



# Family Violence & Family Law Brief

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Gender-Based Violence and Access to  
Justice for International Students at  
Canadian Post-Secondary Institutions

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ALLIANCE OF CANADIAN  
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# Gender-Based Violence and Access to Justice for International Students at Canadian Post-Secondary Institutions

## Introduction

In the last two decades, the number of international students in Canada has tripled to over 600,000, which makes up more than 14% of overall enrolment in Canadian post-secondary institutions (Canadian Bureau for International Education [CBIE], 2018; see also De Moissac et al. 2020; Firang & Mensah, 2022). For example, 31% of the University of British Columbia's (UBC) student body is comprised of international students (Dwyer, 2017). Similar rates are found at McGill (30.75%), Simon Fraser University (SFU) (20.7%, excluding graduate students), and the University of Toronto (U of T) (21%). Since 2000, the enrolment of international students has increased by 376.5% and, by 2019, international students' contribution to the Canadian Gross Domestic Product (GDP) reached \$21.6 billion (De Moissac et al. 2020; Firang & Mensah, 2022; Statistics Canada, 2018, 2020). Many of these students plan to remain in Canada after the completion of their post-secondary education. Specifically, as the CBEI (2016) found, approximately 51% of international students intend to apply for permanent residency following the completion of their degrees.

*What are post-secondary institutions?*

The term *post-secondary* encompasses technical institutes, colleges, and universities.

International students are drawn to completing their post-secondary education in Canada for many reasons, including quality of life, job opportunities after graduation, and immigration pathways (Arrive, n.d.). Additionally, the Canadian government recognizes the many benefits of international students, such as their contributions to the GDP through high rates of tuition and fees (Dam et al., 2018; Firang & Mensah, 2022). Yet, federal and provincial governments have not sufficiently mitigated barriers and challenges faced by international students. These barriers include, but are not limited to, immigration related difficulties, financial insecurity, housing (e.g., insecurity, overcrowding), and limited access to supports and resources (e.g., health and well-being, legal, safety) (Hutcheson & Parsons, 2022), especially those that are culturally safe.

Despite the prominence and rapidly increasing number of international students in Canadian society generally, and in post-secondary institutions more specifically, their experiences with gender-based violence (e.g., sexual violence, domestic violence) is an under-researched topic (DeKeseredy & Kelly, 1993; Forbes-Mewett & McCulloch, 2016; Hutcheson & Parsons, 2022; Yakushko et al., 2008). Of the research that exists, much of the focus is on theoretical understandings (for

example, see Park, 2018) and access to services (for example, see Todorova et al. 2022). Additionally, this research largely neglects international students' experiences within Canadian post-secondary contexts. This gap in the research is further amplified by very minimal research focused on international students' experiences with gender-based violence both on and off university campuses (e.g., shared housing arrangements, predatory landlords) (Bonistall Postel, 2020).

Due to the under-researched nature of gender-based violence perpetrated against women international students, especially within the Canadian context, much of the contextual literature has an international scope (e.g., United States, Australia, United Kingdom). However, the barriers to safety experienced by women international students, as well as the intersecting inequalities that intensify their vulnerabilities and put them at an increased risk of experiencing gender-based violence, “translates across borders” (Forbes-Mewett & McCulloch, 2016, p. 347). As such, this research is relevant to understanding these issues within the Canadian context.

## Gender-Based Violence

The research that explores gender-based violence experienced by post-secondary students focuses almost exclusively on domestic students or treats students as a homogenous group by disregarding key factors such as international student status (for example, see Burczkacka, 2020; Jeffrey & Barata, 2019; Muehlenhard et al., 2017). Of the research that focuses on important intersecting identities and vulnerabilities related to experiences of gender-based violence (e.g., transgender university students), international student status often remains unaddressed (for example, see Martin-Storey et al., 2018). The intersections of “gender, race, class, and international student status” puts women international students at an increased risk of experiencing violence in their host countries by comparison to their counterparts (i.e., domestic students, international students who are white, English speaking, and/or men) (Forbes-Mewett & McCulloch, 2016, p. 346; Hutcheson & Parsons, 2022; Poljski, 2011). As Poljski (2011) notes, women international students “are more likely than their male counterparts to experience discrimination (even within the international student community), physical abuse, sexual harassment and social exclusion” (p. 17), especially women of colour (Hutcheson & Parsons, 2022).

