

# Exploring Inequality in Relation to Rates of Reporting Sexual Assault at Canadian Post-Secondary Institutions

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*Abstract: Sexual assault on Canadian post-secondary campuses remains a persistent, reoccurring issue, with 25% of post-secondary women being sexually assaulted (Hawn et al., 2018). This examination of the literature endeavours to determine how the policies, barriers, and responses to sexual assault at Canadian post-secondary institutions helps or hurts an individual's odds of reporting sexual assault issues. The literature review revealed three themes that act as obstacles to reporting sexual assault: a) lack of sexual assault policies, b) existing barriers to support, and c) poor responses by post-secondary institutions. If these obstructions are reduced—or eliminated completely in a best-case scenario—the likelihood of sexual assault survivors reporting may increase.*

*Keywords: sexual assault, post-secondary, Canada, policies, barriers, responses*

## Introduction

Sexual assault<sup>1</sup> on post-secondary campuses is a topic of utmost importance because incidences are occurring at an increasing rate on university campuses (Hawn et al., 2018). In a representative sample of female students at American colleges, Hawn et al. (2018), found that upwards of 25% of women are sexually assaulted while enrolled in post-secondary programs. Given the prevalence of this issue, educational institutions need to have adequate legislation in place to assist survivors in incidents of sexual assault and encourage individuals to report these assaults (Pineau, 1989). While the call for institutional legislation has existed since 1989, a recent surge of high-profile cases suggests that there is still a lack of inadequate legislation on Canadian campuses (Lopes-Baker, McDonald, Schissler, & Pirone, 2017).

The focus on Canadian institutions is timely and relevant as recent headlines surrounding sexual assault demonstrate that sexual assault is occurring frequently on Canadian post-secondary campuses. Three examples of media headlines reporting about sexual assault on a campus illustrate this point: “Dalhousie [University] dentistry students break silence on ‘Gentlemen’s Club Facebook scandal’” (Tryon & Logan, 2015); “Saint Mary’s University frosh chant cheers for rape, underage sex” (Tutton, 2013); and “U of [Ottawa] men’s hockey players had sex while others watched, university claims” (“U of O men’s hockey players had sex while others watched,” 2016). However, these are only the *reported* incidents, and do not reflect those who did not come forward.

There is a lack of relevant and reliable Canadian research exploring female university students’ experiences with sexual assault (DeKeseredy, Schwartz, & Tait, 1993; Patel & Roesch, 2018). A great deal of attention is paid to what has been occurring in the US, but within Canada, research on sexual assault has been progressing slowly. More knowledge on the topic of sexual assault on Canadian campuses is required to grasp a comprehensive understanding of rates of reporting. In turn, this understanding will lead to the ultimate goal of increasing reporting rates and implementing better policies. Rates of reporting sexual assault are affected by three things: (a) a lack of sexual assault policies, (b) existing barriers to support, and (c) responses from post-secondary institutions. My research poses the following question: *how do the policies, barriers, and responses at Canadian post-secondary institutions help or hurt individual’s odds of reporting sexual assault issues?*

It is often assumed that policies are enacted to help survivors in reporting, therefore increasing the odds of reporting. Likewise, individuals often assume that the existing barriers deter the survivors from reporting, therefore decreasing the odds of reporting. Moreover, individuals assume that universities respond in a typically helpful manner, increasing an individual’s odds of reporting. However, to date, there is very little research that explores how policies, barriers, and responses work in conjunction to help or hurt an individual’s odds of reporting. This was exemplified in the Mandi Gray case at York University, where

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<sup>1</sup> I use sexual assault to refer to unwanted sexual contact between individuals, which is similar to the legal definition within Canada.

Gray came forward with a sexual assault accusation against a fellow student and York University refused to support her (“York University fails to support sex assault victims,” 2015).

An analysis of how policies, barriers, and university responses affect a survivor’s odds of reporting is necessary because: (a) sexual assault is pervasive on university campuses; (b) understanding how policies, barriers, and responses hurt and/or help in sexual assault cases will allow for a better understanding of how to help individuals in terms of reporting; and (c) this analysis will help to determine how to better manage cases of sexual assault on university campuses for survivors.

