International Pathways Project: Identifying and reducing barriers that newcomer students have in accessing sexual violence support and education services at SFU

Acknowledgement

We respectfully acknowledge that SFU, the SVSPO and its partners in the International Pathways Project conducted the work of this project on unceded Coast Salish Territory - the traditional territories of the xwmothwojem (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh Úxwumixw (Squamish), səlilwəta? (Tsleil-Waututh), kwikwəxəm (Kwikwetlem), Semiahmoo, Kwantlen, Qaywayt, Tsawwassen, and Katzie Nations. Sexual violence has been part of the core of the settler-colonial agenda that displaces and disenfranchises Indigenous peoples. Though we have much to learn, doing anti-violence work, we strive to centre anti-colonialism on the path to end gender-based violence.

Introduction

Post-secondary institutions are intended to be safe spaces for learning, personal growth and community building. While college and university campuses are places where students are heavily engaged with academic and social activities, students may experience sexual violence and other forms of harm. Despite the fact that many post-secondary institutions have developed and implemented educational programs and support services to respond to sexual violence in university communities (Reid and Dunlop, 2017), this approach tends to miss a vulnerable population on campuses: those Students from International Pathways (SIPs) (definition offered below).

The purpose of the International Pathways Project (IP Project), initiated by the Sexual Violence Support & Prevention Office (SVSPO) and in partnership with Fraser International College (FIC) and International Services for Students (ISS), seeks to identify barriers that SIPs face when accessing sexual violence support and engaging in sexual violence educational initiatives. We also seek to survey SIPs' knowledge of sexual health issues. As well, we would like to identify the sexual health base knowledge of SIPs at Simon Fraser University (SFU) and Fraser International College (FIC). The hope is that by sharing project findings, SFU and other postsecondary institutions may be able to implement change to better support SIPs.

Consultations with key campus community partners about the project were conducted in Fall, 2018. The consultants consisted of the Women's Centre, International Student Services (ISS), Student Engagement & Retention Services, the Interfaith Centre, Campus Public Safety, Residence & Housing, Health & Counselling. In partnership with ISS and FIC, the SVSPO conducted a survey to gauge SIPs perspectives and needs in relation to sexual violence support services that are offered at SFU and FIC. We created and distributed digital and paper questionnaires targeted towards undergraduate SIPs studying at SFU and FIC (separate report). We received 427 responses (166 SFU responses, 261 FIC responses) and offer a summary of our findings in this report and offer some insight into SIPs' perspectives about accessing sexual violence support services and prevention education on campus.

Background

The Sexual Violence Support & Prevention Office (SVSPO) at Simon Fraser University (SFU) offers ongoing, confidential and free support for University Community members including students, staff, and faculty, who are impacted by sexual violence. The Office also offers

educational materials and workshops about sexual violence prevention, supporting disclosures of sexual violence, and other educational topics for students, staff, and faculty. Committed to fostering a culture of care, consent and respect at SFU, the SVSPO supports student-led initiatives with the Active Bystander Network who promotes support and education services. We thank the members of the IP Project working group from the SVSPO, FIC, and ISS for their ongoing support.

Definitions

Students on International Pathways (SIPs)

Those students who have arrived in Canada within the last eight years and could include permanent residents, refugees and international students. SIPs could also include Canadians who may have been previously living outside of Canada, and have now arrived in Canada within the last eight years.

Sexual Violence

"An umbrella term that encompasses a broad range of behaviour...a sexual act or an act targeting a person's sexuality, gender identity or gender expression that is committed, threatened or attempted against a person without the person's Consent. Such behaviour may or may not involve physical contact...includes but is not limited to: sexual assault, sexual exploitation, sexual harassment, stalking, indecent exposure, voyeurism, and the distribution of sexually explicit photographs or videos of a person without their Consent." (SFU, 2017)

Community Engagement

The community engagement process mentioned above was done in two stages. The first included conversations with key campus community partners and helped develop the survey questions. The second stage included the development of a survey with questions tailored for SFU and FIC SIPs and asked about their experiences accessing sexual violence support services and their engagement with sexual violence education. The survey was hosted on an online platform and distributed in paper form to three major locations on the SFU Burnaby campus frequented by SIPs: International Services for Students (ISS), Fraser International College (FIC), and Residence & Housing. Two separate surveys were developed: one for SFU students and one for FIC students. Surveys were live from late February, 2019 to mid-March, 2019. A total of 464 responses were collected; 197 were from SFU students. After the data was compiled and reviewed, 166 SFU responses were analysed.

