

***The Open Secrets Project:
A study on rape culture and accountability at Canadian postsecondary institutions
Preliminary summary and recommendations***

Project Background

[The Open Secrets project](#) was initiated in 2019 by a small research team at Students for Consent Culture Canada (SFCC). It is one of the first large-scale attempts to explore the scope and impact of sexual violence and harassment by professors against students. The aim of the project is to pursue accountability from post-secondary institutions for violence experienced by students, and to change the cultures that support and perpetuate it. SFCC has worked to consolidate existing data and develop a better baseline for future research in the area, with recommendations on policy, advocacy and structural change. We are developing a multifaceted tool kit based on the findings of the report for student survivor-led groups to inform and support mobilization on their campuses.

At the heart of the project are the experiences of those who came forward with their stories, who have previously been disbelieved, marginalized, and ignored by administrators. The research has paid particular attention to Canadian data, intersectional questions, and grassroots advocacy, which with some notable exceptions are often neglected in mainstream press coverage and academic literature on campus sexual violence. Though the report is still in draft form, below we provide a preliminary summary and recommendations as of February, 2021.

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Research Methodology

A number of goals structured our methodological decisions in this project, including:

- To amplify survivors' voices, experiences, and analysis;
 - To work in intersectional and trauma-informed ways;
 - To operate autonomously from institutional influence; and
 - To produce work that meets both conventional and social movement standards of ethics.
- This was reflected most clearly in our continuing efforts to do research that prioritises community care and does not retraumatise for the sake of expediency.

In this project, we chose to employ a relatively conventional set of mixed research methods, even though many of our sympathies lie with more participatory and co-constructive approaches to research and knowledge production. This decision was primarily made in response to our existing resources and labour capacity, as well as the ongoing restrictions of COVID-19. Between January and July 2020, we collected data from current and former students and faculty across Canadian post-secondary campuses through online anonymous surveys and semi-structured interviews. This research was carefully balanced with reviews of primary sources such as news articles, social media posts, policy documents and reports, and secondary sources that include scholarly articles and texts. Through our analysis, we developed two illustrative case studies, coded and analysed primary data and media coverage, and developed an interdisciplinary review of literature and policy.

Themes and Gaps in the Existing Literature

There are now decades of scholarly research addressing sexual and gender-based violence, including a significant body of interdisciplinary work on campus violence. Within this field of research, the majority of studies continue to focus on documenting and recommending ways to reduce violence between students. While they have provided important data and informed prevention efforts, many such studies have been built around traditional gender binaries, and have only recently begun to seriously engage with intersectional approaches to power and violence. Similarly, there is a strong predominance of analyses that understand gender-based violence as an individual, legal, or policy problem rather than a deeper issue that is embedded in the culture of postsecondary institutions.

Though likely unintended, this analytical focus can render invisible many of those who are most at risk by normalised abuses of power in the post-secondary structure. Within both academic literature and other channels such as social media, some aspects of sexual violence continue to be particularly neglected. These include the experiences of Indigenous and trans students, students with disabilities, as well as the dynamics of gender-based violence in settings with unique power dynamics, such as field schools and medical training. Recent shifts towards more complex approaches to power and identity show the positive potential for feminist and anti-oppressive frameworks that emerge from and respond to social movements, as opposed to institutional concerns (Todd, 2018; Harris and Linder, 2017; Ahmed, 2017). However, the issue of violence and harassment by faculty remains particularly elusive in this field. The lack of data in this area compromises student survivors' ability to legitimise our experiences in the eyes of academic institutions, government and the media.

Research on campus sexual and gender-based violence as a whole retains an uneasy relationship to the colleges and universities it scrutinises. Unsurprisingly, researchers have described the difficulty in publishing work that critically addresses the violence within their own institutions or their disciplines (Armstrong, Gleckman-Krut, and Johnson 2018; Baker 2018; Bull et al, 2019; Healey 2014). Whether researching or seeking accountability for personal experiences of sexual violence and harassment, it is easy to be cast in various dismissive stereotypes, from the troublemaker, to the jilted lover, to the

