

The unreported

Where to go? Whom to talk to? When it comes to sexual assault, victims are made to feel like criminals

By Ishita Verma

FOR MacEWAN UNIVERSITY student Cheyenne Juknies, the 2015-16 academic year began with sexual assault.

“I was having a bad day and he messaged me to hang out,” she recalls.

She knew her attacker. She had been on a date with him. The only thing she hadn't known was that he was a sexual predator.

“So, we went to Towers, the local bar, where I had several drinks. I didn't realize until after two or three drinks that he wasn't drinking.”

Later that evening, in an empty classroom near her locker, he assaulted her.

Sexual assault, as defined by MacEwan's Office of Sexual Violence Prevention and Education Response, is any sexual contact without consent. This includes, but is not limited to, forced oral contact, forced groping or fondling, forced vaginal or anal penetration, and forced oral to genital contact.

The behaviour does not need to be intentional for it to be considered sexual assault.

On the other hand, sexual violence is an all-encompassing, non-legal term that refers to experiences like sexual assault or abuse, sexual harassment, cyber-violence, stalking, and relationship violence.

Juknies says her experience should not be considered sexual assault.

“When I think about my situation – where I didn't say, No or, Stop, or run away – that, for some reason in my head, is not equal (to physically fighting the assault).

“All separate, everything that happened doesn't seem awful. But, when you add it up together, it's like a series of events. He knew what he was doing. He was fully sober; I was wasted.”

The astonishing thing about Juknies's story is not that she was assaulted, but that she was assaulted in a place of learning, supposedly a safe space.

In 2015, [CBC news](#) conducted a survey of reported sexual assault cases on campuses in Canada. The numbers seemed too low. In fact, in the case of the University of Ottawa, the survey showed that "over the course of five years, only 10 students reported an assault."

The Sexual Assault Centre Edmonton reports that only eight to 10 per cent of sexual assault cases are reported in Canada per year. In 2015, Statistics Canada noted that 76,000 cases were reported – and many more were not.

"We receive 3,000 to 4,000 calls every day," SACE executive director Mary Jane James says.

SACE is there to listen to victims, to believe them and to offer support; for university students, there are other options as well.

Officials work around the clock to keep the MacEwan campus as safe and secure as they can. Security responds to any and all incidents.

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calls every day'

"The role of security and what we do is three things," head of MacEwan security, Raymond Barteau says. "We are providing preventative services, such as patrols. We challenge anything that will disrupt university policies. We also have conversations with people in regards to some of the risks and dangers that are on campus and what they can do to avoid being involved in these kinds of things.

"We provide response services and try to document as much as we can to support the individual that has been subjected to any crime, for that matter. Once we do that, of course, safety is paramount, and that is why we provide safe walks and those kinds of things."

Barteau says that, although security services cannot fight the media or change public opinion, any student who reports an assault will be treated with respect, and have full control of their file.

"There must be an exchange of trust."

In MacEwan, four security officers at a time patrol the seven-block campus. Safe Walk, a voluntary service that accompanies students off campus to their cars or the nearest bus stop or LRT station, operates 5:30-11:30 p.m.

In the past year, only one sexual assault incident was reported to campus security. In 2017, there were two.

There are between 110 and 130 thefts reported on an average, annually. There are between 10 and 12 person-crimes reported; these include sexual violence.

SACE's James and MacEwan's office of sexual violence co-ordinator Megan Simon both say that this reluctance on the part of women to report an assault is not uncommon.

As Simon points out, many movements in the past years – even seemingly powerful ones like BlackLivesMatter – have gained media attention, only to die out.

"#MeToo is happening," she says. "And there's going to be a dip and something else will replace it."

It's no secret that conversations about sexual assault have become more common since October 2017, when the misdeeds of Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein broke over the media. More and more victims are coming forward, but often not receiving the justice they seek.

Statistics Canada researchers Cristine Rotenberg and Adam Cooter analyzed police-reported sexual assaults in Canada, before and after #MeToo.

"Though sexual assaults on school property represented a minority of cases, 5 per cent," they write. "Reports of sexual assaults on school grounds, largely at non-postsecondary institutions with younger students rather than a university or college, increased after #MeToo."