Literature Review

While there is little research in this area, studies show that international students often face many barriers to disclosing or reporting sexual violence. Often, this is because they lack an understanding of what constitutes as sexual violence. These students may also be afraid that they will lose their student visas as a result of disclosing an incident (Crace, 2017).

Some studies have shown that there is an underutilization of counselling services by international students, and researchers are trying to understand the barriers that deter students from accessing these services. Kambouropoulos (2015) conducted a study in two universities to identify some of

these barriers through counsellor interviews and also sought to understand students' help-seeking behaviour and the path by which they eventually sought out counselling. The barriers identified from the feedback provided by the counsellors during the interviews include; lack of familiarity with the concept of counselling & personal experience with it, stigma & saving face, inability of students to talk about their problems and confide in strangers, lack of awareness of the availability of counselling services, confidentiality issues as well as gender roles & age.

Likewise, some reports have shown that international students do not engage well with sexual violence education because the content is not in a language easily understood and the method of delivery of the educative course is different from what the students are used to. The course contents are also not culturally sensitive to the needs of these students (Reid and Dunlap, 2017).

There are not many studies to show how SIPs access sexual violence support services; of the ones that do, even fewer focus on students' standpoints in their access of these services. Acknowledging this gap in literature, we reviewed research about sexual violence experiences of newcomer immigrant and refugee women in Canada instead. Given that the sample of this investigation is fairly broad and includes immigrant students and refugee students, utilizing studies about immigrant and refugee women's experiences of sexual violence offers relevant knowledge to our understanding of how SIPs navigate sexual violence. We suspect also that the shared experience of being racialized, newly-arrived, and non-Canadian likely suggests that immigrant and refugee women experience similar barriers as SIPs when accessing sexual violence support and educational services. It is important to highlight this part of the IP Project's assessment process as it will bring relevance to our research and findings and also brings attention to the lack of academic literature highlighting SIPs' voices in how they navigate helpseeking. But crucially, it brings attention to the fact that postsecondary institutions have failed to address racism as being a part of students' lives and, importantly for this project, as intersecting with sexual violence. This latter note will be further addressed in the discussion section of the report.

Immigrant and refugee women experience sexual violence in their communities, yet there are challenges in terms of accurately reporting the prevalence and the unique dimensions of sexual violence in these communities. This is due to the limited scope of research that specifically examines the issue of sexual violence within these communities as research on this population in Canada focuses more on the subject of intimate partner violence rather than sexual violence (Status of Women Canada, Communications and Public Affairs Directorate, 2016)

Much academic research highlights that immigrant and refugee women are more vulnerable to gender-based violence because they may be isolated from family and community (Status of Women Canada, Communications and Public Affairs Directorate, 2016). This notion is supported by Forbes-Mewett and McCulloch (2016) in their interviews with postsecondary administration and their experiences of supporting Survivor SIPs note that international students are often seen as "attractive targets" because they tend to be isolated from their more intimate networks of support while they are in the host country. Wright, Dhunna, Riddle, Degannes, and Berzins (2019) suggest that Survivors who are international students may find themselves having a more difficult time when dealing with sexual violence as they are away from their support networks.

Given what we know about differing cultural norms regarding talking about sexual (and other forms of) violence, as well as language barriers, it is likely that additional evidence is required that can consider the complexity of immigrant experiences and identities. Status of Women Canada, Communications and Public Affairs Directorate (2016) reported that immigrant and refugee women are more vulnerable to gender-based violence because of a lack of host-country language skills, lack of access to dignified jobs (e.g., those that reflect their skill-set and level of experience), uncertain legal status, as well as their experience with authorities in their country of origin. Individual and group experiences of sexual violence will differ based on such variables as country of origin (e.g., regional/cultural expression of patriarchal ideologies that shape the treatment of women) and the context of arrival (e.g., forced versus voluntary migration; settlement in a rural versus urban location).