overly-sensitive whiner, to the hysteric. As one of our faculty survey respondents put it, "the complaint becomes the problem, and not the one causing the harm," echoing the pathbreaking work of Sara Ahmed on this topic in the UK (Ahmed, 2017). The pressure to remain silent on harassment and abuse can be extreme and isolating; silencing tactics can take both overt and covert forms (Jochelson et al, 2020; Page et al, 2019; Cote-Meek, 2014). When an issue is not named or acknowledged publicly as violence, it supports the normalisation of power disparities and can increase the potential for abusive behaviour. Not acknowledging student experiences of harm can also support more defensive responses from faculty, including the threat of lawsuits. Kipnis (2017), Dank (2008), and Abramson (2011) go so far as to cast intimate relationships with students as not just normal, but a part of their constitutional rights as professors and peoples. While Kipnis (2017) claims that such academic cultures and “norms” should remain a bastion of academic freedom, these are the very cultures and norms that survivors highlight as inequitable, rape-supportive and limiting their rights to an education. The silencing of survivors and inaction of institutions have given rise to numerous forms of organising by both students and faculty allies, which include intergenerational whisper networks, and groups like the 1752 Group in the UK (Page et al, 2019), Faculty Against Rape in the US (Finley and Levenson, 2018) and SFCC in Canada.

Important analyses are emerging that link institutional denial of harm and silencing of survivors with the rise of the neoliberal university (Gorsack, 2018; Quinlan, 2017; Harris & Linder, 2017; Bay-Cheng and Eliseo-Arras 2008). While democratic governance is undermined by budget cuts and austerity policies, neoliberal institutions frequently shift their view of students as citizens with a right to education, to clients or customers who will pay for a product. In this context, the institution’s “brand” and reputation must be protected, and it must compete on an open market of prospective students to ensure financial viability. This has had mixed results in the Canadian context. For example, as a result of student pressure and shifting social norms, postsecondary institutions have been mandated to comply with minimum standards for sexual violence policies that many lacked (Salvino and Spencer, 2019). Having a campus that is perceived as “safe” is becoming marketable. But in many cases, the potential of a significant financial burden due to poor publicity, faculty litigation and union grievances can mean institutions have a strong incentive to silence and suppress sexual harassment and assault cases, particularly those involving faculty (Page et al, 2019). This has led to a disappointing reality that many call “compliance culture,” where institutions do the minimum required not to break the law or be sued. As Levenson and Finley argue in the American context, this emphasis on compliance is not trauma-informed and does not prioritise student well-being (except where that intersects with other institutional priorities) (2018, 126).

Statistics Canada’s recent study on student experiences of gender-based violence (Burczycka 2019) did include aspects of harm committed by those who hold positions of authority, such as faculty members, in post-secondary environments. However, this study was not a dedicated attempt to capture the dynamics of student-professor relationships or experiences of violence, remaining focused primarily on student violence. The study used a broad category of sexual orientation- or gender-based discrimination, within which 12% of women and 7% of men stated a professor was the perpetrator (2019, 8). Yet it

would be a mistake to read this reporting rate as synonymous with low prevalence, or to assign the issue a low priority. Statistical surveys provide vital data, which in turn must be understood in the broader context of the clear but under-acknowledged power disparities between faculty and students that remain a hallmark of Canadian academic culture.

The dearth of data on the issue can compound issues faced by those who do try to report it. But having data carries its own complexities. In their study on intimate relationships between students and faculty, Bellas and Gossett (2001) warn against relying on statistics alone on this particular issue as “percentages may be underestimates, [...] because of the sensitive nature of the subject” (531). SFCC’s research shows that trauma, isolation, fear and intimidation, intersecting forms of oppression, concerns for academic future, career prospects, and struggles with reporting mechanisms and unsupportive staff have all impacted the rates at which faculty harassment or violence is reported by students. That underreporting is a key dimension of gender-based violence is now a well-established principle echoed across feminist research and practice (Johnson and Dawson, 2010). With the Open Secrets Report, SFCC aims to contribute more critical voices and analyses to these discussions that have too often marginalised, tokenised and shut out student advocates and survivors, to support and inform calls for greater accountability from post-secondary institutions.

Policy Analysis

All publicly available sexual violence policies at Canadian colleges and universities were evaluated on five basic criteria:

- Is there a standalone policy on sexual violence?¹
- Does it refer to a collective agreement or grievance procedure?
- Is there an appeals process that complainants can access?
- Does it mention faculty or professors?
- Does it mention provincial legislation (privacy, human rights, anti-sexual violence, labour, etc)?

