

CampUS Safety Project: A Model for Engaging Young People to Prevent Violence Against Women on Post-Secondary Campuses in Canada

Projeto Segurança no CampUS: um modelo para engajar jovens e prevenir a violência contra as mulheres em *campus* de educação pós-ensino médio no Canadá

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Abstract: Colleges and universities are home to young women whom are at the highest statistical risk of experiencing gender-based violence³. In this, it makes sense that campus administration, service providers and campus police come together to consider ways to address violence against women on campuses. Postsecondary stakeholders should ask: *What safety concerns are young women facing? What help is available to support young women on campus? What measures is our post-secondary institution undertaking to prevent and reduce violence against young women on campus?* This paper focuses on a Canadian-based initiative on engaging young people to prevent violence against women on post-secondary campuses. The CampUS Safety Project was initiated by Interim Place, a community organization providing shelter and support to abused women, and the University of Toronto Mississauga. The goals of CampUS were to conduct a campus safety audit; research the experiences of young women on campus; develop a community campus safety plan; implement an education, awareness and violence prevention campaign; and share best practices with other campuses. In this paper, I share highlights of what was learned throughout the CampUS project. Highlights include recommendations applicable to preventing and reducing violence against young women on post-secondary campuses elsewhere.

Key Words: Anti-racism. Gender-based violence. Women. Post-secondary institutions. Prevention. Campus safety.

Resumo: Faculdades e universidades abrigam mulheres jovens que se situam no maior risco estatístico de sofrer violência baseada em gênero. Assim faz sentido que a administração do *campus*, provedores de serviços e a polícia universitária unam-se para pensar formas de abordar a violência contra as mulheres no *campus*. As partes interessadas devem se perguntar: *Que preocupações com a segurança as mulheres enfrentam? Que ajuda está disponível para apoiar as mulheres no campus? Que medidas nossas instituições pós-ensino médio estão tomando para prevenir e reduzir a violência contra a mulher no campus?* Este trabalho enfoca uma experiência canadense sobre o engajamento de jovens na prevenção da violência contra as mulheres em *campus* pós-ensino médio. O Projeto Segurança no CampUS foi iniciado pelo *Interim Place*, uma organização comunitária que oferece abrigo

e apoio a mulheres vítimas de abuso, e pela Universidade de Toronto em Mississauga. Os objetivos da CampUS eram de conduzir uma auditoria sobre a segurança no *campus*; uma pesquisa sobre as experiências das jovens no *campus*; desenvolver um sistema, um plano de segurança comunitária no *campus*; implementar uma campanha de educação, conscientização e prevenção da violência; e compartilhar as melhores práticas com outros *campus*. Neste ensaio compartilho reflexões sobre o que foi aprendido através do Projeto CampUS e destaques que incluem recomendações aplicáveis à prevenção e redução da violência contra jovens mulheres em *campus* pós-ensino médio em outros locais.

Palavras chave: Antirracismo. Violência de gênero. Mulheres. Instituições Pós-ensino médio. Prevenção. Segurança no *Campus*.

Background

The problem of violence against women is a world-wide phenomenon that exists in homes, communities and work places — but it also exists on post-secondary campuses. Colleges and universities in Canada are home to women who are at the highest statistical risk of experiencing gender-based violence: young women between the ages of 15 and 25 years⁴. In this, it makes sense that campus administration, social service providers and campus police come together to consider ways to address violence against women on campuses, where women aged 15 -25 live, study, work and play. Postsecondary staff and stakeholders ought to be asking: *What safety concerns are young women facing at this post-secondary campus? What help is available to support young women affected by violence at our university or college? What are the gaps? What measures is our post-secondary institution undertaking to prevent and reduce violence against young women on campus?* If postsecondary staff and stakeholders don't have answers to these questions, it makes sense for policy-makers, social service professionals and criminal justice allies to consider ways to address violence against women on university and college campuses.

In 2012, the Government of Canada provided 21 organizations with close to \$4 million to carry out projects to address violence against female students through the Status of Women Canada's *Engaging Young People to Prevent Violence against Women on Post-Secondary Campuses* funding stream. Under this stream, community organizations worked with college and university campuses to carry out identified projects. The projects addressed institutional barriers and factors (e.g., institutional policies and programs, social dynamics, security provisions and physical safety issues) that limit the capacity

of campus communities to prevent and respond to violence against young women. The projects also worked to build partnerships between campus and community stakeholders, which responded to the specific needs of young women on campuses. Students helped to identify the contexts and impacts of violence affecting young women on their campus. In concert with campus and community stakeholders, the students also helped carry out strategies to prevent and reduce gender-based violence in the campus⁵.