*Female international students in particular have the added inequality/disadvantage of being vulnerable to power-imbalanced relationships with males, either within or less commonly outside their national groups. Vulnerability to gender-based violence can relate to race or cultural ideologies as international students tend to be exploited by individuals of their own national group who have been afforded misguided trust based on cultural commonalities. The vulnerability can also relate to their lack of knowledge of local cultural norms, which may be exploited by those inside and outside their national group. The large numbers of international students who are financially insecure adds yet another intersecting layer of vulnerability.*

(Forbes-Mewett & McCulloch, 2016, p. 349)

Gender-based violence, such as sexual violence and domestic violence, perpetrated against women international students is common, un(der)reported (e.g., shame, guilt, fear, lack of awareness of available resources), and under-researched (Forbes-Mewett & McCulloch, 2016; Hutcheson & Lewington, 2017; Hutcheson & Parsons, 2022; MOSAIC, n.d.a.; Sable et al., 2006). International students, men and women alike, have also been found to downplay or dismiss their experiences with gender-based violence (Yamawaki et al., 2009). Nevertheless, what is known highlights the gravity and importance of addressing gender-based violence perpetrated against international students, both in Canada and other nations.

Based on their research in Quebec and Ontario, Hutcheson and Parsons (2022) note:

41.6% of international students from Francophone universities in Quebec experienced at least one incident of sexual violence on campus. A survey at McGill University showed that 38.6% of international students experienced sexual harassment and 23.6% experienced sexual assault. (para. 3)

Such violence tends to be perpetrated by individuals known to these women. Often, the abuse is perpetrated by men “from within the same cultural group with whom they have a personal relationship” (Forbes-Mewett & McCulloch, 2016, p. 347; see also, Forbes-Mewett, 2011; Poljski, 2011).

Fisher et al. (1998) contend that women international students present with “target attractiveness” due to decreased protection (e.g., families, social networks) and support in host countries, as well as a decreased likelihood of “fight[ing] back” (as cited in Forbes-Mewett & McCulloch, 2016, p. 349), language barriers, lack of knowledge of Canadian laws/legal systems, and “troubles identifying sexual violence” (MOSAIC, n.d.b., para. 3; see also BurnabyNow, 2019; CBC News, 2019). Of note, individuals who perpetrate gender-based violence against women international students are often those in positions of power (e.g., partners on whom they depend, landlords, employers, and teaching assistants, instructors/professors) (Hutcheson & Parsons, 2022).

### *International Students and GBV*

MOSAIC reported that educational institutions may mishandle cases in which women international students experience gender-based violence.

In a news release, MOSAIC noted, “several international students have told MOSAIC that they received no support or guidance from their schools when they disclose a sexual assault [...] For example, a 21-year-old female student told us that after she was assaulted, she didn’t know where to turn. She eventually disclosed the assault to her teacher who didn’t believe her and made her fear that she would be kicked out of school” (as quoted in BurnabyNow, 2019, para. 5).

## *Vulnerabilities and Complexities*

It is problematic to conflate the experiences of domestic and international post-secondary students, as their vulnerabilities and barriers to safety are often distinct. Factors that contribute to women international students' experiences with gender-based violence include, but are not limited to:

1. Geographic, social, and emotional distance from support networks and communities, resulting in reduced systems of protection and an increased likelihood of getting into relationships that are prone to violence (Forbes-Mewett & McCulloch, 2016, p. 349).
2. Dependence on abusive partners through secondary visa status (Forbes-Mewett & McCulloch, 2016; Poljski, 2011)
3. The “newfound freedom” experienced by men international students who are “no longer under scrutiny of family and friends in their home country” (Forbes-Mewett & McCulloch, 2016, p. 349).
4. A lack of knowledge about their host country and new community, or the supports and resources therein (Coston, 2004; Forbes-Mewett & McCulloch, 2016).
5. Increased barriers to accessing supports and services, especially those that are culturally informed and linguistically accessible, which hinders their ability and willingness to report violence and/or seek help (see Barriers and Challenges section, pp. 8-11).

