



UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' COUNCIL POSITION PAPER ON

GENDER AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE RESPONSE AND PREVENTION



Legislative History

This Position Paper was commissioned by USC to update previous papers:

Anti-Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Policy Paper, approved by Council March 2022

Womxn's Policy Paper, approved by Council July 2019

Approved by Council (date)

To be reviewed by Council in its 2027-2028 sitting

This paper contains the discussion of potentially triggering topics such as Intimate Partner Violence, stalking, and sexual assault. If you or someone you know is struggling, please refer to the list of resources below for assistance:

Gender-Based Violence & Survivor Support Case Manager

519 661-3568
support@uwo.ca

Anova (formerly Sexual Assault Centre of London)

24 hour crisis & support line:
519 642-3000

London Abused Women's Centre (LAWC)

797 York Street #5
Services by appointment: M-T 9-5:00, F 9-4:00
519 432-2204

CMHA Crisis Centre & Reach Out

24/7 Crisis and Support Services
In-person: 648 Huron St, London
Phone: 519 433-2023

Human Rights Office

519 661-3334 (non-emergencies only)

Residence Counselling

Ontario Hall, Room 3C10
needtotalk@uwo.ca

Independent Legal Advice for Sexual Assault Survivors

Survivors of sexual assault may be eligible for up to four hours of free, confidential legal advice.

Regional Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence Treatment Program

Staffed 24/7, St. Joseph's Hospital, London
519 646-6100 ext 64224

Western Special Constable Services

Lawson Hall, Rm. 1257 (24/7)

From a campus phone: call 911 or x83300 (non-emergency line)

From a cell phone: call 519-661-3300

*For reports of gender-based violence, WSCS will connect you with the local police service.

Zhwwanong 24 Hr Emergency Women's Shelter for First Nations women and their children

256 Hill St, London, Ontario
Phone: 1-800-605-7477

Trans Lifeline:

877-330-6366

TABLE OF CONTENTS

2	Legislative History
5	Land Acknowledgement
6	Introduction
9	Recommendations
15	Conclusion



LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

As an organization created to empower and support our students throughout their educational experience, it is particularly important to acknowledge and recognize the power of education as a tool for healing and reconciliation. The USC always seeks to empower students on our campus to voice their perspectives on the issues that matter most to them, but we must recognize that there is still immense work to be done, at the USC and across Western's campus. We must remain active in our process of learning and unlearning to ensure that we take responsibility for educating ourselves on the history of the lands that we are situated upon and their impacts on those that lived upon them first.

Additionally, the issue of gender-based and sexual violence is one that disproportionately impacts Indigenous women, girls, and two-spirit people. Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and Two-Spirit People (MMIWG) has been deemed a Canadian national crisis, as well as an ongoing Canadian genocide. Indigenous people face severe and disproportionate rates of systemic violence, and are disproportionately affected by human trafficking, domestic and sexual violence, and homicide. MMIWG is an urgent, present-day crisis, rooted in colonialism, racism, and gendered violence, and must therefore be thoroughly integrated throughout the USC's advocacy, specifically when it comes to gender-based and sexual violence.

With this, we wish to acknowledge that Western University and our Affiliate Colleges are located on the traditional lands of the Anishinaabek, Haudenosaunee, Lūnaapéewak and Attawandaron peoples, on lands connected with the London Township and Sombra Treaties of 1796 and the Dish with One Spoon Covenant Wampum.



INTRODUCTION

We Hear You. We Believe You. We Support You.

The University Students' Council dedicates this advocacy on behalf of all survivors.

