

The background of the cover features a vertical strip of colorful, illuminated lanterns. The lanterns are in various colors including red, yellow, and blue, and some have intricate patterns or text on them. The lighting is warm and glowing, creating a festive atmosphere.

JANUARY 2020

# **CAPSAP Report**

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

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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 MSVU Policy Against Sexual Assault:**

**Complainant:** A victim/survivor of sexual assault who chooses to file a Report pursuant to the MSVU Policy.

**Respondent:** An individual who has been accused of sexual assault in a Report filed pursuant to the MSVU policy.

**Victim/Survivor:** An individual who has been subjected to sexualized violence. They are referred to as a complainant when they file a report under the MSVU sexual assault policy. These terms are used interchangeably throughout the report as we recognize that people who have been subjected to sexual violence have the right to choose how they want to be referred to.

**Disclosure:** When someone chooses to inform another person about an incident when they were subjected to sexual violence. A disclosure is the first point of contact.

**Report:** A formal complaint of sexual assault to Mount Saint Vincent University for the purposes of initiating an investigation and final decision, which could result in disciplinary action against the respondent.

**Rape culture:** A culture in which dominant ideas, social practices, media images, and societal institutions implicitly or explicitly condone sexual assault by normalizing or trivializing sexual violence and by blaming survivors for their own abuse.

# Executive Summary

This paper explains research findings of CAPSAP (Culture and Perspectives on a Sexual Assault Policy), a project which explores international student responses to a Policy Against Sexual Assault at MSVU, comparing these to Canadian student responses. The 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. Library research and consultations with experts were used in addition to focus group data when developing the recommendations. Participants commonly expressed a lack of knowledge surrounding sexual assault, a lack of awareness surrounding MSVU's Policy Against Sexual Assault, and/or anxiety about MSVU's services and prevention procedures for sexual assault. Certain concerns expressed during focus groups generated more culturally specific recommendations while others generated recommendations that applied across culturally delineated focus groups.

The recommendations are as follows:

- Number one: include an FAQ in the policy guide booklet discussing the rights of the respondent
- Number two: Promote the utilization of SANE nurses and Dalhousie's sexual assault hotline and develop a 24/7 disclosing service at MSVU
- Number three: disseminate sexual assault materials and campaign information on MSVU social media accounts
- Number four: develop a list of people on campus trained to receive a disclosure
- Number five: create posters that emphasize key policy points and place them in bathroom stalls
- Number six: develop a third-party disclosure form
- Number seven: cultivate creative, engaging ways to promote awareness of the Policy Against Sexual Assault, and discussions of sexual violence more broadly. Educational documents should be developed for awareness campaigns that should occur once a semester
- Number eight: ensure sexual assault educational materials avoid “explicit content” and are presented in safe locations at appropriate times.
- Number nine: dedicate a small-scale study to finding ways to engage men in discussions of sexual violence across cultures
- Number ten: develop a Q&A forum where students can anonymously ask questions about sexual assault and the Policy Against Sexual Assault

- Number eleven: produce an app that allows victims to communicate with counsellors and other survivors 24/7
- Number twelve: translate the policy into the most used languages at MSVU
- Number thirteen: develop a one-page document targeted towards parents/guardians that highlights the critical points of the policy
- Number fourteen: promote disclosing to the health office or counselling as this ensures that respondents must share their story only once. Provide education about what counselling is, how it works, and also provide culturally appropriate alternatives.
- Number fifteen: have bystander prevention training and training to receive a disclosure available for all MSVU community members
- Number sixteen: develop a 2-3-minute video that encapsulates the key policy points and defines sexual assault. Screen this video during class time.
- Number seventeen: simplify the language in the policy and the guide
- Number eighteen: Outline the informal resolution process and the criminal justice system route in the Policy Guide
- Number nineteen: have more Black representation and more diverse cultural representation among faculty, staff, and administration
- Number twenty: Provide anti-racist training in addition to Sexual Assault focused training for students and faculty

- Number twenty-one: encourage international student leaders to complete bystander prevention training and training to receive a disclosure
- Number twenty-two: incorporate Breaking the Silence Modules into Mount 101
- Number twenty-three: create a peer support network that is overseen by peer mental health support workers
- Number twenty-four: take measures to increase safety for students walking from the Bedford Highway to their residences at night
- Number twenty-five: Ensure that there are two security guards on duty at all times and hire more female security members.

Implementing these recommendations will promote access of international students and others to essential sexual assault services, in some cases by working to dismantle systemic racism that produces barriers to supports. In so doing, they will decrease the presence of rape culture on campus.

Implementation of the recommendations will simplify the disclosing and reporting process, increase the quality and accessibility of supports, promote awareness of the Policy Against Sexual Assault, advance students' knowledge on sexual violence, enhance security measures, and promote a culture of consent.

# 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 and Canadian student responses to a Policy Against Sexual Assault at MSVU to identify and explore culturally specific lenses for sexual assault as well as applicable policy and supports. At the time of the focus groups, a sexual assault policy had been in existence since 2015. A revised policy was in the advanced stages of being drafted. Participants explored this revised policy before it was finalized and released to the MSVU community at large. This information is 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.