Housing arrangements are a key consideration when understanding the vulnerabilities and barriers to safety experienced by women international students (for example, see Forbes-Mewett & McCulloch, 2016; Hutcheson & Parsons, 2022; McEwan & Teixeira, 2012). The unaffordable nature of housing, especially in places like Vancouver, British Columbia and Toronto, Ontario, as well as issues of overcrowding and housing insecurity, among others, place these women at increased risk.

Another important consideration is that post-secondary environments can normalize gender-based violence (e.g., sexual harassment, sexual violence) (Eyre, 2000; Forbes-Mewett & McCulloch, 2016). As a woman international student explained:

### *Housing*

In Sudbury, Ontario, fourteen (14) international students shared a three-bedroom home that had been “converted to seven bedrooms, with multiple people living in each room” (Gemmill, 2022, para. 2). In addition to overcrowding, the international students were subject to many health and safety issues, including infestations (i.e., bedbugs, cockroaches, and rats) and no functioning smoke or carbon monoxide detectors.

As Sudbury Councilperson Joscelyne Landry-Altmann noted, “you have a vulnerable population coming into our city, choosing to live here, and being taken advantage of by slumlords” (as quoted in Gemmill, 2022, para. 26).

*They have a very old-school bunch of faculty – old white dudes that took advantage of their positions of power in terms of how funding works, how research gets conducted, and even influencing what papers could get published, which greatly affected a lot of the female colleagues. There was this one faculty that was known to hire international postdocs from Europe. They became isolate in the US and when they were assaulted or harassed by their boss, they didn't know what to do and were terrified because they were hoping to build a career in America and not get sent back because they're here on visas. (as quoted in Bloom et al., 2021, p. 1660)*

Undergraduate and graduate international students, women in particular, have expressed a lack of trust, confidence, and safety within post-secondary institutions (Bloom et al., 2021). One of the contributing factors is *unequal power dynamics* in instances of sexual harassment and gender-based violence, which leads these students to feel as if their success is not being supported and/or they may not be able to complete their degrees.

## Barriers and Challenges

### *The COVID-19 Context*

The COVID-19 pandemic became a turning point for most aspects of people's lives globally, with more vulnerable populations, like international students, experiencing greater negative impacts personally, socially, educationally, and financially (Firang & Mensah, 2022; Van de Velde et al., 2021). Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, by comparison to their domestic counterparts, international students have experienced increased rates of:

1. Housing insecurity;
2. Harmful living conditions (e.g., overcrowding);
3. Financial insecurity and relative-to-absolute poverty;
4. Physical and mental health concerns; and
5. Isolation (e.g., distance from family and friends, pandemic-related travel restrictions) (Van de Velde et al., 2021).

The federal government tried to mitigate some of the harms brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic through the provision of financial relief and social programs for most Canadians, like the [\*Canada Emergency Student Benefit\*](#) (CESB), the [\*Canada Emergency Response Benefit\*](#) (CERB), and expanded [\*Employment Insurance\*](#) (EI). Yet, international students are not eligible for such aid (Firang & Mensah, 2022). Of note, international students may have been eligible to apply for British Columbia's [\*Recovery Benefit\*](#) and other provincially provided aid across Canada. However, there is a lack of data on the proportion of international students who received such aid by comparison to all other applicants.

Governmental and immigration-related delays have compounded the safety, security, and well-being of international students during the COVID-19 pandemic. These unique barriers and challenges faced by international students include:

1. Delays in approving study permit and visas (Sciarpelletti, 2020);
2. International travel restrictions impacting arrival in Canada and enrolment in classes (Firang & Mensah, 2022; Hari et al, 2020);
3. Delayed review, processing, and/or approval of permanent residency applications; and
4. Difficulty locating and retaining sufficient employment (Gordon, 2020).