## Terminology

When examining sexual assault, it is important to conceptualize the terms that will be operationalized throughout this paper. However, before doing so, it should be acknowledged that the term “sexual assault” and its use is associated with a great deal of social and legal slippage, leading to a challenge for researchers, policy-makers, and survivors alike. Follette, Polunsky, Bechtel, and Naugle (1996) described *sexual assault* as forced or pressured non-consensual sexual acts, physical and non-physical, that occur between individuals.

Meanwhile, the authors explained *physical sexual acts* as the touching of one individual by another individual in a non-consensual sexual manner (Follette et al., 1996). Whereas *non-physical sexual assault* refers to non-consensual verbal, written or visual sexual acts directed towards another individual (Follette et al., 1996). In Ontario law, sexual violence is defined as

any sexual act or attempt to obtain a sexual act by violence or force. This includes: unwanted sexual comments or advances, selling or attempting to sell someone for sex; acts of violence directed against an individual because of their sexuality, regardless of the relationship to the victim.” (Government of Ontario, 2018, para 2)

Likewise, in Canadian law consent is defined as “the voluntary agreement to engage in the sexual activity in question. Conduct short of a voluntary agreement to engage in sexual activity does not constitute consent as a matter of law” (Government of Canada, 2015, para 1).

## Positionality

I completed my four-year undergraduate degree at Dalhousie University, and continued on to complete my one-year master’s degree at McMaster University. In total, I spent five years in university. It is a well-known statistic that 1 in 4 women will be sexually assaulted while in university (Hawn et al., 2018). This means that every year, I had a 25% chance of being sexually assaulted. For me, that number was way too high.

I chose to attend Dalhousie University in Halifax, Nova Scotia, as it was a family tradition. My dad had attended the university and my younger sister was also attending. I was so proud to be following in my father’s footsteps, or so I thought. The sense of pride quickly diminished in 2015, the second year of my undergraduate, when my sister notified me of an Instagram account in her residence. On “The Dal Jungle” account (Vaughan, 2015, para. 3), certain men were posting explicit, sexual content of female students. I was initially ignorant towards the issue of sexual assault on campus in my first year, but after hearing about this case, I became more interested in the topic.

The more I think about my positionality, the more I realize just how scary this phenomenon is. I’m scared for myself, for my sister, for my friends, and for every student who attends university in the future. I know that out of four of those students, one will likely be sexually assaulted, and those numbers continue to be pervasive on all campuses across the nation. I am a female university student, who is fearful for my own safety, and the safety of others, on our university campuses. I am a student who, among other students, is striving for change on our campuses, to make them safer, more inclusive places for all students. There has been an increase of student activism within Canada in the recent year, making this research timely.

## Literature Review

There is an insufficient amount of literature that has been published to date speaking to the epidemic of sexual assault on post-secondary campuses. Most of the research focuses on the United States; there is a lack of extant literature speaking about Canadian campuses. When it comes legislation surrounding sexual assault, the US and Canada differ greatly. In the US, campus sexual assault is mandated through two federal policies: a) the 1972 *Title IX* amendment to the *Higher Education Act* (1965), and b) the *Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act* (2013) amendment to the *Jeanne Clery Disclosure of Campus Security Policy and Campus Crime Statistics Act* (1990), otherwise known as the *Clery Act*. (Lopes-Baker et al., 2017). Meanwhile, in Canada there is no federal legislation enacted for campus sexual assault. As a result, it is essential to look into Canadian post-secondary accounts of sexual assault on campuses. Quinlan, Quinlan, Fogel, & Taylor (2017) conducted a study where they reviewed the websites of 243 Canadian post-secondary colleges and universities to explore their sexual assault policies and centers. The authors suggested that in a ranking of the top five most violent crimes in Canada, sexual assault constituted one of those five crimes (Quinlan et al., 2016). The authors further note that sexual assaults are occurring more frequently on college campuses (Quinlan et al., 2016).