This paper focuses on one *Engaging Young People to Prevent Violence against Women on Post-Secondary Campuses* initiative: the CampUS Safety Project. CampUS was initiated by Interim Place, a community organization providing shelter and support to abused women, and the University of Toronto Mississauga (UTM). The goals of the CampUS initiative were to conduct a campus safety audit; research the experiences of young women on UTM's campus; develop a community campus safety plan; develop and implement an education, awareness and violence prevention campaign; and document and share best practices with other campuses. Jacqueline Benn-John, is a former Project Manager and Advisory Committee Member of the CampUS Safety Project; Dr. Njoki Nathani Wane was the special advisor on gender issues to the Vice-President, Human Resources and Equity and the officer in charge of the Status of Women Office at University of Toronto, and she consulted on the CampUS Safety Project during its early implementation. In this paper, we share highlights of what was learned while developing and delivering the outcome of the CampUS project. This includes recommendations for best practices engaging students in preventing and reducing violence against young women on post-secondary campuses. These learnings are transferable to other campuses elsewhere.

Violence Against Women, Campus Contexts and Theoretical Framework

The United Nations offers a widely-accepted definition of violence against women: “*Any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivations of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.*”⁶ Violence against women manifests in many forms and contexts. These include intimate partner violence, in which violence occurs in a dating relationship. Forms of intimate partner violence can include

physical assault, sexual assault, verbal/emotional abuse, financial abuse, stalking, harassment and spiritual abuse. *Acquaintance sexual assault/rape* refers to sexual assault perpetrated by someone that is known to the woman, but not necessarily dating. *Sexual violence* refers to other forms of harmful sexual behavior, such as non-consensual touching, sexual innuendos, sexual harassment or exposure of sexual organs. *Stalking and trailing* includes uninvited following or tracking of a woman in a manner that threatens her and elicits anxiety and fear (this can occur in real time and space or in cyberspace).

The extent of violence against women in Canada and on university campuses is well documented: between 15 and 25% of college and university-aged women will experience some form of sexual assault during their academic career⁷. Four out of five female undergraduates surveyed at Canadian universities said they had been victims of violence in a dating relationship; 29% of female university students reported incidents of sexual assault⁸; and many on-campus sexual assaults occur during the first eight weeks of classes⁹. Canadian reports also highlight that alcohol and drugs can be one of the most significant risk factors for sexual violence on college and university campuses. Over half of sexual assaults of postsecondary students involve alcohol or drugs¹⁰. Clearly, the issue of violence against young women specifically on campus is a timely and concerning reality.

The theoretical framework of *anti-racism/anti-oppressive theory (AR/AO theory)* was applied to the development and roll-out of the CampUS project. Anti-Racism/anti-oppression practice is a theoretical approach that can be applied to working in the community. Anti-racism/anti-oppression strategies and actions “challenge social and historical inequalities and injustices that are systemic to our systems and institutions by policies and practices that allow certain groups to dominate over other groups”¹¹. An anti-racism/anti-oppression approach recognizes and challenge inequalities – including acts of interpersonal violence informed or facilitated by sexism, racism, classism and other systemic oppressions – that occur in our communities.

Gender-Based Analysis (GBA+) is the name of the theoretical framework tool the Canadian federal government uses to assess the impacts of policies, programs or initiatives on diverse groups of women and men, girls and boys¹². For the purpose of the CampUS project (and this paper), we acknowledged that GBA+ is an application

of anti-racism/anti-oppression practice. Within CampUS, a GBA+ analysis noted that one's experience of violence and safety from violence was informed by gender. In the case of the UTM consultations, attention was paid to differences observed between male and female students; as well as differences among female students from different ethnic backgrounds. Issues related to women living with disabilities, women who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer (LGBTQ), and women living in residence at UTM were also considered.

CampUS, in applying an anti-racism/anti-oppression (or GBA+) lens, identified that while all females experienced violence and safety concerns, some populations experienced additional barriers to receiving appropriate violence prevention and healing supports: "Students and service providers indicated that while the UTM campus is very multicultural and inclusive, there are some groups that experience challenges related to their personal or cultural characteristics, mainly: Muslim women; women living with disabilities; and women identifying as LGBTQ"¹³. In these ways, an applied anti-racism/anti-oppression or GBA+ analysis proved highly relevant and useful to the overall project.

About the CampUS Safety Project: A Model for Engaging Students to Prevent and Reduce Violence Against Young Women at UTM

UTM is located in the City of Mississauga, Ontario. It was established in 1967 and is the second largest campus of the University of Toronto's three campuses. University of Toronto is, overall, Canada's largest university. UTM campus is set on 225 acres of protected greenbelt land along the Credit River. UTM has 15 academic departments and 147 programs. Gender diversity of the student population is 59% female and 41% male. The campus population consists of 12,500 undergraduate students, 500 graduate students and 700 academic faculty and staff. UTM hosts students from over 90 countries and includes large communities of students from South Asian, Middle Eastern, Chinese and East Asian backgrounds¹⁴.