Of note, the Canadian unemployment rate was near a 40-year low before the COVID-19 pandemic. Nevertheless, more than 3 million jobs were lost at the height of pandemic-related lockdowns; such losses differentially and disproportionately impacted the security and well-being of vulnerable populations, such as international students (Gordon, 2020).

At the height of the pandemic, international students, especially those who were about to graduate, were facing increased difficulties finding a skilled job, which impacted their permanent residency applications; this is compounded by additional barriers brought on by the immigration system and employment policies. However, to alleviate some of these issues, the Canadian federal government offered the *Temporary Resident to Permanent Resident Pathway* as an immigration pathway for newly graduated international students from March to November 2021 (IRCC, 2021).

These COVID-19 related contexts likely negatively impacted the safety and security of international students in Canada and around the world. While there is no research that sufficiently explores these connections as of yet, many of the issues outlined above are known to amplify risk of, and increase vulnerability to, gender-based violence for women international students.

### *Safety & Help-Seeking*

Gender-based violence has negative impacts on the health and well-being of women international students, especially women of colour (Hutcheson & Parsons, 2022; Poljski, 2011). International students also experience mental health concerns at higher rates than their domestic counterparts (Clough et al., 2019; De Moissac et al. 2020; Forbes-Mewett & Sawyer, 2016; Shadowen et al., 2019); these increased rates of depression and anxiety are interconnected with:

1. Migration-related challenges (e.g., loneliness, isolation, adjusting to life in Canada and the culture of Canadian post-secondary institutions);
2. Tenuous and/or overcrowded living arrangements;
3. Nutrition;

4. Economics (e.g., relative-to-absolute poverty, finance-related concerns);
5. Educational barriers and attainment-related challenges (e.g., language proficiency);
6. Experiences of abuse and violence; and
7. Racism and discrimination (Becker et al., 2018; Calder et al., 2016; De Moissac et al. 2020; Mesidor & Sly, 2016; Rajapaksa & Dudnes, 2002; Ramsay et al., 1999; Shadowen et al., 2019).

Yet, existing university supports (e.g., counselling and health services, advising, student services) are underutilized by international students (Yakushko et al., 2008). While facing increased mental health concerns and disproportionately high rates of gender-based violence, international students are significantly less likely to seek help on and off campus, both through formal and informal channels (Becker et al., 2018; De Moissac et al. 2020; Hutcheson & Parsons, 2022; Shannon et al., 2019; MOSAIC, n.d.b.; Ridde et al., 2019).

Despite experiencing higher rates of gender-based violence on and off university campuses, women international students are significantly less likely to seek help and encounter greater barriers than their counterparts (MOSAIC, n.d.b.; Ridde et al., 2019). These barriers to help-seeking include, but are not limited to:

1. Shame and stigmatization;
2. Cultural and community beliefs around help-seeking and gender-based violence;
3. Language barriers;
4. Limited-to-no appropriate/culturally informed services;
5. Inaccessible language in policy and law;
6. Lack of awareness of existing and appropriate services and supports;
7. Bias, discrimination, and racism, including responses from service providers;
8. Concerns related to confidentiality and potential retaliation from perpetrators;

### *Help-Seeking*

A woman international student who was sexually and physically assaulted by a friend with whom she shared a home expressed, “I was living with someone I knew from Nepal. I trusted him and when I came here, I thought he would treat me like a sister. This person used to yell at me all the time and I felt like I wasn’t allowed to express my opinions. There was violence” (as quoted in Kale, 2021, para. 5).

With respect to help-seeking, she noted, “he took advantage of my innocence and my vulnerability. [If you] share a story of sexual assault, you feel like you are going to be judged by people. Not being in your own country makes a big difference [...] I felt like the weakest person on the planet” (as quoted in Kale, 2021, para. 5, para. 11).

9. Victim blaming; and
10. Unsatisfactory experiences with past help-seeking (Becker et al., 2018; Bonistall Postel, 2020; De Moissac et al. 2020; Forbes-Mewett & McCulloch, 2016; Hutcheson & Parsons, 2022; MOSAIC, n.d.b., Shannon et al., 2019).