In addition, echoed in Crace, immigrant and refugee women lack awareness of their rights and the resources of support available to them which creates further obstacles to accessing services. This may be especially true for new immigrants, women with precarious citizenship status, or those who are undocumented; furthermore, those in Canada as refugees, on temporary work visas, or whose citizenship is pending, may not want to draw attention to themselves out of fear of deportation. Under these circumstances, women may not feel safe to report sexual violence if they feel it will jeopardize their status in Canada. (Status of Women Canada, Communications and Public Affairs Directorate, 2016). Given that immigrant and refugee women are more vulnerable to gender-based violence when living in the host country, and given that international students are more likely to be targeted for gender-based violence, it is clear that postsecondary institutions are challenged with focusing on how to best support Survivors from international pathways. From the literature review, we have found that there is a gap in research in relation to best practices for reducing barriers for students on international pathways from accessing sexual violence support services, further reinforcing the need for this project.

Results

Below are the results of the surveys. It is estimated that approximately 2.49% of International Students at the undergraduate level completed the questionnaire. The remainder of responses are comprised from the general SFU undergraduate population from students who identify as one of the following categories: Permanent Residents, Canadian Citizens, or Other (not including Refugee).

Personal Information Section.

Question: Age range

- 16 - 18 years-old: 21.3%

- 19 - 21 years-old: 57.9%

-22 - 24 years-old: 18.3%

- 25 - 27 years-old: 0.6%

-28 - 30 years-old: 0.6%

- 31+ years-old: 1.2%

Question: Gender that you identify with

- Male: 41.6%

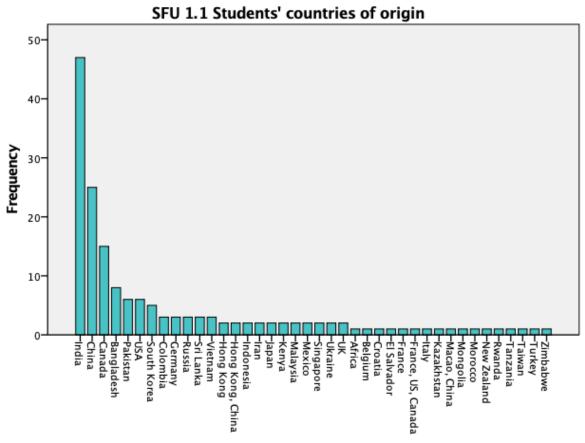
Female: 57.8%Non-binary: 0.6%

Question: What year of study are you in?

- 1st: 51.8% - 2nd: 16.3% - 3rd: 17.5% - 4th: 12.0% - 5th: 2.4%

Question: What is your country of origin?

- Please see image SFU 1.1

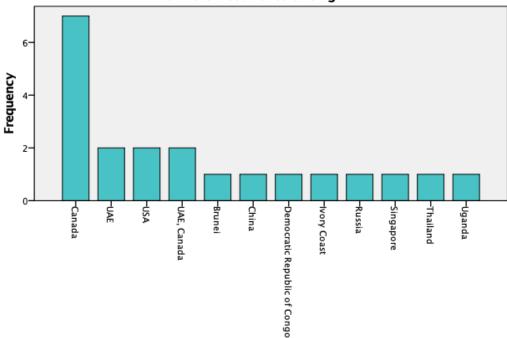


What is your country of origin?

Question: What country have you spent the majority of time in, if different from the above question?

- Please see image SFU 1.2

SFU 1.2 Countries in which students have spent the most time if different from their countries of origin

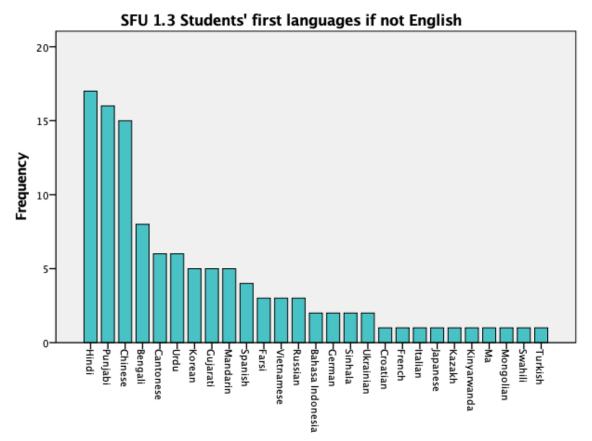


In which country have you spent the most time in if different from the above?

