Responding to Disclosures of Sexual Violence

Training for: Community Advisors, Residence Orientation Advisors, and Residence Orientation Reps

Hagar Akua Prah, M.Ed., RSW
Consultant on Sexual Violence Prevention and Response

Tolulope Ojo, M.A.
Sexual Violence Prevention Education Program

Equity and Inclusion Office
McMaster University sits on the traditional Territories of the Mississauga and Haudenosaunee Nations, and within the lands protected by the Dish With One Spoon wampum agreement.
AGENDA

1. Definitions and Statistics
2. Effects and Approach
3. Roles and Responsibilities
SESSION GUIDELINES

• Self-care
• Confidentiality
• Be non-judgmental
• Be Respectful
• Use “I” statements
• Listen actively and empathically
SEXUAL VIOLENCE

SEXUAL “JOKES”
UNWANTED SEXTING
STREET HARASSMENT
VOYEURISM
INDESCENT EXPOSURE

SEXUAL HARASSMENT
STALKING
UNWANTED SEXUAL CONTACT
SEXUAL ASSAULT
SEXUAL EXPLOITATION
RAPE
CONSENT – a legal term

- Voluntary agreement to sexual activity
- Communicated through words or conduct
  - Can be withdrawn at any time
  - Must be capable (not asleep, inebriated, etc.)
  - Cannot be obtained by coercion, intimidation, force, threats of harm
  - Cannot be obtained through abuse of position of trust, power or authority
CREATING A CULTURE OF CONSENT

Freely Given
Reversible
Informed
Enthusiastic
Specific

Source: Planned Parenthood
Available online at: https://plannedparenthood.tumblr.com/post/148506806862/understanding-consent-is-as-easy-as-fries-consent
Let's Talk about Consent

Written, produced, and directed by NYU students and alumni, this video reflects 18 hours of interviews with students and recent grads at NYU and across New York City who shared what consent means to them, and the importance of starting a brave conversation on campus.
SEXUAL HARASSMENT – illegal

• Violation of Human Rights Code (administrative law)

• Unwelcome sexualized comments or conduct against a person’s
  
  o sex

  o gender identity

  o gender expression or

  o sexual orientation

• May involve one incident or a series of incidents
Sexual Harassment
In the Workplace

What Constitutes Sexual Harassment?

- Offering benefits for a sexual favor
- Sexual advancements
- Threats or retaliation to "no"
- Visual conduct suggestive gestures
- Verbal conduct derogatory comments
- Physical conduct body position or touching

Source: Nupur Preeti Alok, September 29, 2015, Feminism in India (FII)
SEXUAL ASSAULT – a crime

• Violation of the Criminal Code (criminal law)

• Any unwanted, non-consensual, sexual activity, such as:
  – unwanted sexual grabbing, kissing, and fondling, as well as rape.

• Incident rates have not changed
  – While other violent crimes declined in last decade
SEXUAL ASSAULT – rooted in gender inequity

9 of 10 reported sexual assaults are against women (or female-identified persons)

94% of reported sexual assaults committed by men (or male-identified persons)

Additional inequities create elevated risk/rates 2–3 X MORE

Mr. McIntosh
WOMEN ARE NOT THE ENEMY

Women sexually assaulted in their lifetime:

1/4

Women who go to the police about their rape:

1/6

Of reported assaults, only 1/20 are false. Only 0.2% of women are false rape accusers.

RAPISTS are the ENEMY.

MEN ARE NOT THE ENEMY

Men sexually assaulted in their lifetime:

1/6

Men who commit rape in their lifetime:

1/17

Only 6% of men commit 5-6 rapes each.

Source: Dawn Centre Domestic and Sexual Violence Services, Florida, U.S.A.
https://www.dawncenter.org/sexual-violence
McLean’s Survey (2018): 1 in 2 LGBTQ2S+ students experienced sexual violence

Source: Fenway Health Violence Recovery Program
http://www.equalityinstitute.org/metoo-but-why-is-it-up-to-survivors-to-call-it-out
SEXUAL ASSAULT – Reporting to Police

95% of survivors do not report assaults to police, making sexual violence the most underreported crime in Canada.

Source: Alberta University of the Arts Students Association website; text from Government of Alberta
http://www.acadsa.ca/sexual-violence-awareness/
Myth: Committed by strangers.
Fact: More than 80% committed by someone known to individual.

