

MacEwan University Sexual and Gender-Based
Violence Climate Survey 2023:
Student Perceptions and Experiences

MacEwan University Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Climate Survey 2023:
Student Perceptions and Experiences

Vespi, E. (2024)

© Copyright 2024 by Hatch Collaborative

Printed in:

Amiskwacîwâskahikan (ᐱᓂᓂᓄᓂᓄᐱᓄᐱᐱᓄᓄ)

Treaty 6 Territory

Acknowledgements

Many thanks are due to the MacEwan students and staff who provided their insight in the findings during the project's Data Day. We have tried to weave your perspectives throughout the report in a way that honors the breadth of your experiences. Thank you to Robert Jagodzinski who supported the data analysis for this report. Finally, this report would not have been possible without the guidance of Roxanne Runyon. We hope that this report will support reflection, discussion and action that helps to advance a culture of safety and inclusion at MacEwan University.

Definitions

2SLGBTQ+ - individuals who identified as two-spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, asexual, queer, pansexual or questioning.

Cisgender - individuals whose gender identity corresponds with the gender they were assigned at birth.

Gender diverse - individuals who identified as transgender, genderqueer, gender fluid, non-binary, two-spirit, agender or questioning.

OSVPER - the Office of Sexual Violence Prevention, Education and Response.

Racialized – individuals who did not identify as white.

SGBV – Sexual and Gender-Based Violence: a wide range of sexualized acts and behaviours that are unwanted, coerced, committed without consent or forced, either by physical or psychological means.

Sexual Assault - any sexual contact without consent, which can include but is not limited to forced or unwanted oral contact (“kissing”), groping or fondling, vaginal or anal penetration, and forced oral to genital contact.

Sexual Harassment - unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favours, or other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature that may cause offense or humiliation.

Stalking - being repeatedly followed, communicated with (by phone, online or in person), watched and/or threatened.

Survivor - an individual who has experienced sexual violence.

Contents

Context	5
Background	5
Survey Methodology	6
Data Analysis & Limitations	6
Respondent Demographics	7
Experiences of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence	9
Sexual Harassment	9
Stalking	10
Sexual Assault	11
Sexual & Gender-Based Violence	12
Disclosure Behaviours	13
Bystander Actions	15
Perceptions of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence	16
Student Perception Trends	17
Opportunities for Action	18

Background

MacEwan University is committed to creating and maintaining an educational and working environment free from sexual violence. A key recommendation outlined in *Courage to Act*, the national framework to address and prevent gender-based violence at post-secondary institutions in Canada, is to implement climate surveys to determine the prevalence of sexual violence and assess the campus climate regarding sexual violence.¹ The primary goals of climate surveys are to understand respondents' attitudes and beliefs about sexual violence, experiences of sexual violence, and perceptions of the campus climate regarding sexual violence. This information is used to support the development and growth of programs and services that prevent and respond to sexual violence.

Climate surveys are a key tool to assess current prevention strategies and identify gaps as outlined in *Building Momentum: Operational Plan 2020/21 – 2025/26: Sexual Violence Prevention, Education and Response Program*.² MacEwan University's *Sexual Violence Prevention and Education Framework* further supports implementation of climate surveys as a tool to assess and adjust programming based on evaluation results and implementation of best practices in measurement of program effectiveness (Strategic Goal #6: Develop an evaluation framework and tools to ensure maximum impact of education and prevention activities).³ Additionally, following best practices in data collection and using data to inform policies, strategies and programming relating to sexual violence aligns with *MacEwan's Teaching Greatness: Strategic Vision 2030*; "creating a safe and supportive environment for all students in foundational to delivering exceptional undergraduate learning and to honoring our place in O-day'min".⁴

In 2019, MacEwan University conducted an online climate survey on sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). Survey results can be found in *MacEwan University Sexual Violence Climate Survey 2020*.⁵ Then, in 2023, MacEwan University was selected by the Government of Alberta to be the lead institution in developing a province-wide Campus Climate Survey on Sexual and Gender-Based Violence. MacEwan worked collaboratively with representatives from 26 publicly funded post-secondary institutions across Alberta and an external contractor, Leger Marketing Alberta, to design and implement the survey.