Question: Is English your first language?

- Yes: 27.3% - No: 72.7% Question: If your first language is not English, please indicate your first language

- Please see image SFU 1.3



If no, please indicate your first language?

Question: How long have you been living in Canada?

0 - 1 year: 44.0%
1 - 2 years: 14.5%
2 - 5 years: 21.1%
5 years +: 20.5%

Question: What is your status in Canada?

Permanent Resident: 6.0%International Student: 78.3%Canadian Citizen: 15.1%

- Other: 0.6%

Sexual Violence Support Services.

Question: Are you familiar with the definition of sexual violence?

Yes: 77.7%No: 22.3%

Question: If yes, please describe sexual violence as you understand the term.

Here are some of the responses that we would like to highlight:

"[a] sexual act that may harm victim [sic] in some way."

"[v]iolence of a sexual nature including assault and rape."

"HURTING YOUR PARTNER WITH ACTIONS OR WORDS [sic]."

"Inappropriate or unwanted touching or even forced sex."

"Violence that has a sexual nature to it such [sic] as rape."

Question: Are you aware of the existence of the SVSPO at SFU?

- Yes: 67.5% - No: 32.5%

Question: If yes to the question above, please indicate how you heard about the SVSPO?

- SVSPO website: 12.4%

Friend: 15.0%Workshop: 12.4%Class: 26.5%Residence: 19.5%

- Other: 14.2%:

- Here are some responses that we want to highlight:
 - "posters around SFU [sic]"
 - "Counselor [sic]"
 - "Training workshops for Welcome Leader [sic]"
 - "I saw some leaflets about that at [sic] SFU downtown campus."
 - "Rotunda community [sic]"

Question: Are you aware that the SVSPO provides sexual violence support to all students at SFU?

- Yes: 68.7% - No: 31.3%

Question: Are you aware that the SVSPO provides sexual violence support to all staff and faculty members at SFU?

Yes: 56.0%No: 44.0%

Question: What are some of the reasons why you may choose **not** to use SVSPO support services? *Here are some of the highlights from the responses we received from the question:*

"Because of shame."

"Privacy security [sic] concerns."

"Being in such a situation may be embarrassing to talk about to begin with [sic]. I do not know if the support service respects my privacy completely or partially or does not do so at all."

- "Often it happens that people ask for proof and do not trust us if we are physically or mentally abused. If there is no one to listen than we would not use this support."
- "I didn't know it [the SVSPO] was a thing. It's not something commonly talked about or advertised [sic]"
- "Because i [sic] don't exactly know where it is and what are the laws [sic] regarding sexual harassment of international students."
- "Language barriers [sic] Different understanding of sexual violence [sic] No knowledge of consent [sic]"
- "Because I have not [sic] history with sexual violence [sic]"
- "I believe that I am not completely aware of my trauma and so it would likely be a waste of resources or [sic] someone more in need should be tended to rather than me."

Question: What are some of the ways in which you would like to receive information on the SVSPO's support services?

Email: 54.2%Newsletter: 25.3%Social media: 50.6%In class: 31.3%

- From a friend: 16.9%

- I do not wish to receive information from the SVSPO: 9.6%

- Other: 1.2%

• Here are the responses suggested:

"physical [sic] posters or something on campus [sic]

"Events e.g. Get Involved Day [sic]"

Recommendations for sexual violence support.

- Create campaigns that promote the ways in which students can access the SVSPO for support.
 - o Highlight what "client-centred" support means and what it can look like.
 - o Highlight the Office's integrity to confidentiality and privacy.
- Create long-term, safety-centred campaigns that draw attention to what sexual violence means.
- Offer students the option to access support in the top 3 non-English languages that they speak.
- Maintain engagement with students about support services by posting posters around all
 three campuses, discussions in class, and intra-community relationships (i.e., Health and
 Counselling Services, Career Services, Rotunda student groups, etc.)
- Create SVSPO social media accounts to centralize engagement with students and to relay information about support services.