In total, 147 policies were reviewed and evaluated. Similar to SFCC’s OurTurn Campus Sexual Violence Policy Scorecard system for sexual violence policies (Salvino, Gilchrist, and Cooligan-Pang 2017, 21), this systematic work enables advocates to get a broad idea of the types of policies that exist across the country, better understand where gaps and complications exist, and recommend strategies for moving towards more accountability. Our findings show that policies in Canada vary greatly in size, language, and rigor. Here we highlight two major areas of concern: First, many policies do not fit our organizational standard of “standalone policies” - meaning the procedures attached to the policy were

¹ SFCC defines a standalone policy as a set of procedures used in sexual assault policy that do not rely on other policies or processes to be implemented (eg. code of conduct or tribunals).

not built specifically to deal with complaints of sexual violence and therefore are not appropriate to be used in those cases. Second, we are concerned with the sparsity of language referring to collective agreements and the procedures around complaints against employees governed by them. When policies are not clear it is difficult for students to have any sense of what a complaint process against a professor would look like before going through it themselves.

We at SFCC see an opportunity for students and labour to come together outside of committees and working groups run by institutions or corporate consultants hired by the government. Discussions could focus on how these policies and collective agreements should and should not interact, how we can make these processes more clear and accessible for everyone, and ultimately how to build strong coalitions to support each other as we fight to hold neoliberal institutions accountable for the harm they cause their students and workers alike.

Legal Analysis

In the context of widespread inaction in the face of “open secrets” at almost every postsecondary institution in Canada, strategies of sharing information and warnings through whisper networks have provided an important (but insufficient) avenue for creating safety and solidarity among marginalised students and faculty. This project’s legal concerns focus on two related areas: non-disclosure agreements and defamation lawsuits. Both areas address the extent to which complainants against faculty can speak publicly about their experiences of harassment and abuse, as well as about the institution’s response. Our participants generally understand speaking publicly as a last resort, when official procedures have failed. A frustrated and oft-repeated refrain in our data is that universities do nothing unless the media is paying attention.

Non-disclosure agreements (NDAs): SFCC’s advocacy experience and participant responses demonstrate that non-disclosure agreements often have a chilling effect on survivors’ capacity to gain accountability for faculty sexual violence, and that students too often know little about them before one is put in front of them. Some participants tell us about being asked to sign agreements that far exceed what is reasonable. In one example from a student survivor:

“The NDA I was asked to sign stated I could not speak to anyone but a lawyer during the investigation, which silenced me from speaking to a therapist. It then made me accountable for any breach of confidentiality made by a therapist when I asked for a rewrite [...] It made me responsible for anyone’s retelling of the story, including random people warning others about [the faculty member] and the actions of support persons provided and employed by the institution.”

Faculty participants share the perception that NDAs are being employed as silencing tools.

“Confidentiality clauses are strong! They don't allow students to speak openly about their experiences after submitting a complaint. NDAs are used in the complaint process to keep students quiet.”

Other faculty add that, beyond the impact on survivors, they are concerned about transparency and accountability to community members and the public:

“Non-disclosure agreements that often accompany investigations into sexual misconduct [...make it] impossible for the general public to know what, if any, steps the University has taken in these cases. Confidentiality is important, but a complete embargo on any information is inappropriate.”

In the Open Secrets report we will provide a basic overview of NDAs, how to recognize them and your rights in resisting them. This is particularly important as SFCC continues to document how often student survivors are told not to question what the institution's lawyers tell them.

Defamation lawsuits: Numerous defamation lawsuits have been filed against survivors, advocates and faculty. These generally target those who seek to change policy and to publicise risks posed to students when institutions do not hold abusers accountable and when their procedures to do so are not transparent. Notably, students report that the threat of this type of lawsuit is used not only to keep individual survivors silent about the identities of their harassers, but also to halt activism around policy change that addresses cultures of harassment and is perceived as restricting (mainly senior, cis male) faculty behaviour. This pattern is concerning to us especially because it impacts students' capacity to exercise their basic rights to expression and assembly. Students tell us:

“The professor involved got some sort of "defamation" protection so it's literally illegal for students to use his name in posts/articles/orientation [...] It just makes me feel hopeless.”

