for that to be prevented or at least minimized we need to create a circle of care, which is listening to the needs of the victim but also of the family members and friends and other people who care for the victim” (South Asian male identified student)

Protecting the privacy and confidentiality of the individual, can they request accommodation, extension on deadlines, with the University interceding on their behalf with their professors? (South Asian male identified student).

“When someone is a victim of that situation they don’t want to be reminded on this situation, because people will treat them differently, and this is not really good. They want to go back to normal life, so I think it’s not just about policies, but it’s about educating people how to treat the victims after the fact” (South Asian male identified student).

### **Recommendations:**

**Regularly promote information and materials among members of the University community about sexual violence and its physical and psychological short and long-term consequences.**

**Specify types of academic accommodations that are available to students who experience, disclose or report sexual violence on campus, with reference to the SMU Policy on Accommodations for Students (8-1021).**

**Specify types of short and long-term mental and physical health care support that students are entitled to, and ways in which the University can support them in recovery.**

**Establish clear protocol about removing the survivor from the immediate proximity of the perpetrator in both the residence context as well as the academic context.**

## **6. Concern over protecting privacy and confidentiality was strongly expressed, and was often correlated with reluctance to disclose and / or report an incident**

“How is privacy protected? What other options in reporting are there? One of the major fears for women especially is that coming forward about sexual assault will result in ridicule or everyone being able to identify them and point fingers at them” (Caribbean female identified student).

“Victim confidentiality is very important to consider” (South Asian female identified student)

Privacy and confidentiality, anonymity, and protection of personal information for the victim is seen of paramount importance by both male and female students from most regions. A survivor-centric and culturally sensitive policy needs to include additional details regarding the safeguarding of privacy and anonymity for the victim.

In many cultures in Asia—south east but also south Asia, including India, students note a close link between gender and dignity, the purity of the female body as a sign of family honour, and the loss of reputation as an irreparable harm, which presents a barrier to disclosure. The family of the perpetrator too, would see this as a loss of reputation as well, so both sides appear to be motivated to treat sexual assault as a private matter.

Student comments make it clear that doubts about the ability of the institutional process to vouchsafe privacy and confidentiality present a barrier to disclosure.

“Personally, being South Indian, reporting is the last thing I would think of. So speaking to a friend would be the first rescue. The reporting channel would be the last scenario” (South Indian female identified student).

### **Recommendations:**

**Clearly identify within the Policy a section dealing how the policy protects survivor privacy, anonymity and confidentiality.**

**Include in the Policy a Retaliation Clause, outlining the consequences for respondents who threaten to or do retaliate against a survivor.**

**Review and revise the Policy to be survivor-centric, namely, to see the process from the perspective of someone who has survived sexual violence, to ensure that correct steps to protect the privacy of the survivor are clearly stated in each relevant section.**

**Open a SANE nurses 24/7 location on campus (within the existing campus clinic space, or nearby) that would be accessible to the University community both in person as well as over their sexual assault hotline, and outline in the Policy how disclosure with them protects privacy.**

**7. Prevalence of victim blaming from among friends, family and others was reported across many different cultural groups as being a real concern; fear of being blamed as the victim was cited as a major cause of underreporting/disclosing**

*Students from diverse cultures and both gender groups noted the prevalence of victim blaming in cases of sexual harassment and violence in their home country, in the values of their peers and parents, as well as their own understanding. Some Chinese female identified students expressed that their parents would support the policy and them reporting. Some North Indian male students point out that people who come from the rural areas of their home country have very little faith in the ability of authorities to protect them or bring justice, which makes them reluctant to report. Some also spoke about the need to empower survivors to come forward to disclose or report.*

“Chinese culture is very conservative. Parents, grandparents, and older relatives will think that the reason you were assaulted is because of what you were wearing, how you dress in public, that you did something to cause it. I really have a hard time explaining this to parents. They said that if I report it to the police, the guy might go to the police himself and demand that I prove with more evidence. My father and brother would rather I don’t go out so I don’t get into trouble, like I don’t want to be on record, or something like that, but I would say, I want to catch the bad guy” (Chinese, female identified)

“Usually Asians in this kind of situations would blame the victim, they would not think of the person. They would be like, this happened because of the outfit you were wearing” (South Asian female identified student)

“I would feel more comfortable talking to strangers and the police about this, than my parents” (Chinese, female identified)

“People from my culture do not really talk about sexual assault because they properly believe that they can destroy the reputation in the community. There are privacy concerns” (North Indian male identified student).