Sexual Violence Education Initiatives.

Question: Were you aware that the SVSPO provides educational workshops and materials to all students at SFU?

Yes: 45.2%No: 54.8%

Question: Were you aware that the SVSPO provides educational workshops and materials to all staff and faculty members at SFU?

- Yes: 41.0% - No: 59.0%

Question: What are some of the ways in which you would like to receive information on SVSPO educational workshops:

Email: 57.8%Newsletter: 30.7%Social media: 51.2%In class: 33.7%

- From a friend: 15.1%

- I do not wish to receive information from the SVSPO: 7.2%

- Other: 1.8%

• Here are the suggested responses:

• "Residence [sic]"

• "Posters [sic]"

• "Events during school day [sic]"

Question: What are some reasons why you may choose **not** to engage in an SVSPO educational workshop?

Here are some of the responses that we want to highlight:

"Embarrassed [sic]"

"fear and shame of people knowing about it"

"stigma [sic]"

"How awkward friends and classmates might be about talking about sex."

"[It isn't] the norm for people from my background to speak about sexual violence. It's more "taboo". They think its [sic] best to forget and move on. Male sexual abuse is deemed nonexistent [sic] in culture [sic] and its [sic] considered weak to admit sexual abuse or violence [sic]"

"If content discussed may be triggering [sic]"

"feel unsafe, the person who may have cause [sic] the sexual act may be there, conserned [sic]/worried [sic] about secondary victimization."

"If I don't feel the knowledge I learnt in these workshops will be applicable in my life."

"Because i [sic] have alot [sic] of classes and workload, [sic] i [sic] dont [sic] have time for anything else [sic]."

Question: Would you prefer to engage in an online training module or an in-person training about these topics?

- Online module: 40.2%

- In-person training: 22.0%
- I do not wish to engage in training about these topics: 14.0%
- Both online and in-person: 23.5%

Recommendations for this section.

- Create diversity-informed, culturally-sensitive, safety-centred educational workshops and materials about sexual violence that can be engaged with in-person and online.
 - o The design of these materials and workshops should be student-centred as SIPs are busy people.
- Maintain communication about educational workshops and materials through email, SFU social media, and in class.
- Create SVSPO social media accounts to centralize information about offered educational materials and workshops.

Sexual Health Knowledge.

Question: How knowledgeable are you about sexual health issues?

Extremely: 7.2%Very: 28.3%

Moderately: 47.6%Slightly: 16.3%Not at all: 0.6%

Question: How comfortable are you discussing sexual health issues?

- Extremely: 13.3%

- Very: 34.9%

Moderately: 39.8%Slightly: 9.0%Not at all: 3.0%

Question: Would you be interested in attending a sexual health workshop if this was offered on campus?

Extremely: 9.6%Very: 22.9%

Moderately: 41.6%Slightly: 17.5%Not at all: 8.4%

Question: If you indicated you would be interested in attending a sexual health workshop, please indicate the reason(s) why you would like to attend.

Here are some highlights from those responses:

"It could be interesting and is something everybody must know about, at least the Basic [sic] information."

"It's good for me to know more about my own body and how to keep it healthy while engaging in sexual activities. Also, I can benefit from knowing what is healthy and what is not in a relationship."

"on site [sic] STI testing, rapid HIV testing [sic]"

"To learn more and be a better resource to others. Also [sic] to fully know about the resource before suggesting it to others."

Question: What topics would you be interested in learning more about related to sexual health?

- Consent: 50.0%
- Healthy relationship: 76.5%
- Assertiveness and boundaries: 51.8%
- Safer partying: 49.4%
- Dating culture in Canada: 61.4%
- Other: 6.6%
 - *Here are some of the responses:*
 - "Where to get testing done and similar [sic]"
 - "Birth Control [sic] if that falls under this topic."
 - "the [sic] stigmatization of female sexuality, stigmatization of male victims, stereotypes surrounding masculine sexuality & [sic] how to fight them [sic]"
 - "stigmatization [sic] of men as victims [sic] stereotypes surrounding masculine sexuality and how to fight them [sic]"
 - "Queer sex and relationships [sic]"

Recommendations for this section.