“I was a part of a student initiative that tried to address the rampant racism, sexism and transphobia in the department. We tried official channels of communication, via department meetings, going to department chairs, and were met with hostility, more violence and silencing and even a threat to be sued for defamation.”

In the final report we will give a basic overview of provincial and federal privacy legislation for non-lawyers, discuss what is and is not defamation, and what to do if you find yourself threatened with a defamation lawsuit for speaking up about a professor.

Surveys and Interviews

In this section, direct quotes from participants are all from students.

Our final survey data set includes 225 student responses and 55 faculty responses. Researchers also conducted semi-structured interviews with 8 key informants (students and faculty). There are participants from almost every province and territory, with a good spread of experience across larger

and smaller institutions, and perspectives from early undergraduates all the way to full professors. The group is diverse in social identities as well as areas of study. Many participated because they have firsthand experience with the issue of sexually violent or harassing faculty. Responses were rich, reflective, and often very raw. We have taken extra care to adequately anonymise participants, but also believe in the importance of their own voices and stories making it onto the record. It is our hope that the final report strikes this balance in a way that does justice to their experiences and analyses.

This study passed through a rigorous community ethics process prior to the beginning of the research, and we hold informed consent as a bedrock principle for our work. Participants could opt out of any question and withdraw at any time from both the survey (before submission) and the interviews (before publication). Though our sampling was not random or large-scale, SFCC has built strong relationships of trust and accountability with networks of survivors and grassroots organisers across the country, and therefore has access to perspectives and experiences that may not be represented in other studies. Responses showed that the majority remain more comfortable with a completely anonymous forum, and that a diverse range of students and faculty across many colleges and universities are looking for support, change, and the space to be heard.

Our analysis is still being finalised. We documented many individual experiences, but have refused the conventional individualisation and obfuscation of the structural issues that sustain gender based violence. Rather than remaining focused on legal and policy change, in this project SFCC looks increasingly to the potential for cultural transformation as a way to address persistent and transgenerational forms of violence, privilege and exclusion in academia. Here the concept of rape culture becomes central. We have worked to highlight key elements of rape culture within our participants’ own discussion and analyses of their experiences.

Our research data highlights:

- how institutional cultures that support gender-based violence are co-constituted by systems of oppression, including ongoing colonialism, racism, white supremacy, ableism, classism, heteronormativity, homophobia and transphobia
- how these cultures are sustained and naturalised in academic settings
- how they can be identified, named, and resisted; and
- through what forms of solidarity and consciousness-raising, generative collaborations, and transformative practices they can ultimately be dismantled.

Major themes and examples drawn from participant responses

When analysing participant responses, we asked:

What’s normal? What conditions are in place that make violence and harassment by faculty possible, likely, yet also deniable, unacknowledged, unremarkable? What happens when students (and to some extent other faculty) experience faculty violence and try to get support? What are the individual and

institutional barriers? What are the impacts on survivors’ health, studies and career? And what has helped them get through? What are their visions for a better future for postsecondary education?

1. Normalisation of structural and cultural conditions that facilitate coercion and abuse of students by faculty

“Open secrets” about harassing or abusive faculty	Large power disparities and hierarchical relationships	Many forms of violence, coercion go unnamed	Individual credibility is unevenly distributed
-Open secrets taken for granted, minimised as gossip, rumour -Whisper networks exist in absence of functioning policies and procedures -Multiple previous efforts to address the issue may have failed	-Lack of consensus on norms of faculty behaviour with students -Wide age and power gap between faculty and students -Sexist, racist, ableist and colonial dynamics embedded in everyday relationships -Spaces dominated or controlled by harassers and their networks	-Hierarchies of seriousness exist around different types of abuse and harassment -“Bad apple” narratives support individualistic approaches to violence -Grooming behaviours accepted as normal -Transactional cultures where students are coerced into abusive situations for academic or career advancement	-Faculty have privileged access to power and credibility -Tenure protects bad behaviour -Cultures of genius, charisma and superstars -High value placed on loyalty to supervisor and institution

“The professor that offended against me was white, male, straight, non-disabled, and at the height of his career. His status had everything to do with why I trusted him, why he could talk me into it for so long, and why I never told anyone.”

“The professor made residential school jokes while pressuring me for oral sex in exchange for a passing grade on an assignment I'd missed. [...] He knew I was Indigenous.”