The CampUS Safety Project was a two year project, operating from 2012-2014. The goals of the CampUS Project were to enhance opportunities for UTM to actively prevent and reduce violence against young women, and to support measures to address violence

against young women on the campus overall. Informed by an anti-racism/anti-oppression and GBA+ analysis¹⁵ of violence and its prevalence, the CampUS Safety Project engaged students and UTM staff to share their thoughts about campus safety and young women's perceptions of safety at UTM. The project also solicited student and staff ideas on how UTM could play a role in preventing and reducing violence against young women.

An Advisory Committee offered leadership to the project; active participation of students in the study itself and on the Advisory Committee was key to the success of the overall project. The Advisory Committee oversaw the design, implementation and evaluation of the project's key deliverable over the two year project duration. Year 1 included the design and delivery of a safety audit and needs assessment studying young women's experiences and perceptions of safety on campus. This study resulted in the development of a community campus safety plan, which aimed to address identified problem areas underscored in the audit and needs assessment. Year 2 saw the implementation of the community safety plan priorities, including a commitment to share best practices with other campuses.

The next sections of this paper will describe the *needs assessment study*, *community safety plan* that resulted for the study, and *best practices findings* of the overall CampUS project in more detail.

Needs Assessment

The *needs assessment* looked at three dimensions related to young women's vulnerability to violence in the UTM community: i) physical contexts/physical environment on campus; ii) social contexts/environment; and iii) service environments, such as counselling supports, that may or may not have the capacity to respond to young women who have experienced violence on campus. The needs assessment team consulted with students on their understanding of gender-based violence, their perceptions of safety on campus, and their recommendations for addressing and preventing violence against women on campus. The above three dimensions were considered when noting and synthesizing student and staff input and recommendations.

Dr. Paula DeCoito, Gender-based Specialist and Principal Investigator for the needs assessment drew information from UTM students, UTM professional counseling staff and the UTM Campus Police¹⁶. Methods of data collection included:

- a) *An on-line survey* of UTM students: 211 students participated in the survey. This included 194 females, 15 males, 1 transgendered person; and 1 person who identified himself/herself as “other.”.
- b) *Focus groups* with different groups of students at UTM. 7 focus groups saw 70 student participants. Of the seven focus groups, six of the groups were female students from diverse groups (South Asians; Blacks; Chinese; students living on-campus; students living with a disability; students from diverse ethnic groups). One group was comprised of eight male students from different ethnic backgrounds.
- c) *Key informant interviews* with UTM service providers. Key informants included campus police, health and counselling staffs and student leaders. 15 interviews occurred.
- d) *Safety walkabouts on the UTM campus*. These were facilitated by UTM students over a two-day period Six walkabouts occurred in daytime and nighttime. 16 female students and 10 males participated.

Overall, student engagement and participation was positive and consistent throughout the needs assessment study.

Community Safety Plan

We were aware that research on best practices (Chege, 2012) for fruitful violence against women initiatives on campuses (ibid) pointed to the importance of actualizing violence against women reduction strategies at three different levels

1. Primary Level: Organizational policies, procedures, and activities aimed at prevention and reduction of violence.
2. Secondary Level: Organizational policies, procedures and actions focused on institutional *intervention and responses to actual incidents* of violence against women on post-secondary campuses; and

3. Tertiary Level: Organizational policies, procedures, programs and services focused on providing on-going and long-term *support to victims of violence* after the violent incidents have taken place¹⁷.

The purpose of the Community Safety Plan is to communicate priorities to address the findings and recommendations identified in the needs assessment. The CampUS project therefore developed a Safety Plan that intentionally included all three levels, noted above. The CampUS Community Safety Plan included the following priorities (note the levels, from Chege's best practices, as well).

1. *Priority 1 (Primary Level): Students Preventing Violence Against Young Women.* In this priority, students took leadership on delivering a variety of education and awareness initiatives such as class presentations, tabling events and myth busting at pub night.
2. *Priority 2 (Primary Level): Planning for Young Women's Physical Safety Needs at UTM.* UTM implemented planned upgrades to emergency telephones and campus lighting.
3. *Priority 3 (Secondary Level): Campus Police Reporting Process for Incidents of Violence Against Young Women.* UTM reviewed and improved the transparency of its campus police reporting processes for victims, as well as its material/tools for communicating these processes. A number of accessible resources were created, such as: "When to Call the Campus Police Service", "Reporting Options" and "What the Campus Police Service Will Do".
4. *Priority 4 (Tertiary Level): Healing Supports for Young Women.* Interim Place (off-campus support) and Health and Counselling (on campus support) partnered to ensure that healing supports were in place for students affected by gender-based violence. For example, a counsellor from Interim Place is now onsite at UTM twice a week.

All priorities reflected both student and staff feedback or concerns, as noted in the needs assessment findings; as well as the multi-level structure of prevention and response, as noted by previous campus-situated best practices (ibid).