## **Rational and Context**

Much of the research on understandings of sexual violence focuses on students in the United States 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 countries 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 color and disproportionately prosecutes, convicts, and sentences men of color (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; Babaloloa et al., 2015).

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 MSVU to discuss a draft of the new MSVU Policy Against Sexual Assault, 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 assault and the Policy Against Sexual Assault so that it reaches members of the university community across cultures. This research has begun to inform culturally sensitive policy implementation.

## **Methodology**

In the first stage of the project, with input from AVP of Student Experience Paula Barry and International Education Centre Manager Amy Braye, international communities with sufficient concentration from which to recruit for focus groups were identified amongst the student population. These included: Bermuda, the Caribbean, and the Bahamas; Canadian and American; East Asian; European; Middle Eastern; East African; and West African.

Focus groups were recruited, conducted, and transcribed by facilitator research assistants (henceforth facilitator RAs) who belonged to the same cultural regions of origin as their focus group members. Focus groups were also homogenous with respect to gender-identity. Gender non-binary folks were not included because it was impossible to create culturally specific non-binary focus groups due to small numbers. We were able to recruit female-identified focus groups for all cultural regions of interest. On the other hand, with the two exceptions of Canada/US and West Africa, we were unable to recruit male-identified RA facilitators, and therefore unable to recruit male-identified focus groups.

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 Policy Against Sexual Assault.. Focus groups lasted 1-2 hours, including time for reviewing and signing consent forms, and for learning about the handout. 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 MSVU Bookstore gift certificate for \$25.

Transcripts were analyzed using MAX-QDA to identify cultural differences and similarities in perceptions of sexual assault and of policies against sexual assault. Analysis was subject to review by CAPSAP collaborators with expertise in gendered violence and/or cultural diversity.

The recommendations presented in this document were generated through the combination of transcript analysis, literature review, and consultations with experts in the area of sexual violence, sexual violence prevention, and international education. Consultation meetings lasted between 45 minutes and 2 hours. The experts consulted include Dr. Susan Brigham, a Professor at MSVU with a background in International/Intercultural education, Immigration/Integration, Critical Race Theory, and Feminism; Caryn Small Legs-Nagge, MSVUS' Harassment & Discrimination Officer; Amy Braye, Manager of the International Education Centre; and Paula Barry AVP of Student Experience. *The action plan entitled Our Turn: A Student-Led Action Plan to End Campus Sexual Violence* served as an example of useful service and policy recommendations. Some recommendations from *Our Turn* were adapted to meet culturally specific needs highlighted within the transcripts. Other recommendations arose during transcript analysis and were sometimes modified during collaboration with experts.

# Recommendations

Recommendations to address concerns raised by students from diverse cultures at MSVU emerged from the process described above. Our recommendations are as follows:

## **1. Include an FAQ in the policy guide booklet discussing the rights of the respondent.**

West African males expressed concern about the rights of the respondent, including about false accusations leading to ostracization and interruption of education as a consequence of lack of due process. For example, one participant suggested that MSVU should take the "innocent until proven guilty" stance rather than "guilty until proven innocent" stance. Participants in this group asked how the identity of the respondent would be kept confidential, and how an accusation would impact a respondent's education and future careers. In fact, confidentiality of respondents cannot be promised as there are no mechanisms prohibiting survivors from sharing their stories. Prohibiting survivor speech to protect confidentiality of respondents would silence survivors, potentially hampering their healing. However, it is also clear that men of African Descent have legitimate concerns about false accusations given the realities of racism in universities as well as the criminal justice system. Thus, when asked what advice he would offer MSVU service providers handling a sexual assault case involving a student from West Africa, one participant responded: "Treat me like how you would treat a white [...] like a citizen of Canada. Treat me with equality [...] Treat me as a human being. Yes." The input of our West African male-identified focus group suggested to us that confidentiality must be clearly defined in our policy, with examples revealing how it is and is not protected, and for whom. This discussion also provoked a recommendation for anti-racist training that is listed below.

## **2. Promote the utilization of SANE nurses and Dalhousie's sexual assault hotline and develop a 24/7 disclosing service at MSVU.**

The 9:00-5:00 operating hours of most university offices are unacceptable for sexual assault services. This critique is explicitly made by members of the Middle Eastern and European female-identified focus groups;

**Middle Eastern Female:** Another thing I am just reading here is like victim services, their hours are only until 4:30 and a lot of these things happen at like night. Like if you are out or something like that. Um, so that's a little bit of a letdown.

**Facilitator RA:** Mhm. So, this service is not like a governmental passport service or other things. This is the sexual assault reporting area, but the working areas are 9-4:30. Ridiculous maybe? (Middle-Eastern)

**European Female:** It is uncomfortable to go to the nurse's office and make an appointment 9 to 5. Especially if your incident happens in the evening and you want to talk right away. It's not convenient. Although it is available, it is not really catered to the student. The 9-5 is more catered to the people working in the office. So, if there was a call line maybe but there is nothing like that.

Lack of opportunity to disclose or report "after hours" might cause victims to stay silent who would otherwise have sought supports. Moreover, a phone line may be ineffective for those who wish to have a face-to-face discussion with a support worker. MSVU should develop a 24-hour service for these circumstances. In the meantime, SANE nurses and the Dalhousie student helpline should be promoted as a safe avenue to disclose and seek help at any time.