- Create diversity-informed, culturally-sensitive, safety-centred educational workshops and materials about sexual health and healthy sexuality.
 - O Students are keen on learning about topics such as healthy relationships, dating culture in Canada, assertiveness and boundaries, and masculinity. They would also be pleased to learn about safe sex, gender, sexuality, and stereotypes.

Key Recommendations

Recommendations for SFU and the SVSPO.

- Create campaigns that promote the ways in which students can access the SVSPO for support.
 - o Highlight what "client-centred" support means and what it can look like.
 - o Highlight the Office's integrity to confidentiality and privacy.
- Maintain engagement with students about support services by posting posters around all
 three campuses, discussions in class, and intra-community relationships (i.e., Health &
 Counselling Services, Career Services, Rotunda student groups, etc.)
- Create long-term, safety-centred campaigns that draw attention to what sexual violence means.
 - O Students' responses strongly suggest that they are engaged with a basic understanding of sexual violence but lack a nuanced understanding that covers the scope of sexual violence. This may hinder students from accessing support because they do not believe that their experiences of sexual violence "count" as sexual violence.
- Create posters about support services that can be posted around the three SFU campuses.

- Offer students the option to access support in the top 3 non-English languages that they speak; also offer other identified vulnerable groups who may be less resourced the option to access support in their language of origin.
- Create SVSPO social media accounts to centralize information about the SVSPO and to engage students with information about support services and educational materials and workshops.
- Create diversity-informed, culturally-sensitive, safety-centred educational workshops and materials about sexual violence, sexual health, healthy sexuality, and dating and relationships that can be engaged with in-person and online.
 - o The design of these materials and workshops should be student-centred as SIPs are busy people.
 - o Students seem very keen on engaging in education about consent, assertive boundaries, healthy relationships, safer partying, and dating culture in Canada.

Next steps

- SFU and FIC must commit to anti-racist, decolonial, anti-oppressive feminist (intersectional) principles and act to support their students who face multiple structural and interpersonal barriers.
 - o Short-term goals around collaboration:
 - Share findings of the IP Project with SFU and FIC Human Resources, EDI, and Senior Directors within SFU Student Services
 - o Long-terms goals around collaboration:
 - HR to embed anti-racist, decolonial and anti-oppressive feminist principles into job descriptions, hiring practices and professional development opportunities.
 - Directors within Student Services to explore what may be implemented at a departmental level
 - Diversify support staff and encourage staff to engage with multicultural, anti-racist, decolonial professional development.
- SVSPO to share the literature review and findings of the IP Project with internal consultation stakeholders and other Canadian postsecondary institutions.
- SFU to further explore capacity with Monreau Shepell, MySSP provider, to offer traumainformed counselling.
- SVSPO and FIC Wellness Office should strategize around how they can provide resources and support services to SIPs, and the larger campus community, in the language that clients are most comfortable speaking/engaging in. (i.e. promote the use of translation services, translate key promotional materials, hire staff who are fluent in non-English language, etc).
- For on-campus support services to foster relationships with off-campus multicultural, immigrant serving organizations and develop a nuanced understanding of their support services so that they may strategically raise students' awareness of these services and for the latter to be able to access these in ways that are meaningful.

- Create in-person and online educational initiatives that are mindful of students' schedules. SIPs demonstrate a keenness to engage with educational materials and workshops about sexual violence and sexual health but do not have the time to do so due to busy schedules and academic demands.
 - o Short-term educational goals:
 - To further develop workshop and educational materials around dating and relationships in Canada that explore transitions from high school to university and dating culture in Canada.
 - Expand on sexual violence and sexual health educational materials, specifically dating and relationships, into co-curricular programs such as SFU 101.
 - o Long-term educational goals:
 - Collaborate with specialized program offerings for vulnerable groups
 (Back on Track as an example) to provide educational opportunities.
 - Explore creating a Living-Learning community around sexual violence education and prevention.
- In a few years, engage with another iteration of the IP Project to assess the potential barriers that SIPs face when trying to access sexual violence support services and educational initiatives. This will also help the SVSPO and campus partners be able to assess whether there is a change in perception amongst SIPs.
 - o In the next iteration of a survey, to track where students learned about the opportunity to engage in the survey.

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