Myth: occurs in dark, dangerous place
Fact: frequently occur in daylight and in private (e.g., residence, home)

Myth: an act of passion or desire that could not be controlled
Fact: an act of power and control; individuals choose their behaviours

Myth: If individual isn’t crying or visibly upset, it probably wasn’t serious
Fact: Everyone reacts differently; behaviour doesn’t reflect experience
CAUSES OF RAPE

- Short skirts
- Drinking
- Flirty behaviour
- A promiscuous past
- Walking alone
- Night time
- Rapists

Source: The Equality Institute
http://www.equalityinstitute.org/metoo-but-why-is-it-up-to-survivors-to-call-it-out
UNDERSTANDING THE IMPACTS

• Sexual violence may be a traumatic experience

• Every individual will react and recover differently

• The experience can have:
  – significant lasting effects, and
  – academic and workplace implications

• Contact the SVPRO Consultant for accommodations
POSSIBLE EFFECTS...what it looks like

- Low self-esteem
- Difficulty focusing, concentrating, making decisions
- Difficulty performing routine tasks
- Thoughts of suicide
- Flashbacks, nightmares
- Headaches/migraines
- Self-harming behaviours
- Alcohol and drug misuse
SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS

• Isolation from peer group (“on the outs”)

• Being on campus is difficult
  – Fear of bumping into assailant

• Places one frequented no longer feel safe

• Feel must leave school/job
  – due to effects or assailant in workplace
ISOLATION and MARGINALIZATION

- Isolation is intensified if the individual has a small support network or if they experience additional social marginalization (e.g., racism, ableism, homophobia, some international students, etc.)

- Importance of awareness of intersectionality
WHAT ARE SOME BARRIERS TO DISCLOSING?

• Feeling unready
• Feeling shame
• Fear of not being believed
• Fear of being blamed
• Concerns about confidentiality
• Fear of reprisal from accused or friends of accused
• Fear of being shunned by family, community, friend group
• Peer pressure to report or not to report
• Fear of “getting in trouble” if alcohol and drugs involved
• Fear of losing control over reporting process
• Fear of racism, ableism, homophobia, transphobia
INITIAL DISCLOSURE EXPERIENCE

Research shows...

- A supportive and non-judgemental initial response to a disclosure can make a significant difference on the individual’s ability to seek out further supports and on the individual’s recovery.
RECOVERY

• Individuals recover best when they:
  – Have a positive initial contact
  – Receive compassion
  – Know they are not alone

• PEGaSUS for students
  – Connection, empowerment, recovery
  – Contact Consultant on SVPRO
The Term “Survivor”

Some self-identify as survivors to signal a sense of empowerment over victimhood.
How to heal after sexual assault: Survivors on their recovery process
Life After Sexual Violence: how does a victim recover from being raped? Our series asks seven victims how they have learned to survive, and flourish

Thomas Goulding @TomGoulding: Friday 24 November 2017 12:08

https://www.independent.co.uk/video/rape-sexual-assault-advice-recovery-healing-therapy-counselling-support-network-video-a8062211.html
STRETCH BREAK
OPTIONS AFTER EXPERIENCING SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Individual has one or more of the following options:

• Disclosure

• Voluntary Resolution (mutually agreed upon)

• Official Report:
  – Complaint under University Sexual Violence Policy

AND/OR

  – Criminal Report with Police Service
    • Security Services can liaise with Police
WHAT IS A DISCLOSURE?

• **Disclosure** is the act of sharing information with any member of the university community about an experience of sexual violence.
DIFFERENCE BETWEEN Disclosing and Reporting

• A disclosure does not automatically lead to the initiation of a formal report

• Disclosing an experience of sexual violence is a separate decision from making a report

• Each decision will result in different levels of university response or action
WHAT IS A REPORT?

- An official report **requires a written complaint** (through and intake office/process)

- The complaint may or may not lead to an investigation

- **Interim measures** may be required (e.g., **no contact agreement**) pending fact-finding

- Accommodations can be arranged (e.g., living, academic, campus workplace adjustments)
UNDERSTANDING YOUR ROLE
Sexual Violence Response Protocol (Steps)

You must:

• Follow the Recognize, Respond, and Refer guidelines for disclosure support;

• Be familiar with the Limits of Confidentiality and inform the individual of your need to notify your supervisor; and

• Immediately notify the supervising Residence Life Area Coordinator (RLAC), or the on-call RLAC if after business hours
Your role is not to...

• Investigate or collect evidence
• Track down or question the accused
• Determine guilt
• Advise or counsel the individual
• Be the sole supporter or to “rescue”
Your Role is to...

- Assess safety and health
  - Especially if recent (within a week)

- Be compassionate, caring, nonjudgmental
  - And, attend to your own self-care

- Provide support and resources
  - Consult and inform up not out
YOUR APPROACH

• Take a *trauma-informed* approach:
  – Recognizing wide-ranging impacts and symptoms of sexually violent experience, and the varied journeys to healing and recovery

• Take an *intersectional* approach:
  – Recognizing different forms of cultural bias and discrimination that layer onto the impacts
RECOGNIZE, RESPOND, REFER – GUIDELINES FOR SUPPORT

**Recognize**
- Be aware that experiencing SV can be traumatic
- Be aware that a positive Disclosure experience is key
- Be aware of cultural needs and power differences
- Be aware of health and physical safety needs
How to Talk About Immediate Physical Health and Safety

• “Do you think you might need medical attention?”
  - Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence (SADV) Care Centre
    - (905) 521-2100 ext. 73557
  - Sexual Assault Centre Hamilton Area (SACHA)
    - 24-hr support line (905) 525-4162
    - SACHA will provide accompaniment to SADV