### **3. Disseminate sexual assault materials and campaign information on MSVU social media accounts (i.e. student union).**

This recommendation was developed in response to the lack of policy awareness among student participants indicating ineffective dissemination of past policy-related materials. Rather than posters plastered on school walls, or emails sent to the Mount Community, social media posts will reach the largest demographic of MSVU students. Social media is frequently accessed by most students at MSVU, and is a tool utilized across all cultures represented at the Mount. Accounts should be used to spread information about events, services, and other sexual violence prevention initiatives and programming.

### **4. Develop a list of people on campus trained to receive a disclosure.**

Although several folks on campus are trained to receive a disclosure, students are not aware of who they are. A participant in the European focus group notes this experience:

**European Female:** On that note, um, residence life, we have residence assistant staff that are available 24/7 that can receive a disclosure. That's just again I don't think it is visible to anyone.

When students are advised who is trained to receive a disclosure, they can select the individual with whom they expect to feel most comfortable. Amy Braye recommended not only providing a list of trained MSVU community members, but also using a signifier or symbol to mark who has completed disclosure training. This can be pinned on office doors, worn on clothing, and included in email signatures. Consent week is an excellent time to begin promoting such a symbol.

**We acknowledge that under current conditions within our white-dominated university, white, heterosexual, and cis-gendered students are likely to most easily find a trained community member with whom they identify. Other recommendations below address this inequity.**

## **5. Create posters that emphasize key policy points and place them in bathroom stalls.**

Bathroom stalls are a location that all MSVU community members have access to and utilize regularly. Developing a poster that includes essential policy points and captures student's attention will promote retention of the information. The posters should include a QR code that opens into the MSVU sexual assault webpage and other resources. QR codes are used in various countries across the globe.

## **6. Develop a third-party disclosure form.**

According to *Our Turn: A National, Student-Led Action Plan to End Campus Sexual Violence*, 90 % of those who experience sexual violence do not report their experiences to the authorities. CAPSAP transcripts are flooded with statements concerning anxiety about the disclosing process, confidentiality concerns, and fear of victim blaming. Some examples include:

**European Female:** How can we keep our personal information safe? We need to trust that service.

**Canadian Male:** So, if you report under any of this, and somebody wanted to go to Frank magazine or tell the whole community they can and it's not against the law? I think there should be a non-disclosure thing for everyone involved.

**Bermudian or Bahamian Female:** I'm saying that I probably wouldn't talk to somebody out here or from my home country. Just no. Like we run our mouth like water.

A confidential third-party disclosure form could decrease these anxieties by giving survivors the option to relay incidents to authorities without disclosing their identities to administration. In a third-party disclosure form, complainants, witnesses, or those who have reasonable concern about a sexual assault can anonymously express the details that they wish to share about the incident. The form will be submitted online, or to a secure location within the university such as the MSVU wellness center. Disclosed information is sent to administration for review and response. The third-party disclosure form should be provided online, and as a physical copy by the Student Union and/or by the Sexual Violence Prevention Committee.

While this form of disclosure will provide MSVU administration with general information about the incident, it is not considered a formal report. Therefore, an official investigation cannot proceed. A third-party disclosure form is useful as it allows survivors to share their story without having to disclose their identities. Moreover, it provides the administration with information about the incident that can be used to address systemic concerns through the development of education, training, prevention strategies and safety precautions around campus. A third-party disclosure form should not be used when the survivor is in imminent danger from the perpetrator because it does not provide enough information about the incident to protect the survivor, or for the university to take immediate action.

**7. Cultivate creative, engaging ways to promote awareness of the Policy Against Sexual Assault, and discussions of sexual violence more broadly. Educational documents should be developed for awareness campaigns that should occur once a semester.**

As suggested in *Our Turn: A National, Student-Led Action Plan to End Campus Sexual Violence*, MSVU should create and implement an awareness and prevention campaign. The goal is to end rape culture on campus and foster a culture of consent. Campaigns such as MSVU's consent week are created for this purpose. Unfortunately, they have been poorly attended in the past. Lack of student participation diminishes the campaign's impact limiting its capacity to transform campus culture. Students indicated a desire to be better informed but were unaware of the educational opportunities available on campus. Two instances of these discussions are included below:

**West-African Female:** Someone may [...] touch my ass and I will be like "oh it's a mistake". So, I will just wave it off. So sometimes I can be negligent. Sometimes I just {pause} wave it off as if it is nothing. I feel like our awareness of sexual assault should be made a priority, especially for those of us who are from different countries.

**West-African Female:** Yes, I think I also agree with what participant one said - its where you come from. Cause like if you came from like a home or culture where sexual assault was a normal thing, you will think it is normal here. I just think it is ignorance. Like not knowing sexual assault is or how to prevent it.

Rape culture is pervasive across many cultures, including Canadian Eurocentric culture. MSVU ought to better educate its students on sexual violence and consent to dismantle the ideologies that promote and sustain rape culture. Students recognized the dangers of ignorance and asked for education on the subject. MSVU is obligated to provide this information and can begin by cultivating educational tools such as a zine or comic book.

