

FAR TOO MANY SUFFER IN SILENCE

AMOUNT OF UNREPORTED SEXUAL ASSAULT CASES DISTURBING, WRITES CARM BOZZO



CARM BOZZO
Column

Ontario students are finally back in classrooms, back on campuses and back in college residences.

A sense of normalcy is in the air.

However, as students settle back into their educational routine, there are conversations that need to happen.

It is not about academics. It is not about COVID. It is about the prevalence of sexual harassment and assault on school campuses.

And just recently a police investigation has been launched at the University

of Western Ontario in regards to a report that there have been multiple alleged drug-related sexual assaults.

A 2020 Statistics Canada report highlighted that:

- A majority (71 per cent) of students at Canadian post-secondary schools witnessed or experienced unwanted sexualized behaviours in a post-secondary setting in 2019 — either on campus, or in an off-campus situation that involved students or other people

associated with the school.

- Among students, 45 per cent of those who identified as women personally experienced at least one such behaviour.

- Only eight per cent who experienced sexual assault and only nine per cent who had experienced unwanted sexualized behaviours spoke about what happened with someone associated with the school.

- While many saw what happened as not serious enough to report, others cited a lack of knowledge about what to do or a mistrust in how the school would handle the situation.

"Sexual violence is rampant on university and college campuses and survivors are often dismissed and silenced. This reality results in victim blaming and reinforces rape cul-

ture," said Silvia Samas, executive director at SAVIS (Sexual Assault Violence Intervention Services) "At SAVIS we stand in solidarity with survivors and urge University of Western Ontario to believe survivors and hold perpetrators accountable."

Studies show that most students chose not to intervene, seek help or take other action in at least one instance when they witness unwanted sexualized behaviours, including 91 per cent of women and 92 per cent of men who witnessed such behaviours.

Many women did not act because they felt uncom-

fortable because they feared negative consequences or because they feared for their safety.

The fact that so many women didn't know what to do when this happened to them is something that Halton Women's Place is trying to change through our violence prevention programs — especially through our presentations in classrooms.

As well, the high number of individuals who did not intervene is another opportunity for us, as violence against women experts, to educate our community — our youth especially — on how to safely

intervene and why it is important to not be a bystander.

These statistics coincide with the ones we at Halton Women's Place see in regards to women experiencing abuse staying with their partner due to fear of leaving, fear of consequences and fear of not being believed.

If you have questions or need support in regards to sexual abuse and harassment, contact the crisis line at SAVIS 24 hours a day at 905-875-1555 or their intake line at 905-483-0722 from 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

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