With sexual assault being a regular occurrence on post-secondary campuses, it is of utmost importance to continue conducting research to understand and to attempt to eradicate the persistence of sexual assault on institutional campuses. Quinlan et al. (2016), furthered their argument by noting that campuses are considered to be “hot spots” for sexual assault due to the convergence of factors that are deemed to increase women’s vulnerability to assault. They noted that there are two main factors: (a) the student population being young and transient, and b) low levels of community attachment and group cohesion. Due to the fact that sexual assault is most likely to occur on post-secondary campuses, it is of crucial importance to turn to these institutions to look at why and how sexual assault is occurring on post-secondary campuses (Lane, Gover, & Dahod, 2009).

In a study of 259 Canadian undergraduate women, DeKeseredy et al. (1993) found an absence of sufficient knowledge surrounding sexual assault on Canadian campuses, leading to further aggression against women (DeKeseredy et al., 1993). This lack of knowledge stems from a scarcity in understanding and/or appreciation of consent. With violence towards women happening at an increasing frequency in combination with low levels of knowledge about the topic, the occurrence of these behaviours against women is growing. More knowledge may be a contributing factor to decreasing the effects of high rates of aggression on university campuses.

The following section will speak to the three main themes involved in the literature review: (a) lack of sexual assault policies, (b) existing mental and physical barriers, and (c) responses of post-secondary institutions. These three themes will touch on why rates of reporting are low on Canadian post-secondary campuses.

### Lack of Sexual Assault Policies

The literature speaks to two issues surrounding policy legislation for sexual assault in Canada, those being (a) implementation of the policies, and (b) the comprehensiveness of the policies. In turn, a discussion about inequality with respect to the paucity of sexual assault policies—and how this has been actualized in real-life scenarios—is necessary.

**Implementation.** In terms of implementation, Canada has a scarcity of sexual assault legislation on post-secondary campuses. Lee and Wong (2017) conducted a qualitative study to explore existing policies at 119 Canadian post-secondary institutions. The authors found that Canada has no federal legislation governing post-secondary sexual assault responses (Lee & Wong, 2017). Further, only two provinces—Ontario and British Columbia—have introduced legislation requiring universities to develop sexual assault policies and response procedures (Lee & Wong, 2017).

Lopes-Baker, McDonald, Schissler, and Pirone (2017) conducted a qualitative study where they completed a comparative policy analysis between Canada and the United States post-secondary sexual

assault policies. The authors concluded that policies in Canada are not sufficient, as they are passed by provincial, rather than federal, government; while in the US, they are passed by federal government. The authors noted that the Ontario Provincial Government launched *Bill 132: The Sexual Violence and Harassment Action Plan* on March 8<sup>th</sup>, 2016 (Lopes-Baker et al., 2017). Lopes-Baker et al. (2017) further note that a part of the bill is dedicated to reducing sexual assault on campuses across Ontario.

Similarly, the government of British Columbia enacted the *Sexual Violence and Misconduct Policy Act* (Lee & Wong, 2017) in 2016. These policies are significant as they recognize the ongoing issue of sexual assault on post-secondary campuses and attempt to address the sexual assault crisis in Ontario and BC. However, they are still not sufficient as they are merely provincial legislature and need to be enacted at the federal level to initiate large-scale change. Although federal legislation is still not effective—as evident in the hundreds of *Title IX* complaints against post-secondary institutions in the United States—it is still a step in the right direction to enacting a higher level of legislation towards sexual assault in Canada.

Lee and Wong (2017) observed that there are some existing policies at Canadian post-secondary institutions that are not enacted by federal or provincial legislation; rather, they have put in place by the universities themselves. Of the 72 public four-year universities across ten provinces in Canada, Lee and Wong (2017), found a total of 119 policies across the institutions. Of these 119 policies, only 27 were related to sexual assault (Lee & Wong, 2017, p. 10). The findings speak to the reality that only 38% of the 72 institutions in the study have implemented a sexual assault policy, signifying the lack of sexual assault policies in place (Lee & Wong, 2017). These 27 sexual assault policies were not considered to be as comprehensive as the legislation enacted by the governments of Ontario and British Columbia for two reasons. First, they were not as in-depth as the provincial policies; and second, they were not enforced as often (Lee & Wong, 2017). In sum, these statistics display how few sexual assault policies have been enacted by academic institutions themselves.