Avalon Sexual Assault Centre's zine is an example of a creative way to disseminate information. This document includes resources, definitions, inspiring messages, quotes, and other material. MSVU can develop a similar document through collaboration with the Alexa McDonough Institute (AMI), FemCo, and external organizations such as Avalon. The document must be accessible. For example, it should be available online at the MSVU website, at the student union, and dispersed in multiple locations across campus. Furthermore, it should be concise, and easily consumable so that language is not a barrier. This resource will spread awareness about the policy while developing a culture of consent on campus.

Another potential awareness event is hosting a performance of "Slut the Play" on campus. This play addresses rape culture, sexual assault, and consent. It is an excellent source of information about sexual assault that incorporates youth culture and tells an exciting story that is easily relatable and delivers an important message (Susan Brigham, oral communication). Students should be involved in developing awareness tools and events as they know what will engage their peers.

## **8. Ensure sexual assault educational materials avoid 'explicit content' and are presented in safe locations at appropriate times.**

The West African focus group indicated that they were uncomfortable with the presentation of sexual assault material at orientation. Specifically, a video that involved the acting-out of a sexual assault was described as "too explicit". The timing of the video was also problematized as it was played during lunchtime. Students could not focus on the video because they were eating lunch, nor could they enjoy their meals because they were subjected to difficult content at an inappropriate time. Presenting the Policy Against Sexual Assault in this manner was ineffective as the explicit content diminished the educational opportunity. The participant's discussion was as follows:

**West African Female:** There was a video during orientation dinner/lunch, but it was like too{pause} explicit. Like they were showing like a lot of like [short pause] explicit content. It was during lunch, they showed like plastic breasts, and plastic hands, and the hand grabbing the breasts. It was too out there for me to watch [laughing]. Everyone was eating lunch, so it was uncomfortable to watch.

**West African Female:** Like they didn't really send the message out about sexual assault. They didn't really talk about how to prevent it, or like how to report.

Participants stated that they wished they learned more about sexual assault and the Mount's policy during orientation. We recommend re-vamping the video and selecting a better time and location during orientation to play and discuss it.

## **9. Dedicate a small-scale study to finding ways to engage men in discussions of sexual violence across cultures**

Recruiting male participants proved to be more difficult than anticipated. Originally, we desired to have both female and male identified focus groups for every culture. The only cultural groups represented by men were Canada/US, and West Africa. We were unable to recruit male-identified RA facilitators, and therefore unable to recruit male-identified focus groups for the other cultures. This may be due to the stigma surrounding men and sexual violence, a fear or anxiety that they may say something offensive, or as indicated by the West African males, the fear of being blamed.

Research to identify why men are hesitant to participate, if this varies by culture, and how they can be engaged would be useful for future research.

## 10. Develop a Q&A forum where students can anonymously ask questions about sexual assault and the Policy Against Sexual Assault.

After analyzing the transcripts, it was evident that students are curious about sexual assault and MSVU's policy. Some questions include:

**Bermuda, Caribbean, or Bahamian Female:** Are there any safety precautions on campus that allow us to feel safe except for the security picking us up from the bottom of the hill? Because I don't think there is much of a presence.

**Canadian Female:** I'm just wondering how these (punishments) would be determined? Like what kind of punishment would... or what kind of action would constitute, you know, expulsion versus relocation? Obviously, it would be on a case by case basis, but I'm wondering how would that be established? Um you know, does rape equal expulsion and some kind of inappropriate touching else? How would that be worked through?

Students have questions and opinions, but often do not feel safe sharing either with those in a position to respond. There have been consultations with students over the course of the development of the policy, but it is always the same few students who show up. Moreover, although the focus groups allowed students to express their queries and interests, most MSVU students did not take part, and the focus group participants did not allow for ongoing inquiries and discussion as would the recommended service. An additional benefit is that questions raised, and answers provided can generate ideas for promotional campaigns and policy initiatives as well as the zine or comic book style document. The forum must be available online through the MSVU website and the Student Union webpage, and all inquiries should be responded to within 24 hours. Responses may be contributed by counsellors, professors, members of the student union, and/or others who are qualified and willing to engage. Perhaps a new position (student or external) can be created to respond to these inquiries promptly.

## **11. Produce an app that allows victims to communicate with counsellors and other survivors 24/7.**

An app that includes all of the information, services, and resources necessary for members of the Mount community would simplify the disclosing and reporting process by making the information easily accessible to students. Since digital technologies are integral to the daily lives of all the cultures represented at Mount, they should be utilized to deliver this essential service. This service will aid awareness and communication by ensuring that all of the information and services required by a survivor are at their fingertips. We thank Gayle MacDonald for suggesting this approach at the 2019 AMI strategic retreat.

## **12. Translate the policy into the most used languages at MSVU.**

Concern about language barriers to understanding MSVU's Policy Against Sexual Assault was expressed most frequently by the East Asian and Middle Eastern female-identified focus groups.

**Middle Eastern female:** For people who have like English as a second language shouldn't there be something that at least explains it (the policy)? Or like, certain translations or something to the most common languages? Because I know that a lot of people obviously wouldn't understand it if English is their second language because there are complex words.

**East Asian female:** I would suggest they employ someone who speaks the same language with us and shares the same culture.

We recommend translating the policy into the languages that are most spoken by MSVU students.