“I was sexually assaulted by my professor during a field course abroad. It was the worst experience of my life. I wasn't believed and the professor still continues to teach and mentor students on field courses.”

“I know [reporting] won't be taken seriously because people tend not to believe Black people. So there's better chances if someone else reports it.”

“I stopped trying to bring it up when other faculty laughed it off.”

“I’ll never forget being asked if I was in school to ‘find a husband.’”

“The way that women and trans students share info through grassroots texts and convos in order to protect each other is amazing. We continue to find ways to protect each other because we know we are all we have. I would trust another student I have never met before more than admin at my school.”

“There are those who these institutions were built for and by, and those who they weren’t. This shows a lot in who is given the benefit of the doubt, who is given second chances, and who is believed. When high levels of leadership don’t reflect the diversity of the university community, and those who share identity with leaders are not held accountable, that sends a strong message about who matters.”

“The more power a professor has, the less accountable they seem to have to be.”

2. Individual and institutional pushback when students disclose harassment or abuse by faculty

Informal or individual strategies of silencing, intimidation	Passing the buck: Institutional scripts to avoid accountability or responsibility	Appearing to care: Gaslighting and “doublespeak”	Procedural barriers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Backlash from abuser in the form of intimidation, bullying, threats of retaliation through academic or other consequences -Gossip about student’s sexual reputation -Online harassment -Threats to “out” survivors who wish to remain anonymous -Power plays: “Do you know who I am?” -Freezing students out and withdrawing mentorship 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Flat out denial: “This did not happen” -Know your place: “These are very serious claims, young lady”; “This person is a respected/beloved faculty member” -Stranger Danger: Reliance on inaccurate stereotypes about campus sexual violence, such as white supremacist narratives of “protection” from “dangerous” men of colour -Displacement of blame: from perpetrator or institution, to survivor or off-campus location -Downplaying seriousness: “we’re not as bad as…” (rival institution, the US) -Never gathering comprehensive data, then claiming that there’s no 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Institutional talking points such as, “We take sexual violence very seriously” -Dismissal of story or of its seriousness/impacts on survivor -False allies in administrative roles -Participatory rhetoric: pointing to presence of survivors on a committee as evidence of meaningful participation -Checkmark or compliance culture -Token prevention programming focused only on student violence -Appropriation of social 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Uncoordinated, rigid policies and procedures -Requiring constant re-telling in place of action -Exhaustion and attrition by design -Confidentiality/NDAs that protect institution more than survivor -Distinctions between firsthand, secondhand accounts that prevent holding serial abusers accountable -Restrictive ideas about “evidence” -Traumatic or punitive accommodations procedures -Poorly trained, understaffed security -Assigning unrealistic workload to understaffed

	<p>evidence of a problem</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Jurisdictional deferral: "That's a police matter" -Performative consulting, "listening" -Emotional blackmail about finances of institution, risk of lawsuit -Reframing as interpersonal conflict: "You should just work it out with each other" 	<p>justice language, survivors' voices</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -“Let's be reasonable / rational.” 	<p>sexual violence services, counsellors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Lack of widespread disclosure training across institution -Threat of lawsuits -Undemocratic governance, decisions made in secret
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“When I first reached out to student affairs about this incident I was asked if I had previously flirted with this professor, and if I had any mental health conditions. I was encouraged to not proceed with any formal statements and to work out my differences with this professor independently.”

“The professor said ‘I’m tenured, so I can do whatever and say whatever I want.’”

“The policy in my university is a mess of bureaucracy that would only further harm a survivor by making them relive their experiences over and over again to panels of faculty who do not care about them.”

“The general rule always seemed to be that the more power someone had, the less action they were willing to take.”

“In my experience (and in the cases I have heard about), offending professors were either department heads or senior faculty, white, and male. Reporting seems challenging because of this.”

“I was not believed by my institution and was seen as a liability”

“Their priority is avoiding lawsuits and covering for mediocre men.”

“My heart hurt when I was hearing the same story over and over. Students had no idea how to report or how to navigate my school's reporting system because it was so dense and unmanageable for survivors of sexualized violence.”

“I was hired to assist in working on the policy and efforts to be survivor centred were ignored or discouraged because of liability. The policy has let down students at the most granular level.”

“I was told by the faculty representative I reported to that I should finish my degree under the supervision of my harasser.”