CampUS Best Practice findings and Guide

The achievements and learning of the CampUS project were captured in a report and guide, *Preventing and Reducing Violence Against Young Women on Post-secondary Campuses: A Best Practices Guide Based on University of Toronto Mississauga (UTM) and Interim Place's CampUS Safety Project*¹⁸. This guide offered a summary of tips for other campuses aiming to prevent or respond to violence against women. In this way, CampUS was able to create a series of steps, practices and concrete tips for other campus community hoping to replicate CampUs (or something similar) at their own college or university.

A description of the best practices we recommended and noted in the guide will be discussed later in this paper.

CampUS Safety project: Findings

Violence Against Women and Students' Experiences at UTM

First, needs assessment findings¹⁹ pointed to the *extent of violence against women occurring on UTM campus, or at least to the female student body*. 16% of female students had personal experiences of gender-based violence on UTM campus, while 10% of female students know of other female UTM students who have experienced gender-based violence on the UTM campus. Moreover, 40% of female students know of female students who have experienced violence off-campus. Between 2010 and 2012, reports of crimes against persons on the UTM campus showed a decline in most types of crimes; however, in that same time period, reports of crimes involving intimate partner relationships at UTM actually increased. Between 2010 and 2012, the number of domestic disputes/assaults – crimes commonly associated with violence against women – reported to Campus Police on the UTM campus increased from 5 to 9 incidents²⁰.

Findings also highlighted limitations, including barriers, to *reporting incidents of violence against women on UTM Campus*. It was clear that counting reported incidents of violence only would result in many (if not most) incidents not being captured in the analysis. There is limited reporting of violence against women to UTM Campus Police. Prevalence is not adequately reflected in reporting practices. Just as in community settings, violence against women is under-reported²¹. UTM students noted in the needs assessment that reporting

process employed by police (city and campus) is seen as too onerous/intense²². Many women have fears around reporting, which include personal, family, cultural and religious barriers. Some expressed dissatisfaction with Campus Police' response to reports of violence²³.

Many findings also highlighted student *perception of service providers' [limited] capacity to support victims of violence on UTM Campus*. Service providers on campus, including the Campus Police, are seen as having limited capacity for providing services to female victims of violence from diverse cultural backgrounds. Professors and research faculty are seen as having limited knowledge and skills for relating to and supporting female students who are victims of violence against women²⁴.

CampUS Safety project: Best Practices

Based on CampUS's experiences, a number of practices, project supports, partnerships and project frameworks contributed to a fulsome and successful initiative. Many of these are applicable and easily transferrable to campuses elsewhere in Canada and beyond. Practices, project supports, partnerships and project frameworks we counted as *best practices* are highlighted below in the form of concrete suggestions:

1. Strike an advisory committee to oversee and guide your project;
2. Consult with students living on and off-campus before creating a plan of action on how to improve campus safety. Use a variety of data collection methods (i.e. online survey, walkabouts, focus groups), so to increase access to and input from a variety of students;
3. Engage students and student leaders throughout the project duration, and in meaningful roles. Students can take part of your project committee, help to plan the needs assessment, support outreach to other students, and take leadership in planning and activities;
4. Ensure effective and consistent communication amongst stakeholders; and make sure you have different kinds of stakeholders involved in the project and committee. For example, a project committee of just police or safety stakeholders will yield less information and creative strategy than a committee

of students, police and health/counselling stakeholders. Our committee also included a few non-campus allies;

5. Use an anti-racism/anti-oppression or GBA+ analysis to recognize and respond to the needs of the diverse student population in your campus community. If you don't know much about anti-racism/anti-oppression or GBA+, learn more about it by reading theory and practical guides on these models;
6. Ensure that your community plan, or any changes you make to improve safety, consider and integrate the three levels for addressing violence against women (chege, 2012);
7. Engage senior leadership throughout the project duration in meaningful roles. Having your campus engaged at a high level will make it easier to implement policy changes, or to access campus resources and networks more readily.

The CampUS project was evaluated by a third party evaluator, which also captured more project successes, strengths and met deliverables²⁵.

Conclusion

This paper has described CampUs' model, achievements and learnings. We believe that CampUS is an effective model for preventing and reducing violence against women on post-secondary campuses. Initiatives like CampUS offer promising practices for other communities looking for innovative ways to address violence against women on post-secondary campuses. We believe that other post-secondary campuses can learn from our experiences in creating and delivering CampUS; we also believe that governments must continue legislating high-level policies that demand institutional compliance at provincial and national levels. Overall, any work towards increasing awareness of violence against young women on post-secondary campuses is timely and useful to campus communities. Together, we hope that these critical actions will lead to systemic and social change that concretely reduces the risk of violence to young women attending post-secondary institutions.

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Notes

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