### **13. Develop a one-page document targeted towards parents/guardians that highlights the critical points of the policy.**

Some participants indicated that their family members were concerned about sexual assault on Campus. They also mentioned that family members would not be able to understand the policy due to the length of the document and the terminology used. A number of international student participants mentioned that their families were aware of and alarmed by news of a sexual assault case on campus, had reviewed the Mount's Policy Against Sexual Assault, or saw sexual assault as a real risk for their children studying abroad. For example:

**Middle-Eastern Female:** So when people actually started knowing about it (the sexual assault that occurred at MSVU in 2015), and my parents learned that there is even a policy for it, they freaked out a little bit.

**Middle-Eastern Female:** I feel like my parents are scared a lot. Just because we are in a new country they always think that we are going to be, like, victimized or something, or that it is not totally safe, because they don't know everything. They weren't raised here.

**Bermudian, Bahamian, or Caribbean female:** When the assault was put on Facebook my momma contacted me the next day and asked me what happened on campus. This created fear in my parents.

**East-Asian Female:** Before I arrived here, my mother asked me to study something about defence.

Furthermore, families may provide advice and support for students who have been sexually assaulted while at university. In the words of one participant:

**West-African Female:** I think if my family finds out, what would happen immediately is that I would be told to call the police and then report it.

Conversely, some Middle Eastern participants indicated that the existence of a policy was worrisome for their parents. This fear was provoked by the realization that sexual assault is a pertinent issue in Canadian society. The mainstream depiction of Canada as a nation that bolsters equality overshadows the persistence of misogyny and subsequent sexual violence. This document should include basic statistics regarding sexual assault in Canada, definitions of sexual assault, rape, and sexual harassment, and key policy points. Given that international student's parents often have larger language barriers than their children (Amy Braye, oral communication), this document should also be translated into the non-English languages most spoken by significant numbers of MSVU students. A QR code could bring parents to a webpage where they can access more information in their native languages.

**14. Promote disclosing to the health office or counselling as this ensures that respondents only must share their story only once. Provide education about what counselling is, how it works, and the importance of having culturally appropriate alternatives.**

Given the emphasis on confidentiality and the anxiety surrounding disclosing, having a "one-stop-shop" service in the event of an assault is essential. Repeating their story to various individuals can be anxiety-provoking for survivors. Further, the fear of re-traumatization or the risk of being blamed can discourage disclosing altogether. For example, members of the Caribbean, Bahamas, and Bermuda as well as the Canadian female-identified focus groups expressed avoiding discussion with authorities whenever possible. Counselling or health services can provide a single point of contact for survivors (oral communication, Paula Barry), limiting the need for repetition and eliminating the need to deal with members of the Mount community who are more likely to be perceived as authority figures.

The counselling office does not require students to disclose the reason for their appointment. Further, they now offer three drop-in appointments per day for students who are seeking immediate support. Because most students are unaware of this information, it should be promoted on posters and online. It is important to note that, as explored below, international students often expressed desire to disclose to someone of their own culture. Currently, it will not be possible for international students both to take advantage of this single point of contact and disclose to someone who shares their culture. Ideally, International students would have access to a counsellor who reflects their culture.

“The Mount’s Policy Against Sexual Assault: A Guide” notes that students are “encouraged to speak to a specially trained member of the Mount community,” such as Counselling or Health services. However, the benefits of doing so are not specified.

During the consultations, the Manager of the International Education Centre indicated that counselling is a culturally specific activity. Therefore, some groups would not seek a counsellor even if the counsellor reflected their culture. For example, participants in the Bermudian, Caribbean, Bahamian focus group expressed that they would not disclose to anyone, no matter their culture, gender, or occupation. Rwandan students similarly expressed avoiding counsel in the event of an assault as counselling was not part of their culture. The discussion below explores Rwandan participants understanding of counselling:

**Rwandan Female:** Offer them counselling, cause in Africa you can't find counselling.

**Rwandan Female:** Not even, don't put counselling in such a way. Cause, we don't really understand counselling. Maybe for us, or for some, counselling is just talking to my friends.

From this conversation, it is evident that counselling is uncommon and differently understood in Rwanda.

### **15. Have bystander prevention training and training to receive a disclosure available for all MSVU community members.**

Canadian females felt that all MSVU faculty members should receive at least minimal training to receive a disclosure:

**Canadian Female:** if you go to a faculty member and say "I'm disclosing," and they do not know what to say, then what about everything else? Staff or faculty should have to say, "here is this document." I think that is a minimum responsibility that they should have.

While distributing resources and information to survivors is essential, we hope that a growing number of MSVU faculty members will acquire expertise around receiving disclosures. We suggest promoting the Breaking the Silence modules to faculty for this purpose. As described above, Breaking the Silence is a free online training course to help individuals learn more about sexual violence and how to support someone who has survived it. An in-person training option will also be available in early 2020. This holds the tentative title; "Sexual Assault Policy and Trauma Informed Response' training". Although the dates have yet to be finalized, the training will be held across a three-day period with several sessions occurring each day. These workshops will be open to all members of the Mount community and will result in a greater percentage of the Mount community who are trained to receive a disclosure and are positioned to help dismantle rape culture on campus.