“In our family, and usually in South India, there is a concept that the woman’s body is the most important thing for her, even when it comes to planned sex. With assault, they would assume that she is at fault in some way and they won’t be supportive of any disclosure or reporting” ((South Indian male identified student)

“I would think that it is not feasible to want to report if there is an incident because it affects the mental health of those who are involved, and there are a lot of factors that are important around the concept of disclosing personal information” (South Asian male identified student).

Students from some cultures would find it difficult to disclose and follow the policy because of these issues (South Asian male identified student).

“Some victims in my culture might feel ashamed to even disclose the incident even though it wasn’t their fault, and there are some cultures where for cultural reasons it is hard for them to just go ahead and follow the policy” (South Asian male identified student)

#### **Recommendations:**

**Active deconstruction of gendered stereotypes that underpin victim blaming should be an explicit part of all educational and awareness-raising events and materials on sexual violence and prevention that are available to students and all other members of the SMU Community.**

**Develop a one-page document targeted towards the parents/guardians that highlights the key points of the policy and information/ links to further resources and supports on the topic of sexual violence in Canada. This document would help educate family members about the nature of sexual violence and the need to stop blaming the victim.**

**8. Female identified students from China and South Asian countries especially noted they fear upon disclosing that they would be misunderstood or would not be able to explain accurately what they experienced due to a language barrier**

*Chinese female identified students noted that it would be very beneficial to have a Chinese counselor, one who understands the language and is able to help the student overcome a language barrier, but also one who is able to understand the cultural background of the student and to understand their reactions and responses better. They also noted that empathy is crucial in terms of the profile of the person who they would feel comfortable disclosing to.*

“I can’t compare with Canadians in this situation, but my perspective of being foreign is the language barrier. I would appreciate there being people who can listen to me, listen carefully, because like I could, I could make mistakes, I could make mistakes in how I say things, like I wouldn’t be able to explain myself what I exactly think. It is difficult to communicate in a second language, esp. in those difficult situations” (South Asian female identified student)

#### **Recommendations:**

**Develop a list of diverse people on campus who speak at least one more language other than English and who are trained to receive a disclosure.**

**Create a roster of a diverse group of student peer leaders who are trained to receive disclosure and who can provide immediate and accurate referral to further resources and/or persons.**

**Develop regular/annual professional development and support for all those who are trained to receive disclosure.**

**Translate the policy into the most used languages at SMU.**

### **9. Students expressed questions and concerns about what counts as evidence when a case is disclosed, reported, and investigated**

“The hardest problem for sexual violence is to collect evidence...I really want to know what evidence is valid for the police, or for security on campus. Maybe a camera? I think this would be the most valid evidence for them...What about places where there are no cameras? Does it then mean that there is no evidence to prove that something happened?” (Chinese, female identified)

“I would suggest to her to write down as many things as she can remember, so that we go and act according to the policy we have enough details and information so that they can help us out, because you know, when you are in this situation it’s overwhelming, you are so scared you don’t know what to do and having a friend that tell you something like that, you know, write it down, I think would be helpful” (Latin American female identified student).

“Sometimes they can use it against you, if you don’t...if something happens and you take your time processing it, and the more time you take in reporting, they can use that against you to, like, this person made things up because you waited a long time.” (Latin American female identified student).

“Go to a doctor or a nurse as soon as possible so you can have evidence of what happened to you, because if you wait, at the end you have evidence, and the other person can take that against you, like, you made all of this up” (Latin American female identified student).

“I want to know what kind of evidence does the policy apply to. Sometimes the only evidence is what the victim writes or says.” (South Asian female identified student)

“Usually, everyone assumes that anyone who claims that they have been sexually assaulted to be at least 90 percent right because nobody likes to go out and talk about and say, yes, I’ve been sexually abused...but how will you identify whether the person has been sexually violated or not” (North African male identified student)

### **Recommendation:**

**Based on best practices in survivor-centric policy research, include in the Policy and other educational materials information about what can serve as evidence in the context of sexual violence, disclosing, and reporting.**

## **10. Students noted that the Policy, and discussions of sexual violence more broadly, are gendered and lack cultural specificity**

*Male identified students from East Asian countries especially noted that the policy should include reference to all groups and all genders who are impacted by sexual violence, including men, as well as members of the 2SLGBTQ+ community.*

“Sexual violence is often still seen as a women’s problem” (Canadian/UK/US female identified student).

