

THE POWER OF OUR COLLECTIVE VOICES:  
*Changing the Conversation on  
Sexual Violence at  
Post-Secondary Institutions*

THE PRE-CONFERENCE SYMPOSIUM

MAY 30, 2016  
UBC, VANCOUVER



INTERNATIONAL CENTRE FOR  
CRIMINAL LAW REFORM  
AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE POLICY



ENDING VIOLENCE  
Association of BC

Canada



Department of Justice  
Canada

**SUMMARY REPORT**

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Planning Committee would like to express its deep appreciation to all presenters, facilitators, volunteers and participants for their important contributions to the symposium and their inspiring commitment to ending violence on post-secondary campuses and the community as a whole.

We would like to thank our event volunteers Jessica Jahn, Rochelle Kelava, David Markwei, Jenny Musyj and Kelsi Wall. We would also like to thank the AMS Conferences and Catering team for their help and support.

**Jointly hosted by:** The International Centre for Criminal Law Reform and Criminal Justice Policy (ICCLR), the Alma Mater Society's Sexual Assault Support Centre (SASC) at UBC, and the Ending Violence Association of British Columbia (EVA BC)

**Made possible by:** The Department of Justice Canada - Victims and Survivors of Crime Week 2016

**With support from:** AMS Sexual Assault Support Centre, the AMS Sexual Assault Initiatives Fund and Status of Women Canada

**Location:** The Great Hall, AMS Student Nest - 6133 University Blvd, the University of British Columbia



# Table of Contents

- Acknowledgements.....1
- Table of Contents.....2
- Executive Summary.....3
- Welcoming Remarks .....4
- Keynote Address | Farrah Khan .....4
- Policy and Legislation| Presentation.....5
  - Honourable Andrew Wilkinson..... 5
- Campus Sexual Violence: Guidelines for a Comprehensive Response | Presentation.....6
  - Tracy Porteous .....6
  - Kate Rossiter .....7
- Roundtable and Facilitated Discussions .....7
  - Key Points of Discussion..... 7
- Closing Remarks|Ashley Bentley .....8
- List of Speakers .....9

## Executive Summary

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AMS Student Nest

As part of the Department of Justice Canada's Victims and Survivors of Crime Awareness Week 2016 initiative, the International Centre for Criminal Law Reform and Criminal Justice Policy (ICCLR), the Alma Mater Society's Sexual Assault Support Centre (SASC) at UBC, and the Ending Violence Association of British Columbia (EVA BC) organized and hosted a one-day pre-conference symposium centred on the development and implementation of post-secondary sexual violence policies, protocols, prevention strategies, and community collaboration.

The symposium, titled *The Power of our Collective Voices: Changing the Conversation on Sexual Violence at Post-Secondary Institutions* connected over 140 students, staff, faculty, senior administrators, from many of BC's public post-secondary institutions, and community-based service providers, as well as government officials from across the province.

The diversity of participants was especially instrumental in view of the introduction of Bill 23: *The Sexual Violence and Misconduct Policy Act* in late April 2016. The bill requires all public post-secondary institutions in the province of BC to establish and implement a sexual misconduct policy.

## Welcoming Remarks

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The Honourable Anne Rowles

The event began with opening remarks from **the Honourable Anne Rowles**, Chair of the Board for the ICCLR. She expressed her appreciation for the diverse voices represented at the conference, recognizing that in addressing the issues faced by victims and survivors of sexual violence it is important to include not only post-secondary staff and students, but also service providers in the community who play a crucial supportive role. She also emphasized the goal of the symposium to create space for collaborative and intersectional dialogue in order to properly address the issue of sexual violence as one which affects a wide range of communities.

She then introduced **Elder Larry Grant**, Elder-in-Residence at the First Nations House of Learning to acknowledge the setting of the event as a part of the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territory of the Musqueam people and to recognize the historical connections of colonization and doing anti-violence work on this land.

Following Elder Grant's remarks, **Ashley Bentley**, Manager at the AMS Sexual Assault Support Centre (SASC), offered some words of introduction for the event's proceedings. She also reminded participants to be mindful of their wellbeing, and to feel comfortable in sharing their perspectives and experiences. In closing, she then introduced the keynote speaker for the event, Farrah Khan.

## Keynote Address

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Ms. Farrah Khan

**Farrah Khan**, Sexual Violence Support and Education Coordinator at Ryerson University focused her presentation on the shared experiences of post-secondary institution staff and community workers who provide support to victims and survivors of sexual violence. She then used that experience as a platform to raise a number of problematic aspects of contemporary discussions about sexual violence.