**Comprehensiveness.** The second issue at hand is the comprehensiveness of policies that do exist on Canadian post-secondary campuses. Lee and Wong (2017) remarked that even when requirements are put in place by governmental officials, sexual assault policies can differ a considerable amount between institutions. However, due to the lack of policies on Canadian campuses, the comprehensiveness of post-secondary responses varies even more so: “given the lack of requirements surrounding sexual assault policies at Canadian post-secondary institutions, there is significant variability across institutions” (Lee & Wong, 2017, p. 4).

Lee and Wong (2017) suggested that comprehensive policies are needed, and that verbal and behaviour definitions of sexual and assault should be included within each policy. In addition, identifying to whom the policies apply, who is responsible at each stage of response, formal/informal disclosure and reporting options, protection services for victims, and training/education for all members of the campus should be included in every policy. It is essential that these elements be included in post-secondary policies regarding sexual assault to ensure the proper management of these issues while navigating the complexities of these cases (Armstrong, Hamilton, & Sweeney, 2006).

Because of the absence of comprehensive policies in Canada, victims are often failed by the system. Lee and Wong (2017) provided an example of this at the University of British Columbia, where six students claimed they were sexually assaulted by a PhD student. Lee and Wong (2017) noted that one victims claim was dismissed by the university as the assault occurred off campus, one victim was asked to keep quiet, and action was not taken because it was considered an endangerment to the history department. The accused was expelled, but not for one-and-a-half years after the initial complaint was made (Lee & Wong, 2017). This case in point highlights how universities fail their victims when they do not have the necessary policies in place to properly manage sexual assault issues.

Bohmer and Parrot (1993) conducted a qualitative study where they examined more than 20 campus lawsuits involving rape; they stated that American colleges are beginning to realize that their policies are inadequate to address campus sexual assault. The policies are ineffective due to three reasons:

- (1) there are no closed hearings held by universities,
- (2) there is no definition of “unacceptable” behavior, and

(3) there is no separation of the victim and perpetrator (Bohmer & Parrot, 1993).

Campuses do not possess these crucial elements, as they do not possess comprehensive policies. As a result, post-secondary administrators are left to determine how to deal with the assault without any guiding principles. This lack of guidance may lead to inconsistency in how universities address incidents of sexual assault and often does not lead to a positive outcome for the victim.

**Inequality.** Inequality for sexual assault victims is evident in the lack of policies in terms of their implementation and comprehensiveness. The discussion on policy relates back to inequality in action in its micro, meso, and macro forms. Micro refers to small scale, individual or group interactions, while macro refers to large-scale processes, with meso falling between the two. Specifically, this discussion relates to Stainback, Tomaskovic-Devey, and Skaggs' (2010) article, "Organizational approaches to inequality: inertia, relative power, and environments." Stainback et al. (2010) noted that inequality is often produced and perpetuated in organizations including universities. Stainback et al. (2010) summarized the research on organizations and inequality using three explanatory frameworks: (a) inertia, (b) the relative power of internal constituencies, and (c) exogenous pressures. These three frameworks are evident in the organization of post-secondary institutions as well.

**Inertia.** Stainback et al.'s (2010) first framework on inequality, *inertia*, refers to the tendency of organizations to resist change as time progresses; this is a macro-level form of inequality because of its scale and complexity. Inertia is evident within universities because they are often opposed to shifting how they manage sexual assault issues on their campuses. This is evident with the dearth of sexual assault centers available on campuses today, as well as through the lack of comprehensive sexual assault policies to manage these complex situations (Lee & Wong, 2017). This is in part due to the fact that once established, organizational practices are resistant to change (Stainback et al., 2010). Stainback et al. (2010) further their argument on inertia by noting that in organizational inequality, there are three facets of inertia, those being "(a) the cognitive foundations of organizational inertia, (b) organizations' formal job structure and the policies governing their distribution, and (c) the long-standing effects of conditions at organizational founding" (p. 227). In terms of the first facet of inertia, cognitive foundations of inertia, cognitive bias refers to decision-making and how information is routinely processed and distorted. The brain processes information in terms of categories (e.g., male-female) or roles (e.g., manager-worker) that hold shared cultural meaning, called status beliefs (Stainback et al., 2010).