When we give ourselves to love, we don't expect to be physically hurt. When a partner says they care about us, we expect that to mean unconditionally, not just when they are in a good mood, or sober. We are entitled to have our voice, our autonomy, and our boundaries respected at all times. Unfortunately, the reality is that 80 percent of undergraduate students experience dating violence, and 29 percent are sexually assaulted.¹ Statistics indicate that 47% of reported assaults are against women aged 15-24,² and this age group is also the most likely to experience spousal violence and homicide.³ Statistics Canada reports indicate that 80 percent of intimate partner violence (IPV) occurrences go unreported, but even so, it is estimated that 44 percent of adult women (or 6.2 million women in Canada) experience physical, psychological or sexual violence in a relationship at some point in their lives.⁴ While many statistics focus on IPV rates for women and girls, it is crucial to recognize that those identifying with other communities experience even greater rates of violence than is commonly reported. Approximately 61 percent of Indigenous women, 55 percent of disabled women and 29 percent of minority-identifying women experience IPV, and those within the LGBTQIA+ community also report incidents of IPV at a rate of 3 to 4 times more than cis gendered survivors.⁵ Students whose identity intersects with multiple communities are four times more likely to experience various forms of victimization on campus, including threats, bullying, sexual harassment and assault.⁶

1 F. Khan, C. J. Rowe and R. Bigood, *Courage to Act: Developing a National Framework to Address and Prevent Gender-Based Violence at Post-Secondary Institutions in Canada*. (Toronto, ON. 2019). <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5d482d9fd8b74f0001c02192/t/5d8917eb2b64e973184ae641/1569265667569/CouragetoAct-Sept15.pdf>

2 As reported by Statistics Canada for 2014: <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/85-002-x/2017001/article/14842-eng.html>

3 Khan, Rowe, Bigood, "Courage to Act"

4 "Intimate Partner Violence," Government of Canada, accessed January 31, 2024, <https://www.canada.ca/en/women-gender-equality/gender-based-violence/intimate-partner-violence.html>

5 Ibid.

6 Woodford, Michael R., Antonio Duran, Tin Vo, Corey W. Johnson, Lee Airton, and Simon Coulombe, "Thriving on Campus: Promoting the Inclusion, Academic Development, and Wellbeing of Diverse 2SLGBTQ+ University and College Students: Introduction to the Special Issue," *Journal of LGBT Youth* 21, 2. (2024): 209–11. doi:10.1080/19361653.2024.2326397.



The USC's previous Womxn's policy paper (2019) focused on raising awareness about the exploitative culture at Western University and the need to provide training and supports to all students, especially survivors of sexual assault. Following the incidents of Orientation Week 2021, Western University has acknowledged the issue of sexual violence on campus and has gone to great lengths to ensure training and supports are available for leaders, physical spaces are made safer, and is actively working towards changing the campus culture. By 2026 every student enrolled at the university will have completed a mandatory gender based sexual violence training module. Continual upgrades are being made to improve physical safety through lighting, additional security cameras and blue light phones, landscaping for visibility, increasing the availability of Foot Patrol, SERT, and Campus Constables. Care hubs are deployed during large events to provide safety or a resting space for students. Reporting procedures have been simplified, and specific GBSV case managers have been hired.

However, in the years since that paper, on-campus trends are shifting away from stranger-danger, to violence perpetrated by people known to survivors: their partners, friends and acquaintances. Between the years 2014 and 2022 intimate partner sexual assaults increased by 163 percent, physical assaults increased by 14 percent and harassment increased by 38 percent.⁷ The average rates of femicide are also increasing to the point that now one woman in Canada is killed by her partner every two days.⁸ For Indigenous women, the homicide rate is more than three times higher.⁹ The Western community is not immune to these occurrences. Western University's Annual Report on Gender Based Sexual Violence 2023-2024, reveals an increase in cases of stalking and harassment by ex-partners and peers, as well as an increase in students seeking support for IPV. There were 28 formal complaints made between May 1, 2023 and April 30, 2024; of those 16 were for sexual assault, 13 for sexual harassment, 6 for sexual exploitation, 8 for cyber harassment, 5 for stalking and 3 for domestic violence.¹⁰ These numbers represent formal complaints made to a representative on campus only, and do not include disclosures, or occurrences reported directly to London police or other community services.