• “Are you concerned for your physical safety?”
  - McMaster Campus Security Services
    - 905-525-9140 ext. 24281
  - MUSST Safety App
RECOGNIZE, RESPOND, REFER – GUIDELINES FOR SUPPORT

**Recognize**
- Be aware that experiencing SV can be traumatic
- Be aware that a positive Disclosure experience is key
- Be aware of cultural needs and power differences
- Be aware of health and physical safety needs

**Respond**
- Be open and approachable
- Be compassionate and respectful
- Listen actively and empathically
- Provide validation and non-judgemental support

**Refer**

---

**McMaster University**

**Brighter World | mcmaster.ca**
SOME THINGS NOT TO SAY

• “Why did you go there?”
• “Why were you drinking/taking drugs/etc.?“
• “What were you thinking?”
• “Did you SAY no?”
• “Why would (the accused) do that to you?”
• “(The accused) is such a good/nice/etc. person.”
• “I can’t believe they would do that.”
• “Are you sure that is what happened?”
• “It could have been worse.”
• “You shouldn’t feel that way.”
• “You should report this so that you can make sure it doesn’t happen to anyone else.”
• “You should get forensic evidence collected so that the case can go to court and the accused prosecuted.”
• “I will do anything you need me to do.”
SOME HELPFUL THINGS TO SAY

- “Is this a good place to talk?”
- “Do you feel comfortable in this space?”
- “I’m sorry that this happened to you.”
- “Do you think you might need medical attention?”
- “Are you concerned for your physical safety?”
- “Thank you for trusting me enough to come to me.”
- “I think it took a lot of courage to share this.”
- “You can share as little/much as you’d like.”
- “It’s ok to feel a lot of different emotions…”
- “It’s ok to feel nothing…”
- “It makes sense to me that you feel…”
- “Is there anything you would like me to do?”
- “How can I help you best?”
- “What do you need, if you know?”
- “What I hear you saying is…”
- “I’d like you to know there are options for support.”
Recognize
• Be aware that experiencing SV can be traumatic
• Be aware that a positive Disclosure experience is key
• Be aware of cultural needs and power differences
• Be aware of health and physical safety needs

Respond
• Be open and approachable
• Be compassionate and respectful
• Listen actively and empathically
• Provide validation and non-judgemental support

Refer
• Share information about resources and refer individual to SVPRO
• Discuss need to inform Area Coordinator (on-call if after-hours)
• Follow-up and check in with the student, as appropriate
• Get support from the Consultant on SVPR for yourself, as needed
CONFIDENTIALITY AND ITS LIMITS

• All parties have a right to confidentiality

• There are limits, for safety or legal reason:
  – Risk of harm to self;
  – Risk of harm to others;
  – Risk of harm to community (e.g., multiple victims, predatory behaviour, position of power);
  – Required by law (e.g., under the age of 16);
  – Required by regulatory body (e.g., College of Physicians and Surgeons)
How to Talk About Confidentiality – Informing Up not Out

- “I’m really glad you were able to share this with me.”
- “Your safety and well-being are really important.”
- “In my role, I need to inform my supervisor of these types of incidents, because the university takes this very seriously.”
- “My supervisor/the consultant is trained in this area and will have the best information to support you.”
- “There are limits to confidentiality related to your own safety and community risk.”
- “We do everything we can to maintain your confidentiality. So, this is a report up, not out.”
- “I’ll continue to check in with you, if that’s ok.”
MCMASTER RESOURCES

• Security Services
  – 905-525-9140 ext. 24281; MUSST Safety App
    https://security.mcmaster.ca/crime_prevention_safetyapp.html

• Student Wellness Centre
  – 905-525-9140 ext. 27700; MUSC B101 and B118

• Student Support and Case Management
  – 905-525-9140 ext. 20750

• Indigenous Student Service
  – 905-525-9140 ext. 27426; L.R. Wilson Hall Room 1811

• Ecumenical Chaplain

• MSU Women and Gender Equity Network
  – 905-525-9140 ext. 20265; MUSC 204;
    wgen@msu.mcmaster.ca
COMMUNITY RESOURCES

Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence Care Centre
Hamilton Health Sciences
https://www.hamiltonhealthsciences.ca/areas-of-care/emergency-care/sexual-assault-domestic-violence/

Ontario Native Women’s Association (ONWA)
Sheri Gilmour, Trauma Informed Worker
E-mail: sgilmour@onwa.ca
Office: (905) 383-6297 | Cell: (289) 244-8050

SACHA’s 24 HOUR SUPPORT LINE IS THERE FOR SURVIVORS OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE, THEIR SUPPORTERS AND FOLKS WITH QUESTIONS. YOU ARE NOT ALONE.

SACHA.CA

Hamilton Police Services
905-546-4772

Hamilton Interval House
905-387-8881 (support line)
SVPRO CONTACT INFORMATION

Sexual Violence Prevention and Response Office
Equity and Inclusion Office
University Hall, Room 104
www.svpro.mcmaster.ca

Hagar Akua Prah (prahh@mcmaster.ca)
Consultant on Sexual Violence Prevention and Response

Tolulope Ojo (ojot2@mcmaster.ca)
Prevention Education Program