The Office of Sexual Violence Prevention, Education, and Response (OSVPER), which works to create a campus environment free of sexual violence, and provides prevention, education, awareness, and support services to the MacEwan University community, will draw on insights from these climate surveys to identify key findings and priority areas for future prevention, education, and response efforts.

Survey Methodology

Surveys were distributed by Leger to all MacEwan University students in February 2023. Students with valid email addresses received unique links to participate preventing duplicate responses. A total of 1,669 MacEwan University students participated representing a response rate of 11.3%. The results were analyzed by Leger and provided to the University in the report *Alberta Post-Secondary Student Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Survey 2023: MacEwan University*.⁶

Data Analysis & Limitations

An initial crosswalk of survey questions was prepared to determine the compatibility of the 2019 and 2023 for comparative analysis. A limited number of questions were similar enough between the two surveys to facilitate comparative analysis. Thirteen questions from the general attitudes and perceptions sections of the surveys were found suitable for comparative analysis. All questions from the experiences sections were deemed inappropriate for comparative analysis due to the differences in question sequence and follow up question sequence in the surveys.

Data from the 2023 survey were analyzed to uncover additional insights beyond those presented in the *Alberta-Post-Secondary Student Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Survey 2023: MacEwan University* report. Initial results were presented to a group of MacEwan University students, faculty, and staff at a half-day Data Party. This group discussed the data, provided additional context to findings, and identified areas of particular interest to the MacEwan community. At the suggestion of the group, further demographic analysis was done to highlight findings by race (white, racialized) and sexual orientation (straight, 2SLGBTQ+).

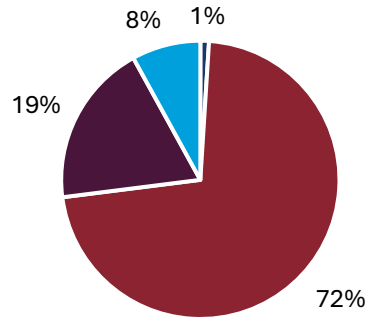
This report presents a subset of the survey findings based on the priorities identified at the Data Party and by OSVPER staff. The findings in this report should be used as a starting place to spark conversation about SGBV. Findings should not be interpreted as reflecting the absolute incidence of SGBV or necessarily reflecting the beliefs, perceptions, and experiences of the whole MacEwan community as respondents represent a small portion of the entire student population.

Caution must be used in interpreting race-differentiated data. Racialized students reported fewer experiences of SGBV including experiences of harassment, stalking, and sexual assault than their white counterparts. This contradicts research which suggests racialized people are more likely to experience SGBV.^{7,8,9} This finding is being considered with curiosity and a commitment from OSVPER to continue its work using an anti-oppressive and anti-racist approach.

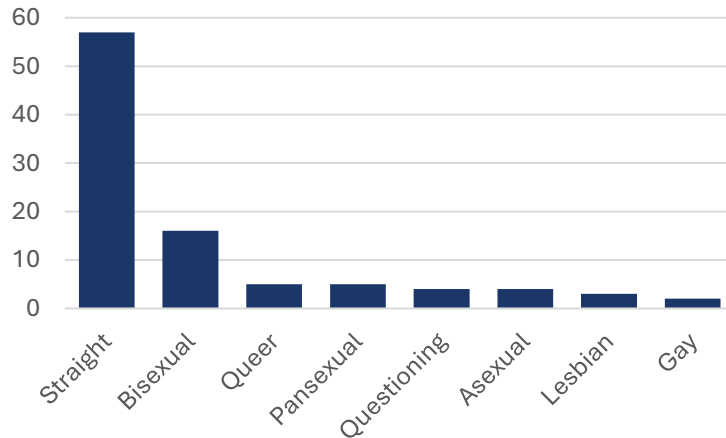
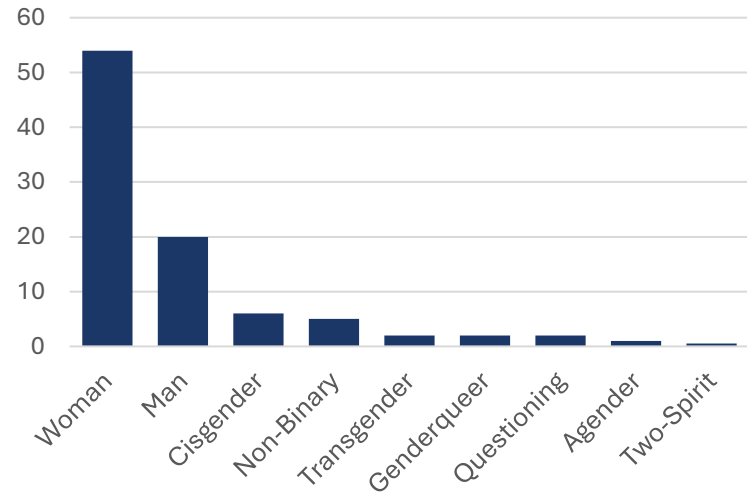
Further information about data analysis and limitations can be found in *Technical Report: MacEwan University Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Climate Survey 2023*.¹⁰