“Once I told a male friend about this kind of situation and he did not show respect to females. Respect is the most important thing” (Chinese, female identified)

“The policy should address male students as well as female. Male students need to have more education about this policy. They might not know if they did the wrong thing” (Chinese, female identified)

“A more inclusive policy would be better, to include different genders, and other cultural norms. When I was at work one week I witnessed an incident like this, not on campus, because of volunteering in a youth organization. It affected the youth community member a lot to be experiencing something like this but they were not able to express it because of stereotypes about masculinity” (South Asian male identified student)

### **Recommendations:**

**Finding creative ways to engage men in campus discussions of sexual violence, gender stereotypes, and particularly stereotypes of masculinity, is of key importance.**

**The Policy should be explicit that it applies to all genders in all situations where sexual violence has occurred on campus.**

**That sexual violence is everyone’s problem should be an explicit part of all educational and awareness-raising events and materials on sexual violence and prevention that are available to students and/or all other members of the SMU Community.**

**The Policy and other educational on-campus resources should make explicit via number of examples that different cultural beliefs and attitudes influence how we think about sexual violence (and provide examples), but also that there are some recurring issues across all cultures.**

**11. Students from various cultural regions emphasized that a survivor-centric approach should be emphasized and outlined in the Policy but also in interpersonal interactions with trained, professional staff**

*Students noted that the survivor-centric support and the nature of care the survivor receives should be rooted in culturally specific competence, sensitivity, and awareness.*

“Control is really important when you’ve been violated and lost control, and empowerment is a big focus” (Canadian/UK/US female identified student).

“Feeling of safety is really important. Having empathy for the survivor and just being able to listen without interrupting, and without judgment...Do not assume anything...learn from listening rather than projecting” (Canadian/UK/US female identified student).

“A lot of times the person blames themselves for the incident, though it’s not their fault. The victim needs support from their friends the most” (South Asian female identified student)

“The first thing should be to make sure the person is fine physically, and that the perpetrator is not nearby, so that what they can feel safe and we can proceed with information gathering” (Latin American female identified student).

“The victim needs professional support” (Chinese, female identified)

“I would listen to a professional, but also, I would listen to a friend as well” (South Asian female identified student).

“One of the reasons why it’s so shitty to live in Latin America is that everything is funny, everything is a joke, and nothing is taken seriously, so major things like these are not taken seriously, and it’s hard for the victim. So I think one thing I would like to see if that I can fully trust the person that I am going to share my experience with, and that they value and understand the story that I am going to share with them...If I don’t want to share too much, I just want to be in a safe place and just feel safe” (Latin American female identified student).

**Recommendations:**

**Ensure that whoever is directly responsible for the SMU Policy on Sexual Violence and Prevention and its implementation is a trained professional with expertise in the area of survivor-centric sexual violence support.**

**12. Diverse student perspectives on the Policy and the topic of sexual violence emphasized the importance of intercultural sensitivity, understanding and support when disclosing, reporting, and during investigation. Student comments show that specific cultural attitudes shape how both victims and perpetrators think about sexual violence and**

**disclosure. Their perspectives show that it is important to be able to interpret different interpersonal attitudes and behaviors through culture-specific lenses**

“They should be able to understand, how you say, behind the words. I also think the culture is different, so like, we don’t really hug or kiss each other in [country] or like touch each other which is normal in Canada and this can be like sexual harassment in [country]. They should be able to understand the differences between cultures, and our culture so they can help more people.” (South Asian female identified student)

“Asians are very conservative, and like the society as a whole, therefore the people are very conservative. Not a lot of people would be open about a sexual topic, we think that it’s a personal topic that we should deal with ourselves, only. My advice would be to be as respectful as possible. Don’t force it to talk about that, not a lot of people would be open to this. Instead, discuss the feelings, how are you feeling about the situation” (South Asian female identified student)

“The thought and ideology of the victim was created in the society where they grew up or what they were being taught....There should be someone who understand the cultural background of the student. Someone from a different culture may not understand fully what the student is saying” (South Asian female identified student)

“It’s really hard to share experiences with people, with other people. First, you have to understand the effort she put to talk to someone. You have to be careful what you say, as maybe, you can even hurt them more by what you say” (South Asian female identified student)

“We are very touchy as a culture around friends...For example, when I moved here the thing we do is we give two kisses when we say hi to someone, but then when I was doing it here there are people who look at me like I was trying to...you know...so it was really a big culture shock for me. So I think getting to know more about the sexual violence policy, if I was a man, to be honest...We don’t talk about things like that in Latin America.” (Latin American female identified student).