With this paper, we wish to focus on what can be done to support students who are dealing with violence, and explore what efforts can be made to prevent intimate partner violence and stalking, not only as it affects students on campus, but throughout their

7 Trends in police-reported family violence and intimate partner violence in Canada, 2022, prepared by Statistics Canada (Ottawa, ON, 2022). <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/231121/dq231121b-eng.htm>

8 The Government of Canada issues statement to urge everyone to 'Come Together, Act now' to end gender-based violence in Canada, prepared by Women and Gender Equality Canada (Ottawa, ON, 2024). <https://www.canada.ca/en/women-gender-equality/news/2024/11/the-government-of-canada-issues-statement-to-urge-everyone-to-come-together-act-now-to-end-gender-based-violence-in-canada.html>

9 "Intimate Partner Violence," Government of Canada.

10 https://uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/board/minutes/2024/a24June27bg_pgn_website.pdf



lifetimes. Realizing that not all survivor's partners are fellow students who are subject to educational sanctions or repercussions through Western University, we also need to explore what can be done at municipal, provincial and federal levels to protect and support all survivors, and the families of victims.

While we are forced to rely on available statistics for this paper (which lean heavily towards cis gender women and girls) we recognize that the experiences of those from other communities are under-represented. We acknowledge that Black, Indigenous, LGBTQIA+ identifying students, and those with disabilities are disproportionately affected by gender based violence.¹¹ We also recognize that men are survivors of intimate partner violence. Our intent with the recommendations presented in this paper is to advocate for positive changes that will impact anyone who experiences intimate partner violence.

¹¹ Facts, stats and WAGE's impact: Gender-based violence, prepared by Women and Gender Equality Canada (Ottawa, ON, 2024).



RECOMMENDATIONS

1. WESTERN UNIVERSITY SHOULD MANDATE YEARLY DISCLOSURE TRAINING REFRESHER MODULES FOR ALL FACULTY, STAFF, AND STUDENT LEADERS.

According to the review of Western University's Undressing Consent training module, almost 70 percent of students who completed mandatory training remained uncertain of how to make a disclosure, or about the support services available at Western.¹² When a student is in distress they are even less likely to recall what supports are available or how to find them. It is natural for students to reach out to a trusted adult or mentor such as a professor, TA, or other member of staff with a disclosure. As such, it is important for all staff to receive regular training on how to appropriately deal with a disclosure, and the procedures to follow to ensure that the student feels supported and empowered to make informed decisions for whatever action(s) they choose to take. This should also include knowledge about available supports in the community, including the Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence Treatment Program at St. Joseph's Hospital where exams and forensic evidence can be collected.

Indigenous and LGBTQIA+ communities, and people with disabilities, may be impacted by IPV in differing ways and to differing degrees. Recognizing that most broad-based support programs rely on colonial and ableist-centric preconceptions, it is important that training modules are designed in conjunction with representatives from diverse communities in order to recognize, respect, and support a range of intersectionalities, abilities, needs and cultural practices.

While we support the recommendation made in the Special Advisor's report that staff receive refresher training every three years,¹³ we strongly encourage Western recognize the importance of this issue and implement a refresher module yearly.

note provisions should be made to ensure that refresher training would not re-traumatize a participant.*

¹² Katreena Scott, Anushka Khanna, Aadhiya Vasudeva et al. "Impact of the Undressing Consent Program." Western Centre for Research and Education on Violence Against Women & Children, April 2024.

¹³ Tracy Isacacs, "Report of the Special Advisor to the Proost on Gender-Based and Sexual Violence: Executive Summary", December 2024



2. WESTERN UNIVERSITY SHOULD INCLUDE A MODULE ON TECHNOLOGY SAFETY AS PART OF THEIR MANDATORY GENDER BASED SEXUAL VIOLENCE TRAINING.

Technology is playing an increasingly large role in enabling and perpetuating intimate partner violence and stalking. It is increasingly important for students to be aware of how it is being used, and how to prevent it. Incorporating training about the negative and positive aspects of assorted device features, social media, and apps during mandatory training would ensure broad spectrum coverage of an issue that impacts all students.

Technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV) “refers to any violent and/or abusive act carried out using technological devices, such as domestic violence, harassment, stalking, sexual assault, impersonation and extortion[.]”¹⁴ A 2021 report by the United Nations Population Fund reports that over 92 percent of people who have experienced intimate partner violence have also experienced some form of technology-facilitated aggression.¹⁵

We rely heavily on technology for education, entertainment, instruction and social connections, but it is increasingly being used to stalk, harass and intimidate. Between 74 and 88 percent of all Canadian undergrad students have experienced sexualized forms of online or digital abuse.¹⁶ This can include incidents of cyberflashing, use of images manipulated by artificial intelligence, doxxing, and non-consensual disclosure of intimate photos and videos.¹⁷

Women’s shelters indicate that perpetrators are using various means of technology to locate or harass their targets by means of GPS, location tracking software, spyware apps, and through the monitoring of emails and social media platforms. They report the

14 Stechyson, Natalie. 2024. “An hour on hold to change a phone plan puts lives at risk, say gender-based violence experts,” CBC Canada, June 5, 2024. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/technology-gender-based-violence-abuse-1.7222788>

15 Alexandra Robinson and Nora-Piay-Fernandez, “Making All Spaces Safe,” UNFPA Technical Division, Gender and Human Rights Branch, December 2021. <https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/UNFPA-TFGBV-Making%20All%20Spaces%20Safe.pdf>

16 Lindsey A. Snaychuk and Melanie L. O’Neill, “Technology-facilitated sexual violence: prevalence, risk, and resiliency in undergraduate students”, *Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment & Trauma*, vol. 29, No. 8, (2020), pp. 984–999, DOI: 10.1080/10926771.2019.1710636

17 For additional information:

Cyberflashing- Lalonde, Dianne. 2024. “Expert insight: Cyberflashing is a serious form of gendered sexual violence.” *Western News*, May 27, 2024. <https://news.westernu.ca/2024/05/cyberflashing-sexual-violence/>

AI Generated Deepfakes- Murray, Erika, “Artificial Intelligence, Deepfakes and Digital Violence: Understanding the Impact on Health” (2024). *Inspiring Minds – A Digital Collection of Western’s Graduate Research, Scholarship and Creative Activity*. 677. <https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/inspiringminds/677>

Doxxing is the (malicious) release of personal or identifying information about a person such as phone number, address, medical records etc.

Non-Consensual Disclosure-Hounsell, Kayla. 2025. “She was searching online for a recipe. She found a video of herself engaged in a sexual act.” *CBC News*, January 17, 2025. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/intimate-partner-violence-sharing-intimate-images-1.7432723>

18 Stechyson “An hour on hold”



most common uses of technology are for: harassment (95%), threats (87%), location tracking (82%), social media monitoring or restraints (77%), surveillance (76%) and the sharing of non-consensual images (61%).¹⁸

Alternatively, wide use of technology and social media provides an increasingly accessible avenue that can be used to help survivors locate assistance or to escape from an abusive or dangerous situation. The distress signal designed by The Canadian Women's Foundation¹⁹ is credited with saving the life of an abducted teenager who learned about it on TikTok.²⁰ Western's own team-lead iHeal app²¹ is available in both official languages and is designed to assist those in abusive relationships as well as providing support for those trying to help someone else. The app promotes personal well-being while providing information on how to access safe housing, finances, legal advice, and lists information about Canada-wide resources.

Western University should better inform students about the risks associated with on-line resources and social platforms. They should provide instruction on safety precautions that students can take to protect themselves while on-line, including how to detect and disable tracking features on their devices. The university should also actively seek out and promote useful apps and universal signals to help students recognize and/or assist those who are in dangerous or volatile situations.

3. THE MINISTRY OF COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES SHOULD REQUIRE ALL POST SECONDARY INSTITUTIONS IN ONTARIO TO CONDUCT THE STUDENT VOICES ON SEXUAL VIOLENCE SURVEY EVERY THREE YEARS IN ORDER TO GATHER RELEVANT DATA ON GBSV OCCURRENCES, AND TO EVALUATE PREVENTION AND RESPONSE MECHANISMS.

The 2019 Student Voices on Sexual Violence survey revealed that:

- 23% of university students had been sexually assaulted in the past year
- 63% had been harassed
- 24% had been stalked

The Student Voices on Sexual Violence Survey was administered as a one time initiative in 2018, and served to expose the serious and pervasive nature of sexual violence experienced by post secondary students. While the data collected from the initial survey

¹⁹ Signal for Help Campaign <https://canadianwomen.org/signal-for-help/>

²⁰ Mark Gollom and, Ellen Mauro. 2021. "How a made-in-Canada distress signal may have helped save the life of a North Carolina Teen," CBC News, November 9, 2021.