Respondent Demographics

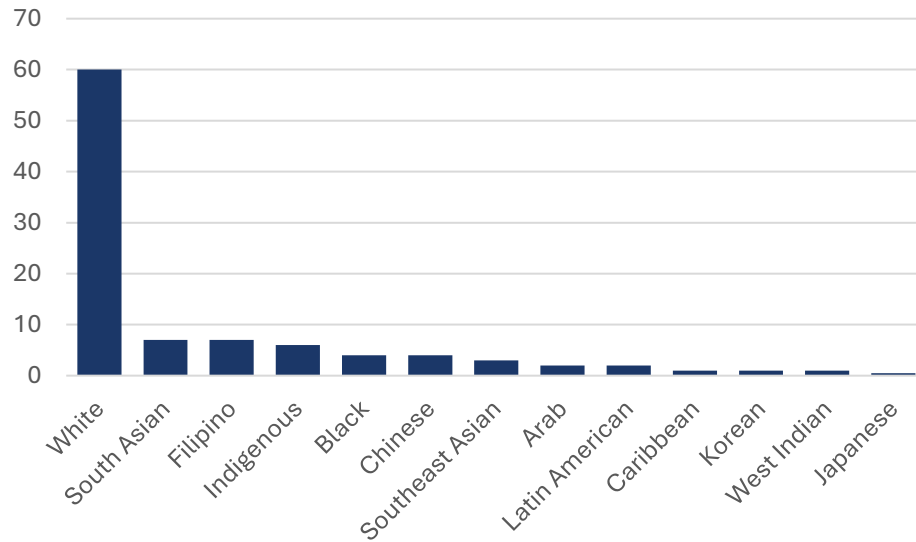
Of the students who responded to the survey, almost three quarters were 18-24 years old, half identified as women, and nearly 60% identified as straight.



■ <18 years ■ 18-24 years ■ 25-24 years ■ >45 years

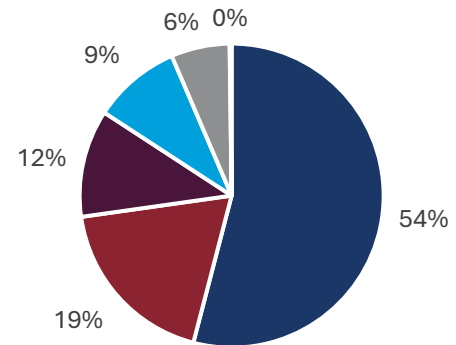


Nearly 80% of students were born in Canada and 60% identified as white. Seven percent of students identified as South Asian, 7% as Filipino, and 6% as Indigenous. Less than 4% of students identified as any other category. For the purposes of this report, the term “racialized” is used to refer to any students who did not identify as white.



Thirty-two percent of students reported they had a disability. Among those, the most common disabilities were mental health (32%), attention and concentration (22%), learning (10%), and physical health (9%).