Of the international students who do seek help, those who experience greater “belonging, sense of coherence, mindfulness, [...] academic and social integration” and “connection to their university” most often seek help through informal networks, while the others usually seek support through formal channels (Becker et al., 2018, p. 1636).

International student women survivors of gender-based violence have reported fear of seeking support, especially from the justice sector, due to their contingent immigration status (Hutcheson & Lewington, 2017; Hutcheson & Parsons, 2022). Women international students have expressed fear of reporting violence resulting in negative impacts on their on-going status in the country, barriers for future immigration applications, and/or deportation. Specifically, they fear that non-permanent status in the country (e.g., citizenship, permanent residency) means that they have “less protection” (Hutcheson & Parsons, 2022, para. 5; see also Forbes-Mewett & McCulloch, 2016). These fears can be used by perpetrators of gender-based violence to silence women international students and hinder their ability to disclose, report, and/or seek help in instances of sexual abuse and domestic violence (Forbes-Mewett & McCulloch, 2016; Hutcheson & Parsons, 2022).

### *What is “contingent immigration status”?*

*In Canada, like many other countries with regulated international education, international student status is conditional, which means that maintaining one’s status to remain legally in the country is contingent on many factors (e.g., maintaining active student status, having adequate grades).*

(Hutcheson & Parsons, 2022, para. 5)

## **Post-Secondary Gender-Based Violence Policies and Practices**

A barrier to safety for women international students who are survivors of gender-based violence is created by post-secondary institutions. Colleges and universities often neglect intersectional considerations in their policies and procedures for responding to gender-based violence on campus, which amplifies the risks and vulnerabilities faced by these women (Forbes-Mewett & McCulloch, 2016; Morley et al., 2008).

When international students are included in post-secondary sexual/gender-based violence responses and policies, they are generally treated as a homogenous group. Alternatively, international student status may be implied, but not explicitly stated, in post-secondary gender-based violence policies. For example, international students are often only loosely encompassed

under the broad category of intersectional considerations, which is common across Canadian post-secondary institutions. As a result, key variables that may put women international students at an increased risk of experiencing such violence are neglected (e.g., race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, country of origin).

### *Sexual Violence Policies at Canadian Universities\**

\*The list below is not comprehensive, but key universities from across Canada were selected and included in this preliminary policy scan.

## Alberta

### **Mount Royal University in Calgary, Alberta**

Mount Royal's [Sexual Violence Response Policy](#) does **not** make any specific reference to or recommendations for international students.

### **University of Alberta in Edmonton, Alberta**

U of A's [Sexual Violence Policy](#) does **not** make any specific reference to or recommendations for international students.

### **University of Calgary in Calgary, Alberta**

U of C's [Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Policy](#) does **not** make any specific reference to or recommendations for international students.

## British Columbia

### **Simon Fraser University in Burnaby, British Columbia**

SFU's [Sexual Violence and Misconduct Prevention, Education and Support](#) policy does **not** make any specific reference to or recommendations for international students.

### **University of British Columbia in Vancouver, British Columbia**

UBC's [Sexual Misconduct Policy](#) does **not** make any specific reference to or recommendations for international students.

### **University of Northern British Columbia in Prince George, British Columbia**

UNBC's [Sexual Violence and Misconduct Policy](#) does **not** make any specific reference to or recommendations for international students.

## University of Victoria in Victoria, British Columbia

UVic's [Sexualized Violence Prevention and Response Policy](#) does *not* make specific recommendations for international students, *but UVic's International Student Services office is listed as a possible resource for students.*

## Manitoba

### University of Manitoba in Winnipeg, Manitoba

U of M's [Respectful Work and Learning Environment and Sexual Assault Policy and Procedure](#) does *not* make any specific reference to or recommendations for international students.

### University of Winnipeg in Winnipeg, Manitoba

U of W's [Sexual Violence and Prevention Policy](#) does *not* make any specific reference to or recommendations for international students.