Status beliefs are generalizations that individuals make, typifying certain individuals into hierarchical groups and according power to the highest group (Stainback et al., 2010). In sexual assault cases, the lower group in the hierarchy are the victims, while the upper group in the hierarchy are the perpetrators. This power dynamic extends beyond the assault itself and transgresses to social and cultural power after the assault. The cognitive foundations of inertia are evident in post-secondary institutions' management of sexual assault issues, as the individuals dealing with these assaults often create status beliefs about the victim and the perpetrator.

Status beliefs work to the disadvantage of the victim, as they essentially evaluate one group of people as superior. This can lead to a discrepancy in the allocation of resources (Stainback et al., 2010). In the case of sexual assault, the perpetrator is looked at as superior, in part due to stereotyping of the victim (Wooten & Mitchell, 2016). Stainback et al. (2010) explained, "stereotypes reflect status beliefs in that they tend to reinforce status inequalities by further highlighting culturally generated categorical differences, which are applied to all members of a group" (p. 227). These stereotypes work against the victim, as the victim is often type casted through victim-blaming for being too promiscuous (Scully & Marolla, 1984) or as if they "were asking for it" (Fisher, Cullen, & Turner, 2005, p. 367). Lorenzi (2015) highlighted by indicating

both governmental agencies and society at large have consistently instructed girls and women to actively work to prevent their own rapes. From childhood to adulthood, women are instructed to avoid taking candy from strangers, walking home late at night, especially in dangerous areas, leaving their drinks unattended and wearing provocative clothing; they are also encouraged to take self-defence courses. (p. 142)

In contrast, we often hear responses to why the perpetrator could not have committed such an act.

Examples of this include “he’s a star athlete, he wouldn’t rape,” as if extra-curricular involvement (or lack thereof) is an indicator of whether or not someone would commit sexual assault.

In terms of the second facet of inertia, organizations’ formal job structure and the policies governing their distribution, a key feature of formal organizations is they are designed to outlive their participants, which is accomplished through the rights attached to the hierarchy of jobs in the workplace (Stainback et al., 2010). Individuals (e.g., university administrators, professors, residence assistants, etc.) who work at universities are limited by how much they can truly help a victim of sexual assault, due in part to the rights and privileges of their positions. Any individual who is not a ruling judge in a sexual assault case, including professors and university staff, do not hold the right to determine the fate of sexual assault cases. These rights are allotted to the higher status members of a post-secondary institution, including members such as the vice-provost, student panels, vice president, and president of the University (Stainback et al., 2010).

The third facet of inertia, the long-standing effects of conditions at organizational founding, refers to the fact that organizations are established with technology and culture in their environments (Stainback et al., 2010). Institutions are embedded with past examples of how to deal with sexual assaults; however, previous instances demonstrate institutional accountability is poor. There has been little-to-no recent change in sexual assault policies and as such, when a sexual assault does occur, a vicious circle results because institutions continue to follow old and outdated policies. It is evident that in all three facets of inertia, the organizational aspect of these post-secondary institutions creates an idea of how little they are willing to change to accommodate victims of sexual assault.

**Relative power of internal constituencies.** Stainback et al.’s (2010) second framework on inequality, the *relative power of internal constituencies*, refers to political hardships and status processes, both which work within organizations to produce power (Stainback et al., 2010). As a mesa form of inequality, the relative power of internal constituencies impacts practices within the institution but are not necessarily influenced or impacted by those from outside. The power of internal constituencies is evident in post-secondary institutions, as the institutions have power to make decisions to better meet the needs of their victims of sexual assault. However, they often do not use their power in a way that helps the victims (Stainback et al., 2010). This was evident in the Dalhousie dentistry scandal, where 13 male students posted sexually explicit content about their female classmates. The men involved in the scandal were allowed to graduate and have since become dentists (Callahan, 2015) which is deeply problematic for moral and ethical reasons.