“The problem was that if I wanted to press charges there would be a formal investigation and I would have to confront [the faculty member] and it would have to take place while I was a student. I asked if I could press charges after I had graduated and they said no, that it wasn't allowed. I can't believe that. That seems incredibly unfair. I thought about it and decided that I didn't want to be involved in something

stressful while I was trying to finish my degree. I was worried about what my other professors would think, how they would react.”

“I felt absolutely gutted that the consequences put upon the professor who harassed me were reversed within two years, and that he still has access to students. I found out he is still drinking with students on a regular basis.”

3. Negative impacts of faculty violence or harassment disproportionately borne by student survivors.

The following impacts are reflected in a large number of responses:

Health impacts	Academic and career impacts
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Shame, self-doubt, pain and fear -Difficulty concentrating -Isolation, restricted mobility -Feelings of “stuckness,” lack of control over case outcomes or future -Declining physical health; burnout, physical and emotional breakdown -Depression, anxiety, PTSD and other mental health conditions, including some reports of suicidal ideation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Dropped classes, diminished academic achievement -Damage to professional and academic relationships -Increase in precarity for international students -Sense of “institutional betrayal”, loss of trust in institution, and in possibility of justice more generally -Belief that degree has/would have no value -High attrition rates from program, degree, graduate study, academic career.

“It affects me everyday and I have sought extensive counseling to help cope. Because my school was so small I felt like everyone knew about the assault and was speaking about it. There was little confidentiality and due to the size of the school I had to see this professor everyday until I graduated, in passing. “

“The prof was given the power to have me expelled after having a breakdown from developing PTSD and I've attempted suicide.”

“It's part of the reason why a degree from the institution lost any meaning for me and why I dropped out to prioritize my safety over a credential.”

“I was unable to complete my Masters because of the impacts of the harassment I faced on my health and well being. I have two years of a better than 4.0 GPA but no final capstone as a result of having to take time away due to health collapse, due to harassment.”

4. Strong visions for future activism, policy and cultural shifts

Below we include illustrative quotes; please see more detail in the section on recommendations.

“Transparency. The school does far too much on the down-low where profs are just “let go” quietly and not punished publicly. They are predators. We should know who they are.”

“Any accountability measures should be equity-informed and accessible (e.g. it should be designed to meet the needs of the most disadvantaged/marginalized students).”

“[The sexually inappropriate faculty member] holds a Canada Research Chair. We need to interrupt the cycle of academic power accrual for faculty who are exploiting those around them.”

“It should be a given that you don't try to f--- your students. Will there be 'edge' cases of say mature students? Yes. But then those should be dealt with by some declaration process. It should be difficult to get into a relationship with a student and should be discouraged at all costs. If other professionals need to sign a code saying they won't f--- their clients, like doctors, then why not profs? I hate to say it, but if this is a problem for you, then you shouldn't be a prof. Go into industry or something where you won't abuse your power in this way.”

“There is so much more work to be done....I would like to see more organized and militant action. A lot of time and energy is spent on meetings with administration, sitting on committees, speaking in official bodies of the university etc, and I truly think that is part of the institution diverting our energies into channels they control and trying to wear us out. We must begin to refuse to participate and disrupt these systems that were designed to control what 'student' input looks and sounds like.”

“There needs to be more resources available for both students, and professors to safely report inappropriate actions. I know for a fact, some professors feel scared that if they stop known behaviour, or try to, they fear they will lose their job. There must be security, and validation.”

Preliminary Recommendations

Student participants

These thematic categories were developed primarily from open-ended survey and interview questions that seek recommendations. Common variations or examples of the theme are listed in italics.

1. Put students and survivors first

Believe, consult and listen to survivors; take disclosures and reports seriously; combat victim-blaming and gaslighting; prioritise student well-being; accommodate student survivors effectively.

2. Improve policies and reporting practices

Policies and practices: More meaningful consultation with students and student groups in policy development and review; better coverage of behaviours that include faculty; actual enforcement of existing policies; protection, support and accommodation of student survivors.

Reporting: Make reporting practices easier, more streamlined, clearer, more accessible, faster, more transparent; promote and destigmatise reporting of all sexual violence; prioritise

anonymity and protect from retribution both students and faculty who report abusive professors.