## New Brunswick

### Mount Allison University in Sackville, New Brunswick

Mount Allison's [Sexual Violence Prevention and Response](#) policy, which is administered by the Vice President of International and Student Affairs, does *not* make any specific reference to or recommendations for international students.

### St. Thomas University in Fredericton, New Brunswick

St. Thomas' [Policy on Sexual Violence](#) does *not* make any specific reference to or recommendations for international students.

## Nova Scotia

### Dalhousie University in Halifax, Nova Scotia

Dalhousie's [Sexualized Violence Policy](#) does *not* make any specific reference to or recommendations for international students.

### Saint Mary's University in Halifax, Nova Scotia

Saint Mary's [Sexual Violence Policies and Procedures](#) do *not* make any specific reference to or recommendations for international students.

### **Ontario Tech University in Oshawa, Ontario**

OTU's [Student Sexual Violence Policy and Procedures](#) do *not* make any specific reference to or recommendations for international students.

### **Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario**

Queen's [Policy on Sexual Violence Involving Queen's University Students](#) does *not* make any specific reference to or recommendations for international students.

### **St. Lawrence College in Kingston, Ontario**

St. Lawrence College's [Sexual Violence Policy](#) does *not* make any specific reference to or recommendations for international students.

### **University of Guelph in Guelph, Ontario**

U of G's [Sexual Violence Policy](#) does *not* make any specific reference to or recommendations for international students.

### **University of Ottawa in Ottawa, Ontario**

U of O's [Prevention of Sexual Violence](#) policy does *not* make any specific reference to or recommendations for international students.

### **University of Toronto in Toronto, Ontario**

U of T's [Policy on Sexual Violence and Sexual Harassment](#) does *not* make any specific reference to or recommendations for international students.

### **University of Waterloo in Waterloo, Ontario**

U of W's [Prevention of and Response to Sexual Violence](#) policy does *not* make any specific reference to or recommendations for international students.

### **Western University in London, Ontario**

Western University's [Policy on Gender-Based and Sexual Violence](#) does *not* make any specific reference to or recommendations for international students.

### **York University in Toronto, Ontario**

York University's [Policy on Sexual Violence](#) does *not* make any specific reference to or recommendations for international students.

## Prince Edward Island

### University of Prince Edward Island in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island

U of PEI's [Sexual Violence Policy](#) does *not* make any specific reference to or recommendations for international students.

## Québec

### McGill University in Montreal, Québec

McGill University's [Policy Against Sexual Violence](#) does *not* make any specific reference to or recommendations for international students.

## Saskatchewan

### University of Regina in Regina, Saskatchewan

U of R's [Sexual Violence/Misconduct](#) policy does *not* make any specific reference to or recommendations for international students

### University of Saskatchewan in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan

U of S's Sexual Assault Prevention policy and companion document do *not* make any specific reference to or recommendations for international students

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## Increasing the Safety of International Students

Post-secondary institutional policies and practices for responding to gender-based violence generally do not meaningfully address the unique risks and vulnerabilities experienced by international students. However, to address some of these gaps, there are resources that can reduce the barriers faced by, and improve the safety of, international student survivors of gender-based violence (e.g., guides, toolkits, policy audits).

### Resources for International Students

#### International Student Project

##### Bystander

*The University of Windsor is currently expanding delivery of Bringing in the Bystander peer-led sexual assault prevention workshops to faculties where there is a higher proportion of international students (para. 1).*

#### International Student Safety Guide

##### Peer Creating Awareness to Facilitate Education and Support (PEERS CAFE) / MOSAIC BC

*PEERS CAFE is an initiative created to address the issue of sexual assault and its impact on international students. This initiative works towards increasing awareness of sexual assault and knowledge for international students to implement tools to keep themselves safe; support their peer's victims/survivors of sexual assault and to increase their capacity to prevent and respond to the crime. If you are an international student who wants to learn about immigration policies, sexual assault and consent, how to support your peers, police/hospital pro is an initiative created to address the issue of sexual assault and its impact on international students (p. 1).*

### Tools for Post-Secondary Institutions and Service Providers

#### Preventing and Responding to Sexual Violence and Misconduct at British Columbia Post-Secondary Institutions

##### British Columbia Ministry of Education

A guide for developing policy and practice.