**Exogenous pressures.** Lastly, Stainback et al.’s (2010) third framework on inequality, *exogenous pressures*, refers to pressures that emerge from organizations’ environments as a result of the effort to preserve existing organizational practice; these are micro-level examples of inequality. Exogenous pressures come into play as post-secondary institutions experience pressure from their students to implement sexual assault policies to better address victims’ needs. This was evident in the events surrounding the Dalhousie University dentistry students: the men involved were not expelled and instead restorative justice procedures were suggested as a solution. This angered many in the community and across the nation: the university received considerable criticism for their choice of action, including student protest for consequences that would impact the perpetrators more significantly (Hunter, Maxwell, & Brunger, 2015).

Stainback et al. (2010) noted that “excluded groups will tend to devise means to usurp status monopolies, either by directly challenging a superordinate’s advantages or by monopolizing other resources” (p. 233). This was evident in the exogenous pressures that students placed on their post-secondary institution in the fight for better management of sexual assault issues. Stainback et al. (2010) suggested that sometimes powerful individuals within the institution pressure the organization to conform to demands. However, this is not the case with regards to sexual assault concerns—despite students’ effort to initiate change—since institutions are often unwilling to amend their policies and practices (Stainback, 2010).

**Mechanisms and processes of inequality.** Victim blaming and lack of resources reflect the mechanisms of inequality. Ridgeway (2014) argued “to understand the mechanisms behind social

inequality,... we need to more thoroughly incorporate the effects of status—inequality based on differences in esteem and respect—alongside those based on resources and power” (p. 1). Status comes into play when looking at the victim and perpetrator in cases of sexual assault on post-secondary institution campuses. In many cases of sexual assault, the perpetrator is more likely to be of a higher status (e.g., social, economic) than the victim (Ridgeway, 2014). Because of this perceived or actual difference in status, perpetrators anticipate few or no repercussions for committing sexual assault.

Ridgeway (2014) claimed that status matters for three reasons. First, “inequality based purely on organizational control of resources and power is inherently unstable” (p. 3). Second, “by transforming mere control of resources into more essentialized differences among “types” of people, status beliefs fuel social perceptions of difference” (p. 4). Third and finally, “when a difference becomes a status difference, it becomes a separate factor that generates material inequalities between people above and beyond their personal control of resources” (p. 4). It is essential, then, when looking at instances of sexual assault, to analyze how status plays a role in the offence. Status beliefs specifically are of relevance here as “people form status beliefs that the ‘type’ of people who have more resources are ‘better’ than the ‘types’ with fewer resources” (Ridgeway, 2014, p. 3). As such, this creates a negative bias toward those who have survived sexual assault.

Despite the pressure that post-secondary institutions face, individuals who possess power in their institutions are more able to resist pressure originating from within their institution (Stainback et al., 2010). However, there are few individuals with power who are helping for the better, an example being faculty members at the University of British Columbia (UBC). Some of the UBC faculty wrote an open letter addressed to students that described the lack of support in improving the University’s sexual assault policies, and their regret for the lack of action on behalf of the administration (Schmunk, 2016). However, this type and level of support is rare because universities have so far succeeded in avoiding implementing comprehensive change related to sexual assault. At the same time, pressures on institutions will only continue to grow as students fight for the rights of sexual assault victims, including those related to reporting incidences of sexual assault.

### **Existing Barriers**

The literature suggests that there are two main barriers that inhibit victims from reporting their assault to their post-secondary institution: (a) victim-blaming and (b) lack of institutional resources.

**Victim-blaming.** The first barrier, victim-blaming, occurs regularly on post-secondary campuses (Lott, Reilly, & Howard, 1982). Karjane, Fisher, and Cullen (2005) conducted a qualitative study where they provided a comprehensive benchmark of sexual assault policy. The authors described victim-blaming as “overemphasizing the victim’s responsibility to avoid sexual assault without balancing messages stressing the perpetrator’s responsibility for committing a crime and strategies bystanders can use to intervene” (Karjane et al., 2005, p. 9). Victim-blaming places too much emphasis on the victim’s responsibility and does not focus enough on the responsibility that the perpetrator possesses (Quigley, 2013). In turn, this significantly reduces the perceived responsibility the perpetrator has in the assault.