²¹ Fazio, Cynthia. 2023. "First-in-Canada tool by Western-led team helps women experiencing partner violence," Western News, November 28, 2023. <https://news.westernu.ca/2023/11/iheal-app/>

retains value as a baseline measurement, the lack of ongoing data collection makes it impossible to track the impact of policies and training on reducing the occurrence of violence. Equally concerning is that anti-violence policies and training programs were designed around, and are regularly re-assessed against out-of-date data. The survey must be conducted regularly to measure the efficacy of programs and policies, to ensure that services are meeting the needs of survivors, and to allow institutions to adapt preventative measures to address emerging trends. To better understand how violent acts are experienced by various communities on campus, demographic based questions should be included in the survey.

Results from the 2017 survey indicated that 60% of Western students did not know how to access the support services that were available to survivors of sexual violence. Since the original survey, Western University has experienced the events of Orientation Week 2021, and enacted measures to address gender based sexual violence including mandatory training, a sexual violence policy update, and multi-year consultations with a special advisor. It is vital to know if any of this has had an impact on altering perceptions and reducing incidents of violence, and to determine if Western's communications have been effective in allowing students to find the assistance they may need.

Sexual violence is alarmingly pervasive in our society, and university aged students are in the highest risk category. Ministry guidelines mandate that sexual violence policies be updated every three years, but they cannot be accurately informed if they rely on the results of a single, out-of-date survey. The Ministry of Universities and Colleges must recognize the value of the survey as a tool for guiding change, and ensure that it is administered every three years to align with policy review periods.

4. THE PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT MUST PASS BILL 173, THEREBY ACKNOWLEDGING THAT WE HAVE INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE IS AN EPIDEMIC IN ONTARIO.

The Government of Canada issued a statement against gender based violence in November 2024.²² Senate Bill S-249 (Georgina's Law) advising national action to prevent IPV, and develop strategies to address funding, programs, protections for victims and legal implications, is waiting to be read in the House of Commons. At least 95 municipalities across Ontario, including London, have declared IPV to be an epidemic.²³ Six provinces have also supported the epidemic designation, yet the Government of Ontario has not only remained silent, but has actively opposed requests to fast-track Bill 173 acknowledging that IPV is an epidemic.

In declaring IPV to be an epidemic, the government would be obliged to chart a clear path to define preventive measures, address the social and health impacts affecting

22 The Government of Canada issues statement to urge everyone to "Come Together, Act now" to end gender-based violence in Canada, prepared by Women and Gender Equality Canada (Ottawa, ON, 2024).

23 Hoffer, Eden. 2024. "Expert insight: Intimate partner violence is a epidemic." Western News, November 15, 2024.<https://news.westernu.ca/2024/11/intimate-partner-violence-epidemic/>



those experiencing IPV, and provide additional financial support for the underfunded and over- capacity agencies trying to support survivors. The fact that this has not yet happened is a disservice to the hundreds of people and families who have been affected by intimate partner violence. The Government of Ontario must act now to confirm the seriousness of the problem, and open up funding to assist the myriad of agencies involved in supporting survivors.

The USC strongly urges all party representatives of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to support Bill 173 and accordingly, work to implement the financial and legal supports that communities require to address violence in their regions.

5. TO BETTER PROTECT AND IMPROVE OUTCOMES FOR SURVIVORS AND VICTIMS OF INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE, THE PROVINCIAL AND FEDERAL GOVERNMENTS MUST MAKE CHANGES TO THE JUSTICE SYSTEM WITHIN THE NEXT FIVE YEARS, AS OUTLINED IN THE RENFREW INQUEST AND TURNING THE TIDE TOGETHER.