Rotenberg's and Cooter's research proved that victims became more confident about receiving the justice they deserved.

MacEwan' sexual violence prevention office is addressing this situation by "fostering trauma-informed and anti-oppressive initiatives that cultivate a culture of consent, a place where everyone can feel safe and supported," to quote the official policy statement.

Simon says: "A recent 2017 campus climate survey across 27 post-secondary institutions in the United States indicates that one in five students will be sexually assaulted during their time as students."

Before coming to MacEwan, She worked as a response co-ordinator at the University of Alberta, and at SACE – though she is closed-mouthed about how the U of A handles sexual violence cases: “Every university has its own policies.”

“Our office’s prevention efforts focus on challenging rape culture and systems of oppression and fostering equity and safety, which we believe is fundamental to our efforts to end sexual violence. We are also working to create an environment where all survivors can feel heard, believed and supported.”

Sexual violence response co-ordinators like Simon work as therapists, providing survivors with counselling, accommodation and medical support, and advise them on their options for reporting their assault.

“Our office provides training to departments across campus,” she says, “so that staff and faculty understand the realities of sexual violence and are equipped to respond to student disclosures. And to connect individuals impacted by sexual violence to the different supports and resources available.”

As well as working with security, the co-ordinators work with the athletics department, to teach athletes of both genders about sexual violence.

They hold a seminar on the topic once a year.

“On any campus, I think everybody needs to be aware of it,” MacEwan sports director Lisa Pittet says. “It’s a real serious issue, right?”

As for Juknies’s assailant, nobody got around to telling him that no means no.

“I actually found out he’s done this to two other girls,” Juknies says. “One on campus and one was not on campus.”

Yet, so far, no one appears to have reported his activities, and he is still on campus.

Juknies describes herself as someone who is good at ignoring things and pretending they don’t exist, and she never considered seeking help or counselling from MacEwan’s support systems.

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"I don't really have a great reason about why I didn't report it. He begged me not to say anything to anybody.

"I don't know. I kind of wish I did report it."

But she was drunk. And he was sober. And it was at the University.

"But, then again, I don't think I would have been taken seriously. Because I didn't say no. Do you know what I mean?"

Juknies says she is not aware of the Office of Sexual Violence Prevention and Education Response.

"I don't feel like they have a place or designated person where you can go in if you've been sexually assaulted on campus," she says. "Like, where do you go? Who do you talk to? There isn't any awareness or direction about that."

The OSVPER has banners hanging up, and posters pinned to the bulletin boards in the university corridors. Links to additional resources are on the university website. However, as Juknies's case shows, many still don't know about the resources.

"I'm a good option," Simon says of her role in the system. "Because I can listen to people and hear what they are going through – and work with them to try and figure out what kind of resources they need."

MacEwan's sexual assault policy is being revised and edited, she says, and the new version will be released in 2019.

"In the revised policy, we are committing to support anyone who comes forward and discloses that they have experienced sexual violence. Regardless of whether it happened recently or before the person joined the university."

'She had no idea that
I was past the point of consent'

One of the realities of sexual violence is that it is often committed by someone the survivor knows: a partner, a colleague, a friend, a date. And it doesn't only happen to women.

When Peter Roundtree (not his real name) explains why he didn't report his case, it brings to light other information that has to be taken into account.

Peter's story began on a date, in a bar, after a few drinks. Although it happened "a while ago," he admits the story still has a dark place in his mind.

"She had no idea that I was past the point of consent."

"It did impact me," he says. "But, that being said, she didn't know. She had no idea that I would black out. She didn't intentionally take advantage of me."

After the incident, Peter had himself checked for diseases, and got support from a nurse at the clinic, and later with a therapist.

"The reason I wanted to talk about it is just to say that, if there is alcohol involved in these situations ..." he says, trailing off. "You have to be very litigious, I guess. Or fastidious.

"Just keep checking once in a while, you know? Because I would have preferred to go home that night."

Slowly, victims, survivors are coming forward with their stories. Together they are creating a united front – with or without #MeToo.

The [OSVPER](#) is located in the student affairs offices.

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