Some of the issues regarding sexual violence raised by Ms. Khan included an inherent lack of intersectionality in sexual violence discourse and policy, the lack of acknowledgement of 'rape culture' on post-secondary campuses and wider society, and the need to implement transformational justice in a way which integrates the important work of restorative justice models.

Ms. Khan also highlighted the propensity of our society to blame victims of sexual violence, and the disproportionate marginalization and vulnerability of particular identity groups, including persons of

colour, migrants, persons with disabilities, and lesbian/gay/bisexual and transgender people to sexual violence.

Ms. Khan asserted the need to recognize the rights of sex workers, such as the rights to personal safety and protection from harm, and warned against the danger of arbitrarily identifying certain cultural practices as ‘barbaric.’ She also explained the increasing trend of “technology-facilitated sexual violence,” where social media has created a new powerful medium through which sexual violence can occur. In addition, she underlined the power of language in shaping attitudes and values on campuses and communities as a whole, urging the need to create a culture of believing and respecting survivors, validating their boundaries, and empathizing.

In closing, Farrah stressed that university staff and community support workers working to end violence should remember the inherent power in working as a community. Her presentation was followed by a question and answer period, in which participants asked insightful questions, such as techniques for communicating with immigrant communities about sexual violence and strategies for identifying other communities outside of post-secondary campuses which need greater education on sexual violence.

### Policy and Legislation | Presentation

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The Honourable Andrew Wilkinson

**Honourable Andrew Wilkinson**, Minister of Advanced Education for the Government of BC focused his talk specifically on the recently introduced campus sexual violence legislation, Bill 23. Titled the *Sexual Violence and Misconduct Policy Act*, the bill requires all public post-secondary institutions in BC to establish and implement a sexual misconduct policy on their campuses.

Hon. Wilkinson briefly described the process through which the legislation was introduced. It was first brought into the provincial legislature as a private members bill created on the initiative of Andrew Weaver, the Green Party Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) for Oak Bay-Gordon Head.

BC Premier Christy Clark was strongly supportive of the bill and expressed her intent to see that similar legislation was introduced. This led to the development of Bill 23.

Hon. Wilkinson highlighted a number of challenges which post-secondary institutions would likely face in developing their policies. More specifically, he explained that there is a jurisdictional issue. Given that institutions are limited to addressing issues falling specifically within the realm of academic misconduct, they could face challenges in dealing with incidents occurring within residential areas off-campus and between one university-affiliated individual/group a non-affiliated individual/group.

Hon. Wilkinson also spoke about the need for protocols which prioritize the victim/survivor’s health and safety. He emphasized that policies must be clear and transparent, a standard which could be achieved by involving/consulting the student body at the policy development stage.

In closing, Hon. Wilkinson asserted that all post-secondary institutions in BC need to be safe and welcoming places for studying instead of opportune environments for sexual violence to occur. He expressed the sentiment that although legislation is a step in the right direction, broader social change is needed and that there is far more work to be done.

### **Campus Sexual Violence: Guidelines for a Comprehensive Response | Presentation**

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**Tracy Porteous and Kate Rossiter**

**Tracy Porteous**, The next presentation came from the Ending Violence Association of BC regarding guidelines the organization had prepared on responding to sexual violence on post-secondary campuses. Tracy Porteous, the Executive Director of EVA BC, opened the presentation by giving some context to the importance of the guidelines.

She expressed that we are at a point of social change, as evidenced by the fact that mainstream institutions are now making sexual violence response a focal point. She then acknowledged the work of key groups which had applied pressure for many years in order to bring about this change.

Tracy Porteous asserted that we need to see sexual violence as a serial offence, citing relatively high recidivism rates amongst perpetrators. She spoke about the importance of language, stating the need for a shift in how we discuss sexual violence to frame it as a crime as opposed to an opportunity to blame victims. She also highlighted the need to not view the severity of sexual violence incidents only in terms of the extent of physical hurt and harm; but to consider the psychological effects on victims/survivors, as they often experience depression and anxiety as a result of their experiences.

Tracy Porteous also underlined the importance of the first person who victims/survivors reach out to when they experience an incident of sexual violence. She explained that the kind of response that person gives upon receiving the disclosure determines how the victim/survivor subsequently deals with their experience. In other words, if that person is understanding and sophisticated, the victim/survivor is likely to seek out further help. However if the person is not understanding, the likelihood of further disclosure is extremely low. Tracy Porteous thus explained that the more we can create an open and respectful door with regards to responding to sexual violence, the more we can alleviate long term health impacts.