The Canadian justice system is failing victims and survivors of intimate partner violence. Changes must be made to ensure that their safety and protection is a priority. While innocent until proven guilty is the foundation of the justice system, it fails to address the risk of repeat violent offences while treating the safety of victims and survivors as secondary. This must change. Following numerous cases of fatal intimate partner violence, several reports have been presented to both the Provincial and Federal Governments with the goal of making the Criminal Code and justice system more supportive to those experiencing IPV, and to increase protection for victims and survivors of violence. Recognizing that there are multiple areas across the system that require improvements, these reports span a variety of topics:

- The Renfrew Inquest resulted in 86 recommendations for the Provincial Government designed to improve victim safety in cases of high risk of re-offence, and particularly flaws in the current probation system.²⁴
- Turning the Tide Together provides 130 recommendations directed to the Federal Government and RCMP including allowances to share information about a person's history of violence and IPV, access to weapons, developing an IPV risk assessment guide, identifying coercive control in situations involving IPV.²⁵
- Strengthening Access to Justice for Victims of Hate Crime in Canada calls on the Federal Government to recognize misogyny as a hate crime and femicide as a separate offence in the Criminal Code, to be considered an aggravating factor during sentencing.²⁶

24 A copy of the recommendations resulting from the inquest into the deaths of Carol Culleton, Anastasia Kuzyk and Nathalie Warmerdam can be found here: https://lukesplace.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/CKW-Inquest-Verdict-Recommendations-SIGNED_Redacted.pdf

25 The full list of recommendations from the Mass Casualty Commission can be found here: <https://masscasualtycommission.ca/files/documents/Turning-the-Tide-Together-List-of-Recommendations.pdf>

26 Strengthening Access to Justice for Victims of Hate Crime in Canada, prepared by Office of the Federal Ombudsperson for Victims of Crime (Ottawa, ON, 2024).

The USC urges all levels of government to recognize and adopt the measures outlined in the above reports to better protect and improve the outcomes for survivors of IVP, acknowledging that there are critical improvements to be made at all levels of the justice system, and services that intersect with the care and support of survivors, victims, and the families that are affected by violence.



CONCLUSION

Gender-based and sexual violence (GBSV) is a pervasive issue that disproportionately affects students in post-secondary institutions across Canada. Despite the progress made through a variety of Western University's prevention and response initiatives, as well as recent government legislation, it is evident that there is still much work to be done. In addition to the pre-existing forms, there is additional evidence for an increase in intimate partner violence, as well as technology-facilitated violence. These newly emerging trends further reinforce the importance of well researched, comprehensive, and proactive approaches to the prevention, intervention, and response mechanisms that are available to our students. Further, it is critical to address this issue through an intersectional lens, recognizing that Indigenous folks, as well as those within the LGBTQIA+ community, report far higher rates of gender-based and sexual violence than white, cisgendered women.

The recommendations outlined in this paper provide a concrete pathway for addressing GBV through education, as well as through legislative and policy reform. Mandating annual disclosure training for faculty and staff ensures that survivors receive informed and compassionate responses to their disclosures. Incorporating technology safety into gender-based and sexual violence training acknowledges the increasing role of digital platforms in enabling harassment and stalking. Regularly administering the Student Voices on Sexual Violence Survey allows for the collection of updated data that better inform and evaluate the efficacy of institutional prevention and response strategies. Passing Bill 173 and therefore recognizing intimate partner violence as an epidemic is critical to unlocking the resources and legislative actions needed to protect survivors. Finally, implementing the recommendations from The Renfrew Inquest and Turning the Tide Together would ensure better protections and outcomes for survivors of intimate partner violence.

Pushing forward these recommendations will require a joint effort between the offices of the future Vice-Presidents of both University and External affairs, who will be responsible for advocating for these changes to Western University's administration, as well as political decision makers at all levels. It will also require collaboration with students, as well as our federal student associations across Canada, and local advocacy groups to achieve our shared goal of campus safety.

The perpetuating issue of gender-based and sexual violence on our post-secondary campuses is a crisis that is based in our cultural norms and societal values, and one that requires a comprehensive response from the government and our institution, in order to provide better prevention and education, as well as supports and responses, to ensure the safety and wellbeing of survivors. By advocating for these recommendations, we hope that the USC is able to create a safer, more inclusive campus environment.





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