Lee and Wong (2017) identified that victim-blaming occurs during the process of reporting an assault. Although disclosure of an assault is done in order to report what has happened as well as receive help, often disclosure results in the opposite. Victims may experience negative responses including victim-blaming comments from those they tell; in turn, this could lead to the denial of services and support from a university. Many victims face victim-blaming when they attempted to report their sexual assault to their post-secondary institution (Lee & Wong, 2017; Gidycz, 2018).

Lee and Wong suggested that there are consequences for the survivor if victim-blaming occurs: “inadequate responses can cause additional trauma and secondary victimization and may reduce the likelihood of disclosing or seeking help” (2017, p. 3). The potential for negative responses creates a barrier for victims in accessing help, and further contributes to a mentality amongst victims that reporting their assault will only cause them further trouble. Victims often do not report their assault as they worry that the authorities and university officials will blame them for the rape that occurred. Freyd and Smith (2014)

coined this phenomenon as *institutional betrayal*, which refers to the second betrayal that survivors face after their assault. More specifically, when reporting their assault, survivors will feel that their institution is being duplicitous because they will be blamed rather than provided support or compassion. Often, authorities and officials believe that women bring these assaults on themselves because they were “asking for it” by wearing a short skirt, for example and therefore, the assault should not be classified as such (Gidycz, 2018; Scully & Marolla, 1984). To further the argument, Bohmer and Parrot (1993) remarked that many women decide that reporting is not worth the trauma and humiliation they will have to experience, recognizing that many post-secondary institutions do not take complaints seriously. This is due in part to the perceived response they believe they will receive from their institution.

**Lack of resources.** There are two main issues in terms of resources and support for victims on campus: (a) an overall lack of available resources, and (b) students not using the resources available. In terms of the first issue, lack of available resources, Lee and Wong (2017) observed that on-campus support in the form of physical resources are quite limited for victims. This creates a barrier for victims who want to report their assault but are not sure where to go (Sorenson, Joshi, & Sivitz, 2014, p. 394). Lee and Wong (2017) further noted that sexual assault centers or women’s resources centers are not often found on university campuses; consequently, there are few specialized services available for victims of sexual assault on campus. This makes the reporting process increasingly difficult for survivors of sexual assault (Mendoza, 2014).

In terms of students not using the resources, Hayes-Smith and Levett (2010) conducted a qualitative study where they explored whether or not students at a large university were receiving information and resources on sexual assault. More specifically, the authors wanted to know if that information was informative and successful in eliminating commonly-held myths about rape. The conclusion of the study was that “even if sexual assault resources are available at a post-secondary institution, it does not mean students are receiving, using, or learning from them” (Hayes-Smith & Levett, 2010, p. 350). Often, students are not aware of the resources on their campus because they are not advertised properly, and the students are not taught about them (Hayes-Smith & Levett, 2010). Thus, students are not even aware these resources exist in the first place, which means they do not know how to go about accessing them when they or their peers may need them.

### **Responses from Post-Secondary Institutions**

The literature suggests two matters that affect how post-secondary institutions respond to sexual assault: (a) legal concerns and (b) the reputation of the post-secondary institution.

**Legal issues.** Sometimes, post-secondary institutions are fraught with legal battles that victims have initiated as a result of the institution’s lack of help during their pursuit of justice (Adams & Abarbanel, 1988). Lee and Wong (2017) remarked that victims of sexual assault may take formal action against their university if they feel as though their case was not dealt with properly. These legal disputes are seen as “last resorts” for the victim: often they had attempted to report their assault to the institution and were met with no course of action for justice. Turning to the legal system was the only hope that the victim may have felt they had left to find justice.

**Reputation.** Lee and Wong (2017) spoke to common post-secondary institution responses, specifically in relation to a post-secondary institution’s reputation. The authors stated that instances of sexual assault on campuses may harm the reputation of an institution; individuals, such as potential faculty, private organizations, or individuals providing funding, may be less inclined to associate with an institution that has a tarnished reputation in respect to sexual assault (Lee & Wong, 2017). This is one of the biggest reasons that post-secondary institutions deny help to their victims. They do not want sexual assault statistics increasing on their campuses. Furthermore, they do not want media released about sexual assault occurring on their campus: this was evident in Dalhousie University’s choice to use restorative justice rather than expel the perpetrators for their actions (Hunter et al., 2015). This decision by Dalhousie received a considerable amount of backlash from individuals who believed restorative justice was not a sufficient enough punishment.