3. Impose progressive discipline on abusive or harassing faculty (including dismissal)

Institutions must be willing to fire faculty for unprofessional, violent and abusive behaviour, as well as impose credible consequences such as removal of privileges, supervisory capacity and contact with students; progressive forms of discipline must actually be applied regardless of the faculty member’s tenured status; more uniform and transparent disciplinary practices for faculty, but also others in instructional roles, including graduate, teaching and research assistants.

4. Improve prevention, training and support resources

Prevention and Training: Preventative measures such as sexual harassment and bystander training that include scenarios about coercive or inappropriate faculty/student relations; widespread training for students on the existence of sexual violence policies and how to use them; create mandatory anti-oppression education for all members of university or college community; integrate with sexual assault education.

Support: Adequately resourced, appropriate and destigmatised support services for all survivors; accompaniment for complainants; guarantees of confidentiality when seeking services. In particular, students overwhelmingly claim that counselling resources are insufficient at their institutions (not enough counsellors; months-long wait-lists; regular counsellors not trained in institution’s sexual violence policy or engage in victim-blaming during therapy; only offer very short-term, solutions-focused therapy).

5. Bans and boundary work

Develop or clarify current guidelines and boundaries for student-professor relationships with regular, customised training for faculty; explain using student experiences and stories about the wide spectrum of previously tolerated behaviours that can cause harm and create toxic learning environments. Do not rely on stigma, “common-sense” or morality to regulate behaviour. Set limits or bans on specific types of relationships, especially those with direct relationships of supervision. Foster open discussion about appropriate behaviour and professionalism; empower coalitions of faculty and students to promote safer norms around power and ethical faculty-student relationships.

6. Greater transparency, public acknowledgement and accountability

Address and acknowledge issue directly and publicly; aim to gain students’ and public’s trust through genuine transparency and promoting a culture of learning and humility rather than secrecy. Keep the complainant and wider community up to date about the status of the complaint procedure, to the extent possible within existing privacy regulations. Build a reputation around these principles, rather than out of a belief that acknowledging problems will

tarnish the existing brand. Apologise to students for inaction and harm. Consult and seek to learn from their experiences, and engage in restorative processes where appropriate.

7. Importance of intersectional and trauma-informed approaches

Student participants express strong convictions that strategies to mitigate harm and seek accountability for abuse and harassment by faculty must put the well-being of survivors at the centre, and be designed drawing on the expertise of equity-seeking groups.

Faculty participants

Faculty participants echoed many of the same concerns and recommendations as students. Faculty are generally more informed about the inner workings of their institution and often include more detail about the various hierarchies and relationships of power that must be navigated in this context, including the frequently toxic cultures and practices at the departmental level that prevent appropriate resolution of complaints about their colleagues. They also shed more light on the long-term effects of abuse and coercion of students, with a number tracing their own experiences through undergraduate, graduate, postgraduate and precarious employment, tenure track, and tenured roles. Faculty respondents speak of deeply entrenched cultures that favour the status quo, and of the intense personal and career consequences of seeking accountability at various moments. We want to properly reflect this complexity in our final report, and are still crafting recommendations based on their responses.

Some faculty recommendations we want to note here:

- Many faculty recommend emphatically that those subject to sexual harassment complaints should not be quietly put on paid leave, a “solution” that appears fairly common, and is perceived as a reward for those who abuse their power in relationships with students.
- Faculty express concern and frustration about the overzealous use of NDAs.
- They discuss the difficulties encountered when faculty associations or unions defend abusive faculty members. Faculty respondents acknowledge that unions exist to defend the rights of members, but also convey a sense that faculty unions mainly protect abusers and fail to defend their other members as effectively from working environments that tolerate abusive and toxic colleagues and cultures. Thus there are some recommendations to improve how unions address these issues, but they are accompanied with a good deal of resignation.
- From the most senior respondents as well as the most precarious, a number of our participants recognise that those with the protection of tenure are in a unique position to speak up and hold institutions accountable for tolerating the toxic and abusive dynamics documented here. SFCC appreciates this recommendation, and offers the additional caveat that it is not appropriate to assign the burden of change to women, LGBTQ2+ and BIPOC faculty and administrators at these levels.