“There are many things that would be considered sexual assault in my country but are not even mentioned here” (South Asian male identified student)

“Make sure that you create an environment where it is easy to open up... in my country people are not willing to open up... So a good connection is really important, this would be the key, and it may take time. This is very different than just being able to say things openly” (South East Asian female identified student).

“This policy is not complete and strong enough to cover all the cultures. Specifically, where I come from, South Asia, there are more occurrences of sexual assault than in Canada. So according to our cultural perspective this policy is good and help people to reach out, but in our culture even the parents won’t want the name to go out because it is directly related to family

prestige. And they would stay away even from the police, and keep it a secret because of shaming and defamation. “ (South Asian male identified student)

“I would like to talk about this in respect to my particular culture. So, in my country and culture, fortunately or unfortunately there is a deep belief of a sense of purity, so that is associated as being lost by people who have experienced sexual violence. It is not just an act of sexual violence, it’s also an attack on their sense of purity and sense of religiousness and all that. So they should be able to connect to that feeling and connect to those values while they are responding to the situation” (South Asian male identified student).

“In Canada, they can’t understand how our family would react or how that situation would affect the girl and everyone else in her family...I would advise them to consider how the family background and the culture...maybe talk to their parents to help them with the decision making, instead of just letting the girl do it alone. It’s hard for her to explain to her parents what happened...People from out country, the victim is less likely to get support from her family, they would probably push them away from even disclosing or reporting” (South Indian male identified student)

“The international student centre should be involved in this and helping the victim” (South Indian male identified student)

### **Recommendations:**

**The International Student Centre, its staff and student employees, as well as the SMU Women’s Centre, should be among those entities whose members are trained to receive a disclosure, and who can be called upon to assist with cases as needed.**

**Person/s responsible for the SMU Policy and its implementation must receive training in intercultural competence. This material should clearly foreground that discussions of culture and cultural specificity equally pertain to Canadian majority populations, and their specific Anglo-Irish, Anglo-Scottish and British backgrounds and ethnicities.**

**Ensure that all members of administrative staff who may be called upon at various junctures pursuant to the processes outlined in the policy receive training on survivor-centric approaches to sexual violence investigation and support.**

### **13. Students spoke about the lack of sensitivity and training among security personnel on campus, who are often the first responders**

“Security staff on campus I believe they do have training in sexual violence but its not very clear if they have knowledge about the international community...They should really do research about our culture so they won’t make accusations or assumptions based on stereotypes” (Latin American female identified student).

“Security staff should have an orientation, or something, about how to support people who report a sexual assault” (Canadian/UK/US female identified student).

“They should be more helpful [security staff]. Once I went to them with a problem that I had on campus and at the beginning they didn’t want to help me, they were like ‘yeah, there is nothing we can do...you don’t have proof of anything...’ and I kept pushing them and pushing them to help me and they were like ‘ok, we will help you’ but they never called me or they never told me what was going on with my case, I had to go to them pretty much every day to ask, hey, what’s going on, and they were like, ‘sometimes people who were on my case are not here, or, I’m not in your case and the other person who is on your case is not here, and I can’t tell you anything and there were weeks that I didn’t know what was going on, and even three months and then they were like ‘I’m sorry but we don’t have anything to help you, and your case is closed. They never contacted me or gave me any information about what was going on’ (Latin American female identified student).

### **Recommendations:**

**All members of security staff who are employed on campus have to receive disclosure training and have to be closely familiar with all of the processes outlined in the SMU Policy on Sexual Violence and Prevention.**

**Include security staff in all educational activities and awareness-raising campus-wide initiatives relating to sexual violence and prevention and mandate their attendance annual to at least one such event as part of their professional development.**

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