**16. Develop a 2-3-minute video that encapsulates the key points of the policy and defines sexual assault. Screen this video during class time.**

Vague student awareness of the policy is a theme that emerges through all of the transcripts. I have included an example from each transcript below;

**Middle Eastern Female:** Same kind of thing for me. I didn't know any of the main details about the policy, I didn't know there was a specific policy. You would kind of just hear about something happening when something happened.

**Bermudian, Bahamian, or Caribbean female:** I feel like when I came to the school, this was not something that was spoken about until it became a problem. Um, even after that I didn't even hear about any policies that are in place.

**European Female:** I haven't heard about it (the policy), but I saw like the poster about counselling. That's all I've seen.

**Canada/USA Female:** I feel like it's not that readily available really. I've never heard anyone discuss it. Yeah, I've got zero knowledge of it.

**East African Female Facilitator RA:** Ah, I would say that I have never heard of this policy before, so its been pretty much invisible.

**West African Male:** Before I came here I didn't know that we had a sexual assault policy. I just assumed that you'll call the police whenever a case occurs.

**West African Female:** No I have never read the policy, but I know that most of my courses, they write something in the course outlines about the sexual assault policy. Like maybe it's kind of like an awareness mechanism. So I don't really know what the policy is about, but I know that there is a system in place to inform students about the policy.

From these examples, it is evident that no culture has been properly exposed to MSVU's Policy Against Sexual Assault, and few participants sought information about the policy on their own. Emails, posters, presentations at orientation, and even past events discussing sexual assault, such as the 2018 consent week, were often deemed ineffective. Participants from the Middle Eastern and Asian focus groups expressed that the video played at orientation was too "explicit", and that they learned little about the policy. Moreover, some West African male participants and Bermudian female participants expressed unwillingness to give up their free time to learn about the policy. For example:

**Bermudian, Caribbean, and Bahamian Female:** Time that is for me I don't want to spend in a meeting about sexual assault. I rather you come to my time that's allotted to something like class to talk about it.

Disseminating policy information outside of class omits the majority of MSVU students, as those who personally seek out this information are typically those who are well-informed with a pre-existing interest in the subject. The video must be presented during class time each semester after the last day to withdraw from classes. This will ensure that every student enrolled at MSVU is exposed to the information. Moreover, screening it every semester will allow the key messages to be ingrained in students' minds. The video should be engaging, interactive and easily consumable by all. It should also be available on every class Moodle page so that students have access to it at all times. Perhaps including a brief quiz or discussion question for participation marks after watching the video would facilitate greater attention by students. To minimize potential faculty concerns about loss of class time, the recommended length of the video is 2-5 minutes.

## 17. Simplify the policy and the guide.

This recommendation is essential for successful communication of the policy. Although consent and the disclosing process are effectively defined in The Mount's Policy Against Sexual Assault, the language utilized remains unclear. Moreover, when an individual has been sexually assaulted, they should not have to struggle with understanding over-complicated terminology. A small-scale study could be carried out with participation from diverse student communities to assess the policy and policy guide for clarity and modify it accordingly.

## 18. Outline the informal resolution process and the criminal justice system route in the Policy Guide.

While the MSVU Policy Against Sexual Assault includes an informal resolution process, less information has been disseminated about this option than about the process of filing a formal complaint. The informal resolution approach should be included in the policy guide as it eliminates some of the face-face contact, retraumatization, and fear of being caught in the criminal justice system. This alternative route may be particularly useful in light of the fact that all of the international groups shared anxiety both about the prospect of formally reporting a sexual assault. Some examples include:

**East-Asian Female:** I think some victims may not have the courage to talk to a person face to face.

**Middle Eastern Female:** I think another reason why people don't report is [pause] they are afraid of getting stuck in the system. So, like, some cases do not necessarily go all the way through. Or um, there is not enough evidence or that sort of thing. Some people might be afraid to revisit that trauma. Or, just that piece of getting stuck in the legal process might be why they don't report.

The following is a discussion that occurred during the Bermuda, Caribbean, and Bahamian female-identified focus group:

**Facilitator RA:** To answer your question, when the respondent appeals, then, the person goes to the administration and all of that stuff.

**Participant Three:** See, who wants to go through all of that? [whispers]. Cause if it's not anonymous, like who's going to want to?

**Participant Four:** I don't know, like if it was me in that situation, I wouldn't want everybody to know, and be all like public about it. So if you're saying that you have to appeal to a whole bunch of people then I don't know if I would do it.

The criminal justice system route must be described as several participants assumed that when a report is made with the university, the police are automatically involved. Further, certain cultural groups such as the West African Males and Bermuda, Caribbean, and Bahamian Females indicated that they would only deal with the police as they do not trust the university authorities to select investigators who can achieve "justice". The policy currently states that an "investigator" will be appointed to a case, without identifying their qualifications, which is worrisome for respondents. These excerpts reveal this thinking:

**West African Male:** Under the definition of the policy, like who's responsibility is it to prove that there's been or there hasn't been a sexual assault?

**Middle Eastern Female:** Okay, so if you are reporting it formally, would you have to pay for it? Or does the school insurance cover it? Like going through trial and stuff, who's going to pay for that? Who pays for the lawyer?

Clarification of the reporting processes, and inclusion of the criminal justice system route in the policy guide will help to relieve student anxiety about the implications of various disclosure or reporting routes. The fact that there are no financial costs directly associated with a formal resolution through the university itself should be highlighted in promotional materials.