However, DeKeseredy, Schwartz, and Alvi (2000) built on existing empirical research in their article, concluding that the prevention and elimination of abuse against women on North American campuses has still not been achieved. The authors believed that there are two reasons that cause this to occur. First, post-secondary administrators do not feel the problem is significant (DeKeseredy et al., 2000). Second, there is a tendency by administrators to support rights of men over those of women (DeKeseredy et al., 2000). Regardless of what the reason is, according to the literature surrounding sexual assault policy, post-secondary institutions have a duty to accommodate victims who are sexually assaulted on their campuses and to provide the measures needed to meet the needs of these victims.

## Conclusion

I argue that at Canadian post-secondary institutions, an individual's odds of reporting sexual assault are deterred because of three main elements: (a) a lack of sexual assault policies, (b) existing barriers to support, and (c) the responses from post-secondary institutions. Three conclusions result from the literature review. First, federal legislation governing post-secondary sexual assault responses needs to be enacted to increase reporting rates. It is evident that "many Canadian universities have much work to do in terms of implementing comprehensive sexual assault policies and resources for students" (Lee & Wong, 2017, p. 12). Without legislation, universities have no guiding principles dictating how to help victims of sexual assault cases on their campuses.

Second, the obstacles that prevent survivors from reporting need to be managed more effectively. In terms of attempting to eliminate victim-blaming, Bohmer and Parrot explained that "the 'boys will be boys' mentality must be removed from society's mindset and be replaced by the conviction that acquaintance rape is rape, and rape is a serious crime" (1993, p. vii). In terms of the lack of resources, post-secondary institutions need to do more to ensure that resources are available and being used by students.

Third and finally, the responses post-secondary intuitions provide must be improved. Bomher and Parrot explained that "in addition to rape prevention and awareness efforts on campus, there is much room for improvement in the way college officials respond to the needs of individual rape victims" (1993, vii). Aside from policy and existing barriers, the manner in which post-secondary officials respond to these allegations is of great importance.

These findings answer my initial research question, *how do the policies, barriers, and responses at Canadian post-secondary institutions help or hurt individual's odds of reporting sexual assault issues?* The literature suggests that a lack of sexual assault policies combined with existing barriers and poor response from universities result in low odds of victims reporting sexual assault.

This research is situated in a time where the issue is of urgent importance, as highlighted by the instances of sexual assaults on Canadian university campuses that were reported on by the media. As a student myself, I want to advocate for better responses from institutions towards sexual assault issues on campus, for past, present, and future survivors. I hope that at some time in the future, we will only have to advocate for past survivors, and work on enhancing their post-assault care. It is my hopes that through research like this, we can work collectively to significantly reduce sexual assault issues on campuses and better responses from institutions.

## Acknowledgement

First and foremost, I would like to give my greatest thanks to my family who provided their endless love and support. I would like to give thanks to Danielle Lorenz, Chelsea Hobbs, Dr. Lorenzi, Edna Dontoh, and Heather Woods for their writing input and overall support. This research is dedicated to sexual assault survivors and their allies, may this research stand as a reminder that you are not alone in the fight against sexual assault.

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**Taylor MacKenzie:** MacKenzie completed her Master of Arts in Sociology at McMaster University in Ontario. She completed her Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Sociology at Dalhousie University in Nova Scotia. Her research interests include inequality, gender, sexuality and law. Taylor's research has examined the ways in which universities manage sexual assault issues on their campuses, looking specifically at Dalhousie University in Halifax, Nova Scotia. She has also researched inequality in relation to rates of reporting sexual assault at Canadian post-secondary institutions, narratives of personal responsibility in relation to sexual assault, as well as symbolic violence and microaggressions as they relate to sexual assault. Currently, she is working on a project to examine how students at an Ontario-based university make sense of three different narratives of responsibility in sexual assault cases. The research will explore the narratives of rape culture at a level of benefits and norms, victim-blaming at an individual level, and university policies at an institutional level.