Half of students live with their parents or relatives. Less than 1% are a member of a MacEwan athletics team.



- Parents/relatives
- Off-campus w/ others
- Off-campus alone
- Own home
- On-campus
- Fraternity/sorority

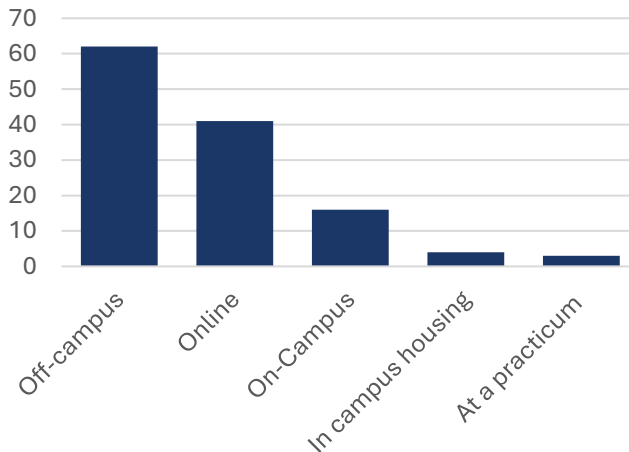
Sexual Harassment

Sexual Harassment is the most common type of SGBV experienced by survey respondents. Nearly half (46%) experienced sexual harassment since becoming a student. Most of these experiences took place off campus (62%) or online (41%). Gender diverse students were the most likely to experience sexual harassment and men were the least likely. 2SLGBTQ+ students were more likely than straight students to experience sexual harassment.

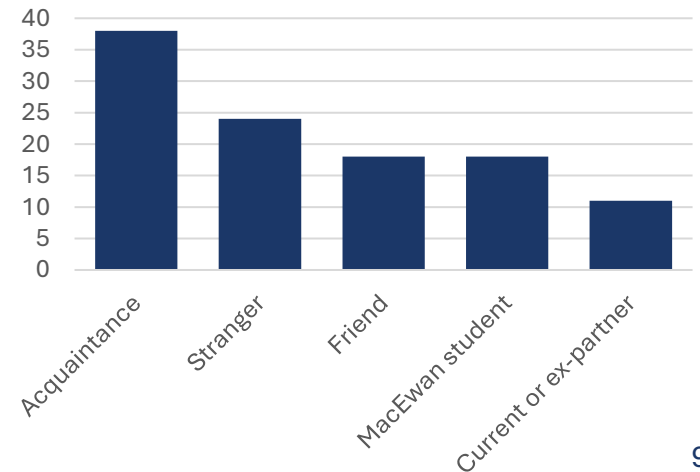
Of those who experienced harassment, the most common types were:

- inappropriate comments about someone else’s body, appearance, or sexual activities (26%).
- unwanted physical contact that was indirectly sexual in nature (16%).
- continued requests to go out or have sex despite previous declines (16%).
- inappropriate comments about their own body, appearance, or sexual activities (13%).
- sexual remarks, jokes, or stories that were insulting or offensive (11%).
- receiving or being shown sexual pictures, photos, or videos (11%).
- crude or gross sexual remarks or trying to talk about sexual matters (7%).