## 19. Have more Black representation and more diverse cultural representation among faculty, staff, and administration.

Several cultural groups expressed distrust of counsellors, administration, and other white people in positions of power. They mentioned feeling neglected, vulnerable, and misunderstood dealing with staff and other members of the Mount community who lacked understanding of cultural differences including those related to experiences of and approaches to sexual assault. Thus, whereas Canadian and American female-identified participants spoke highly of counselling services, participants from international communities expressed distrust and reported avoidance of white Canadian counsellors and other service providers and administrators:

**West-African Male:** So, no matter if I am accused, or if I am the victim, just do not treat me different. Just treat me the same. Don't be like- "because I'm from Ghana I do not know what's right".

**Bermuda, Caribbean, or Bahamian Female:** Will they (counsellors) treat me like they would any women, or use stereotypes?

**Rwandan Female:** Don't even say "counselling" because we don't really understand counselling. Like if someone was like "oh let's go to counselling for this" I would say what the heck? I don't know that person. Why would I explain my life to a stranger?

Currently, all of MSVU counsellors reflect the white majority. There was a recent addition of a male counsellor, however, he is also a white Canadian. The lack of diversity in counselling does not go unnoticed by international students who struggle to find supports that understand their cultural perspectives.

**Middle Eastern Female:** I feel like with North American culture, compared to Middle Eastern culture, the perspectives are so different. Finding a therapist or someone who can help is hard because we are a small community. Compared to the rest of minorities in Canada, our community is big, but we are limited in resources.

Our consultation with MSVU experts reflected a more general sense that it would be years before another counsellor would be hired who would perhaps reflect a racial and/or cultural community other than white Canadian. Until such a time that MSVU employs more diverse faculty, staff, and admin, a roster of culturally diverse mental health professionals and religious leaders equipped to respond to disclosures could be developed to serve our diverse student body. Any costs associated with the services of those on the roster ought to be covered by the university and not incurred by the students.

It was suggested that international student leaders be trained to receive a disclosure so that someone is available to provide culturally specific support. Positive intentions notwithstanding, this proposal depends on the unpaid labour of international students. Paid, professionally trained, white counsellors are available to white students, while students of marginalized racial and ethnic categories would be provided with unpaid and far less qualified peer support.

## **20. Provide anti-racist training in addition to Sexual Assault focused training for students and faculty.**

In addition to cultural ignorance, several groups described fears of racism and/or experiences of racism within classes, counselling and other support services. This is evident in the examples given in recommendation nineteen. Some other examples include:

**Middle Eastern Female:** When I went to counselling in McCain, I was so frustrated. I am like, “Oh, this person doesn’t understand.”

**Rwandan Female:** We are literally two black students. So like if I am sitting in class, or if something ever happens to me, I am like okay {pause} why would I go to like a white person? Colonizers. Like why would I go to administration? Who would I even tell?

Further, some participants described experiences of racism with other students. One incident occurred during a residence activity where students were encouraged to write kind messages on posters placed on each other's doors. In the words of one participant:

**Bermuda, Caribbean, or Bahamian Female:** I guess the morning after they put them up (the posters), she went out to the door and saw a not so fun message. They called her a [racial slur].

anti-racist and anti-oppressive training will promote cultural awareness and will help cultivate an understanding of the implicit and explicit ways that racism is perpetuated in daily interactions.

## **21. Encourage international student leaders to complete bystander prevention training and training to receive a disclosure.**

All cultural groups expressed anxiety about lack of cultural representation. Most participants also indicated that the first person that they would disclose to would be a close friend or family member. It is unclear whether this is due to absence of cultural representation. As suggested by experts, the completion of bystander prevention training by international students would resolve the concern of students having to disclose to someone who does not understand or reflect their culture. Given that MSVU is currently unable to expand and diversify its counselling team due to budgeting constraints, training students to receive a disclosure is a viable alternative. Students from all cultures indicated that they would disclose their assault to loved ones before relevant authorities. Examples include:

**West-African Female:** for me, I was like, "oh, I cannot talk to them about it," so like I talked to my friends and stuff. And like the only people I would talk to would be like my friends and stuff.

**European Female:** I really do believe that the first person you go to is not like somebody responsible from the policy, you would just look for a family member or friend.

## **22. Incorporate Breaking the Silence Modules into Mount 101.**

Since loved ones will likely be the first point of contact, they should be trained on how to properly receive a disclosure. To this end, the Breaking the Silence modules should be incorporated into Mount 101. This is free online training for anyone who is acting as a support person or is concerned about sexual violence. By incorporating Breaking the Silence modules into Mount 101, all new Mount students will be required to complete them during their first year.

As mentioned in recommendation number 15, "Sexual Assault Policy and Trauma Informed Response' training" will be occurring this upcoming year and will be available to all members of the Mount community. This opportunity must be well promoted to maximize attendance.