#### CUPE: Canadian Union of Public Employees

CUPE created multiple guides and checklists to support post-secondary institutions in responding to sexual violence and harassment, including the Responding to Sexual Violence and Harassment on Campus and the Duty to Represent guide, a Trauma-Informed Response to Sexual Violence and Harassment guide, the Sexual Violence and Harassment: Prevention and Response information sheet, the Preventing Sexual Violence and Harassment on Campus: The Role of the Local Union guide, the Checklist for Post-Secondary Institutional Policies on Sexual Violence and Harassment, and the Guide for Post-Secondary Institutional Policies on Sexual Violence and Harassment.

[Enhance Access to Safety for International Students: A Toolkit for Service Providers](#)

**MOSAIC BC**

**Law Foundation of BC**

*The Enhance Access to Safety for International Students initiative addresses the need to make legal education, sexual violence awareness and community resources available to vulnerable international students in remote, isolated and underserved areas of the province. In addition, the initiative aims to increase the awareness of service providers within these same communities of the complexities influencing international students' decision to disclose sexual violence and to equip this group with the legal education and cultural humility to support international students (p. 4).*

[Sexual Violence Advocacy and Campus Communities: SV Campus Policies](#)

**Violence Against Women Learning Network: Mobilizing Knowledge to End Gender-Based Violence**

*This Brief provides context for current sexual violence policies on post-secondary campuses and highlights the critical role of collective advocacy for bringing about change (para 1).*

[Courage to Act Knowledge Centre](#)

**Possibility Seeds**

*Courage to Act's Knowledge Centre is a national repository for tools and toolkits to address gender-based violence at post-secondary institutions in Canada. These resources were created by our national network of student leaders, survivors, frontline workers, legal experts, union leaders, and post-secondary educators, staff and administrators (para. 1).*

These tools include [A Comprehensive Guide to Campus Gender-Based Violence Complaints: Strategies for Procedurally Fair, Trauma Informed Processes to Reduce Harm](#) and the [Education and Training Toolkit: Addressing and Preventing Gender-Based Violence at Post-Secondary Institutions](#).

[Many more](#) guides, tools, and toolkits are available to download directly from Courage to Act's website.

[REES CAMPUS](#)

**REES: A Safer Community by a Community that Cares**

*REES is a simple, secure online platform for reporting sexual violence, tailored to the unique setting of post-secondary institutions (para. 1).*

REES' Canadian post-secondary partnerships include, but are not limited to, University of Windsor, St. Francis Xavier College, Mount Allison University, Okanogan College, The King's University, Brandon University, Providence, and Booth University College.

## Post-Secondary Institutional Reports

Simon Fraser University

**Burnaby, British Columbia**

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

St. Lawrence College

**Kingston, Ontario**

[Supports for International Students: Sexual Violence Support](#)

University of Toronto

**Toronto, Ontario**

[Student's Guide to the Policy of Sexual Violence & Sexual Harassment](#)

## Policy Reviews and Audits

The Canadian Centre for Legal Innovation and Sexual Assault Response

The CCLISAR conducted independent reviews of the policies responding to sexual violence at Bishop's University, Mount Allison University, Saint Francis Xavier University

University of Alberta

**Edmonton, Alberta**

[Sexual Violence Management Audit Report](#)

*Compiled over the course of Winter 2022, the U of A's internal Sexual Violence Management Audit was prepared at the request of the Board Audit and Risk Committee and exclusively focused on the effectiveness of the university's policies and procedures for complaints of sexual violence and harassment, as well as the effectiveness of sexual violence and harassment prevention systems. The audit reaffirms the university's most recent steps to move us towards our goals to address sexual and gender-based violence.*

## Recommendations & Conclusions

Gender-based violence perpetrated against women international students cannot be understood through a singular lens or responded to through a one-size fits all model (Dills et al. 2016; Park, 2018). Approaches to prevention of, and intervention in, gender-based violence among international students, as well as support for survivors of such violence, should be developed through “an intersectional, relational, historically specific, and structural analysis of violence” (Park, 2018, p. 33). This requires not only an intersectional lens (e.g., race, ethnicity, gender, culture, class, citizenship, colonialism), but also a heterogeneous understanding (e.g., how racialization impacts individuals and groups differently).