SFCC's Recommendations

SFCC supports the recommendations put forward by those who have been most affected by abuses of power by professors. In agreement with and in addition to these, we recommend:

Provincial

- That the provincial government(s) update privacy legislation to consider the use of non-disclosure agreements to harm survivors of violence. The use of non-disclosure agreements that limit survivor-centered and trauma-informed supports should be prohibited.
 - Provincial policy legislation must be updated across the country to reflect the need for survivors to have closure to what are often traumatic investigations. This would mean explicitly stating that provincial privacy legislation cannot restrict the release of information to related to cases of sexual violence and the disclosure is for the purpose of informing an individual(s) directly impacted by the incident(s).
 - Health and safety related legislation that involves investigations must also be updated in a similar way so that workers are not impeded from receiving the results of investigations.
- That provincial government and ministries support institutions in creating policies and processes that meet the needs and scale of their campuses and communities. This could include creating networks or communities of practice between institutions so that there is a consistent standard of care across the province as students transition to new schools throughout their education.
- Create comprehensive and accessible accountability mechanisms at provincial levels to address non-compliance with institutional policies and procedures. The lack of meaningful and accessible oversight mechanisms creates a situation whereby institutions, regardless of intention, may violate the rights and/or compromise the safety of survivors with no sanctions from the province, or recourse available to the survivor.
 - Better support provincial human rights tribunals or commissions as an avenue for survivors to seek justice against institutions whose policies cause harm on the grounds of discrimination. This includes implementing the recommendations of [Ardith Walkem](#) towards improving cultural equality for Indigenous peoples to reduce barriers for accessing justice in the human rights tribunal process.

Institutional

- That the physical and emotional labour of survivors must be foregrounded in the discussion and work being done to make the issue of student-professor relationships visible within the higher education sector and more widely discussed in public. This is to mitigate the previously mentioned tendency to focus on the wrong issues or marginalise harm done by normalised abuses of power. SFCC as a low-budget student, grassroots, feminist organisation dedicated to

uplifting the voices of those who have been silenced on this issue, has committed 2+ years of research to bring the issue of student-professor relationships forward in ethical and productive ways. Though it is our intent for the report to be useful for progressing this conversation, this should not stand in for students in positions of making recommendations or change.

- Creating actually standalone policies with processes that are survivor-centered and trauma informed that include the 11 minimum standards recommended by the SFCC One Year Later Report (Spicer and Spencer 2019; Salvino and Spencer 2019, 47).
 - These policies must clearly define the expectations of ethical relationships between students and institutional employees so campus community members know what to expect. Students take varying positions on banning relationships but display the most concern about the widest gaps in power and minimising the potential for abuse of that power.
- Rather than individualized approaches based solely on policy, create institution-wide approaches that focus on culture and ongoing dialogue about the kinds of institutions we want to learn and work in.
 - This includes expanded training and ongoing education for faculty, teaching assistants, and students along with institution-wide campaigns that address ethical relationships and power differences within post-secondary.
 - Not allowing faculty who are known to perpetrate violence against students to have graduate students or research assistants under their supervision.
- Provide sustainable funding for survivor supports on campus including specific mental health supports for survivors, sexual assault centers including those run by students, student advocates, offices focused on bullying and harassment that have a student component of support, and women’s centres.

Next steps

The full report will be released in the summer of 2021 and will be accompanied by a toolkit to support survivors, advocates, and allies on the ground who are pushing back against institutional silence, gaslighting, and betrayal. The toolkit is an integral part of bringing this report to life and ensuring that those taking the most risks on campuses are supported. This kit will include tools that help students understand non-disclosure agreements, tips on meeting with administrators and lawyers, tips for speaking to the media on this issue, and scenario-based training.

As an organisation, we will continue to build relationships with faculty and faculty associations to support those faculty members who wish to advocate for the improvement and transformation of their own institution, as well as union practices and procedures. SFCC will also continue to push for the transformation of post-secondary institutional policies that address harm and support survivors. The knowledges shared with us in this project will be mobilized to showcase the need to move beyond

protection of institutional reputation and meeting legal obligations. There will also be future publications that draw on this work in a variety of aspects including methods of care and mutual aid when addressing violence. We will bring this work back to those who trusted us with their stories and work in order to keep pushing conversations and learning from each other as we work to confront how the power structures inherent in the academy uphold and perpetuate issues of power imbalance, hierarchy, and coercion.

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