## **23. Create a peer support network that is overseen by peer mental health support workers.**

Sexual assault is a taboo topic in many cultures, and victim-blaming continues to occur across the globe, including in Canadian society. The fear of being blamed for one's assault stifles individuals from disclosing to both authority figures and loved ones. Middle Eastern participants indicated that their families would not discuss sexual assault in any context. For example, one participant stated, "Honestly, this is kind of like taboo talk. Like, you don't talk about it". Focus groups were beneficial in creating environments where students were free to discuss sexual violence with minimal fear of repercussions. Developing a peer support network would replicate a similar atmosphere and would aid in normalizing discussion of sexual violence. In the East African focus group, participants engaged in an emotional discussion of victim blaming and its impacts.

Rwandan Female 1: Like, was I the one who showed, like gave them a sign? Like {pause} I think that is the main question that I would try to ask myself. Yeah, like how did it happen? Like, in which position, did you put yourself in {stops} I mean, nobody asks to be assaulted, but sometimes you may put yourself in a position that's a bit risky.

Rwandan Female 2: {raises voice} No! But even if I walk no, no, no. That's not right. Even if I walk naked, nothing gives you the right to assault me.

This conversation continued as the women debated over what constitutes victim blaming and how silencing that stigma can be for survivors. Creating a peer support network will encourage similar discussions. It will create an educational atmosphere where survivors can learn from one another, difficult conversations can become normalized, and a culture of consent promoted.

## **24. Take measures to increase safety for students walking from the Bedford Highway to their residences at night.**

Returning to residence late or leaving a night class were described as anxiety-provoking experiences because students are forced to walk outdoors. For example, a participant in the Bermudian, Caribbean, and Bahamian focus group described being fearful for her safety each time she walked to residence:

**Bermuda, Caribbean, Bahamian Female:** you have to pray going up that hill, because you never know what's going to come out of the trees.

These anxieties place unnecessary stress on the individual to take particular precautions so to "not get assaulted". For example, a West African female stated, "I think we don't walk alone, especially at night." This precautionary action is derived from the fear of being outside alone since there are no other options available. Individuals should be free to roam their campus whenever they please without the fear of being assaulted.

MSVU has increased the lighting outdoors and created a shuttle service from the bottom of campus to the residences. However, many participants reported that security officers are slow, and seem put out by calls for accompanying students up the hill. Further, some participants stated that they were fearful of being alone with security. For example, the European women describe being uncomfortable calling security for a shuttle and then having to be alone with them in the car. Extending McCain's hours, or having a security member permanently posted in a building close to bus stops in the evening may be plausible alternatives.

## **25. Ensure that there are two security guards on duty at all times and hire more female security members.**

All cultural groups problematized the predominantly male security team. Moreover, having only one security guard working in the evenings means that often the only available authority (other than contacting the police) is a man. A participant in the European focus group describes this dilemma in detail:

**European Female:** The MSVU security there is a lot of men working, so they hold a gender bias, of course. Coming into it, sometimes you have to really understand that gender is important on campus, because it is majority women enrolled as students, you can look at the statistic of enrolment at registrar office if you needed to know, or can just look around {laughter}. You don't need to look at registrar, you know there is mostly girls here {laugh} So, like to have to go ask guy security sometimes it can be intimidating at the evening hours.

By hiring more security guards who reflect the gender majority at MSVU (women), and ensuring that there are always two security guards on duty (one male-identified and one female-identified) international students will feel safer approaching security, and safer seeing more security around campus in the evening hours.

# Conclusion

Given the pervasiveness of campus sexual assault, it was essential to explore both Canadian, and international student responses to MSVU's Policy Against Sexual Assault, and supports. The CAPSAP project identified and explored lenses for MSVU sexual assault policy and supports that were articulated by international students from diverse regions of the world, as well as by Canadian students. It revealed that many of the supports in place better meet the needs of white, Canadian students, excluding the diverse experiences of the international student population. A lack of awareness of the MSVU Policy Against Sexual Assault and perpetration of sexual assault in general may be addressed by implementing culturally informed recommendations.

These twenty-five recommendations will assist in dismantling the systemic racism that continues to marginalize and oppress international students. Moreover, they will decrease the presence of rape culture on campus. Implementation of the recommendations will simplify the disclosing and reporting process, increase the quality and accessibility of supports, promote awareness of the Policy Against Sexual Assault, advance student's knowledge on sexual violence, enhance security measures, and promote a culture of consent. The persistence of sexual violence across cultures cannot be addressed by these recommendations alone. However, they will help address the inequities that currently exist within the Policy Against Sexual Assault and associated supports at MSVU, while simultaneously promoting a culture of consent through education.

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# Appendix A

## Measures Addressing Recommendations

Recommendation number sixteen is being fulfilled through the development and screening of a video discussing sexual assault and the policy against sexual assault during class time. This video will continue to be screened for the duration of the academic year.

Recommendation number seventeen is a continuous work in progress for the Sexual Violence Prevention Advisory Committee (SVPAC).

They regularly review the policy guide and discuss updates for clarification and simplification.

Recommendation number twenty-one has been followed in two ways. First, this past fall, all International student orientation leaders were required to complete bystander intervention training. Second, several international students were asked to complete the Waves of Change bystander intervention Education Program in January 2020. This session is a "train the trainer" workshop, so the students who have received the training will then be qualified to train others. These international students will be involved in training all students during the fall 2020 orientation week.

Recommendation number twenty-two is being fulfilled through the addition of mandatory bystander intervention module in Mount 101.