While gender-based violence is perpetrated against international students both on and off post-secondary campuses, these institutions should nevertheless “be held accountable” for the health, well-being, safety, and security of these students (Ridde et al., 2019, pp. 1-2). Dills et al. (2016) recommends post-secondary-based prevention and intervention programming that is developed in a way that is specific to the needs of international students and accounts for their varying, diverse, and unique contexts and lived experiences; that is, not developing a singular approach that treats international students as a homogenous group.

International students’ health, well-being, safety, and security must be a priority for post-secondary institutions, as well as off campus supports and services; this includes, but is not limited to, health- and safety-based responses and programming that meet the specific and diverse needs of international students, with a meaningful and culturally informed focus on gender-based violence (Poljski, 2011). Post-secondary institutions and supports/services off campus also need to account for the unique barriers to safety faced by women international students specifically (see Barriers and Challenges section, pp. 8-11). For instance, it is less common for bystander interventions to take place when gender-based violence is perpetrated by and/or against international students (Kania & Cale, 2018).

### *Student-Centred Services*

Hutcheson and Parsons (2016) recommend the following student-centred services that aim to promote safety and security for international students in Canada.

**MOSAIC**, which is “a Vancouver-based organization that creates international student centered workshops around sexual violence awareness, offering support and resources for reporting and hosting peer focused events for students to access information” (para. 9)

**Sunoh Charity**, “Sunoh, derived from the Hindi work for ‘listen’, is an international charity based in Canada that aims to support the mental health of international students and combat the sex trafficking of international students” (para. 10)

**Consent McGill**, which offers workshops for international students to learn about healthy relationships, consent, and sexual violence” (para. 11)

Combatting gender-based violence perpetrated against international students requires a collaborative, holistic response from post-secondary institutions and off campus organizations and services to ensure these students are safe, secure, and supported throughout their time in Canada. On and off campus supports and services need to provide individualized, culturally informed, and student-centred care, which is especially important when preventing and responding to gender-based violence (Dills et al., 2016; Hutcheson & Parsons, 2022; Poljski, 2011). With respect to gender-based violence specifically, such supports tailored to the needs of international students would include accessible and appropriate information on their rights and the available, culturally safe, and trauma-informed supports/services.

To learn more about the Supporting the Health and Well-Being of Survivors of Family Violence in Family Law Proceedings project, go to: [www.fvfl-vfdf.ca](http://www.fvfl-vfdf.ca) or our partnered research centres:

### The Centre for Research & Education on Violence Against Women & Children



**Western**

Centre for Research & Education on  
Violence Against Women & Children

<http://www.learningtoendabuse.ca>

Dr. Peter Jaffe

Dr. Katreena Scott

### The FREDA Centre for Research on Violence Against Women and Children



**The FREDA Centre**

for Research on Violence  
Against Women and Children

<http://www.fredacentre.com>

Dr. Margaret Jackson

### Muriel McQueen Fergusson Centre for Family Violence Research

*in partnership with St. Thomas University*



Muriel McQueen  
Fergusson Centre  
for Family Violence Research



Centre Muriel  
McQueen Fergusson  
pour la recherche sur la violence familiale

<https://www.unb.ca/mmfc/>

Dr. Catherine Holtmann

Karla O'Regan

[Professor's website](#)

### Recherches Appliquées et Interdisciplinaires sur les Violences intimes, familiales et structurelles

*in partnership with Université du Québec à Montréal*



Recherches Appliquées et  
Interdisciplinaires sur les Violences  
intimes, familiales et structurelles

<https://www.raiv.ulaval.ca/en>

Dr. Geneviève Lessard

Dr. Dominique Bernier

[Professor's website](#)

### RESOLVE: Research and Education for Solutions to Violence and Abuse



<https://umanitoba.ca/resolve>

Dr. Kendra Nixon

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