In closing, Tracy Porteous introduced the guidelines by acknowledging a number of groups and initiatives that were instrumental in enabling its creation. The guidelines had been produced under the Western Canada Sexual Assault Initiative's purview and funded by Status of Women Canada. In addition to creating the guidelines, EVA BC had also engaged with the Association of Alberta Sexual Assault Services, Sexual Assault Services of Saskatchewan, and Klinik Community Health to develop a handbook for support workers who respond to sexual violence, and a series of practice tips for multiple sectors to understand how to respond to a sexual assault disclosure in an empowering way.

**Kate Rossiter** The second portion of the presentation was taken over by Kate Rossiter, Research and Projects Manager at EVA BC. She discussed the set of 10 guidelines outlined in the document. The aspects which the guidelines covered were: leadership and inclusion, a common language, developing a campus sexual violence policy and protocol, confidentiality and information sharing, disclosure and reporting options, interim protection provisions, accommodations for victims/survivors, provision and coordination of services for victims/survivors, and training and education.

After the presentation by Dr. Rossiter, a question was taken from the audience about how far confidentiality could be extended after an incident of sexual violence was reported. To answer that question, Ms. Gisela Ruebsaat, Legal Analyst for EVA BC, was consulted. She explained that although confidentiality can be applied in many cases, there are some limits such as where there is risk of harm to a child, in which case there is a legal requirement to pass on information. This marked the end of EVA BC's presentation.

## Roundtable and Facilitated Discussions

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The second half of the event was marked by multiple concurrent roundtable discussions on current practices being used by institutions/organizations to respond to violence, challenges to implementing the presented guidelines and other practices in the response to sexual violence, and how the newly introduced Bill 23 might impact various institutions/organizations.

After the roundtable discussions there was a larger discussion session facilitated by CJ Rowe, a Diversity Advisor at UBC, and Natalie Clark, Assistant Professor and Chair of Field Education at the UBC School of Social work.



**Facilitated Discussions led by Natalie Clark and CJ Rowe**

## Key points of Discussion

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The need to develop innovative tools and initiatives through which information can be effectively disseminated to students regarding key issues in sexual violence.

The need to increase both the level and accessibility of funding for campus and community support centres in order to boost their capacity as key resource groups in ensuring safety on and off campuses.

The need to ensure post-secondary institutions develop policies which are sufficiently proactive in preventing occurrences of sexual violence as opposed simply reactive.

The recognition of the jurisdictional challenges present in developing effective policies, particularly with regards to ensuring across-the-board training on various aspects such as disclosure, bystander training, etc.

Seeking an integrated RCMP/campus approach in responding to disclosures and investigating incidents, i.e. ensuring adequate support is provided without obstructing justice and due process.

The expansion of restorative justice options for perpetrators of sexual violence in order to significantly decrease recidivism rates.

Addressing cultural/regional diversity across campuses and reflecting those considerations in policies, protocols and initiatives developed to end violence.

The need to trust post-secondary administrative offices to play a key stakeholder role in the development of effective policies on campuses.

The inclusion of significant student consultation at the policy development stage in order to ensure that resultant policies are sufficiently reflective of the social realities of campuses.

The challenges with confidentiality in terms of the dual role of administrators, confusion for victims/survivors in terms of what they can/cannot disclose of their experiences and balancing confidentiality of perpetrators with community expectations and safety.

The potential within developing a database on various patterns in crime to help adopt a more proactive approach in preventing violence.

The need for policy frameworks to be adaptive enough to accommodate the various contexts of post-secondary institutions.

The challenges inherent in collaboration and communication particularly with regard to effective structures for cooperation between institutions, community actors, and survivors, as well as maintaining high levels of awareness despite the high turnover rates of students at institutions.

The opportunity present within Bill 23 to provide a space for institutions to actively engage the process and leverage responsibility to engage as many groups as possible.

Acknowledging the importance of intersections of various identities in the language of policies which are developed by post-secondary institutions.

## **Closing Remarks | Ashley Bentley**

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In closing, **Ashley Bentley** expressed her thanks to all attendees for their keen participation and contribution to the day's discussion. She also acknowledged the work of the Planning Committee, presenters, facilitators and volunteers who had played key roles in making the event a success.

## **LIST OF SPEAKERS**

**Honourable Anne Rowles**, Chair of the Board, ICCLR

**Honourable Andrew Wilkinson**, Minister of Advanced Education, BC

**Ashley Bentley**, Manager, AMS Sexual Assault Support Centre (SASC), UBC

**Elder Larry Grant**, Elder-in-Residence, UBC First Nations House of Learning

**Farrah Khan**, Sexual violence Support and Education Coordinator, Ryerson University

**Kate Rossiter**, Research and Projects Manager, Ending Violence Association of BC

**Tracy Porteous**, Executive Director, Ending Violence Association of BC