Harassment was most likely to occur off-campus or online



Most harassment was done by an acquaintance or stranger



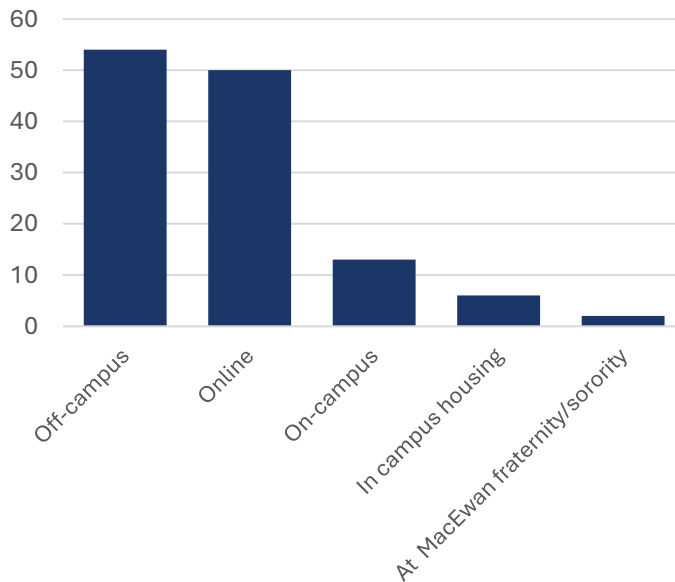
Stalking

19% of respondents experienced stalking since becoming a student. There was no reported difference between gender identity or sexual orientation in experiences of stalking. The most common experience was receiving unwanted phone calls, emails, text, or instant messages. Half of stalking is experienced online. Stalking is usually done by an acquaintance or current or past romantic partner.

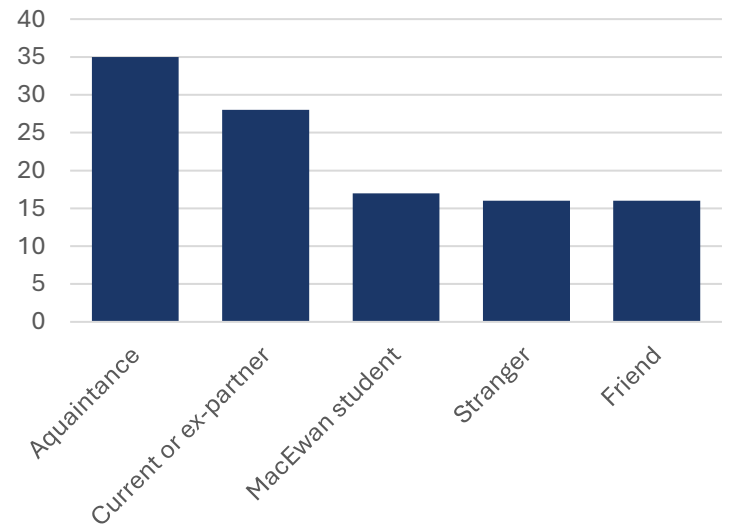
Of those who experienced stalking:

- 56% received unwanted phone calls, emails, voice, text, or instant messages.
- 17% were spied on, watched or followed or had their activities or location monitored.
- 16% had someone show up somewhere uninvited.
- 11% had someone contact friends to gain personal information.

Stalking was most likely to occur off-campus or online



Most stalking was done by an acquaintance or current or past romantic partner



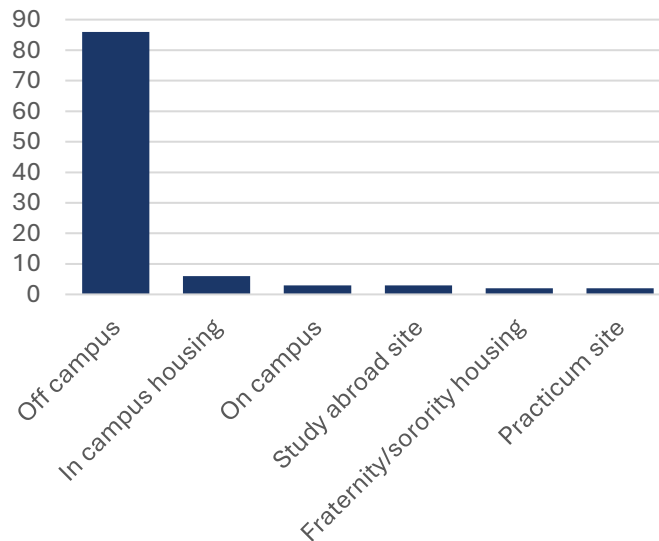
Sexual Assault

More than 1 in 10 respondents (12%) had experienced sexual assault since becoming a student. Women were the most likely to experience sexual assault and men were the least likely. 2SLGBTQ+ students were more likely than straight students to experience sexual assault. Nearly all sexual assaults (86%) occurred off-campus and were done by someone the survivor knew.

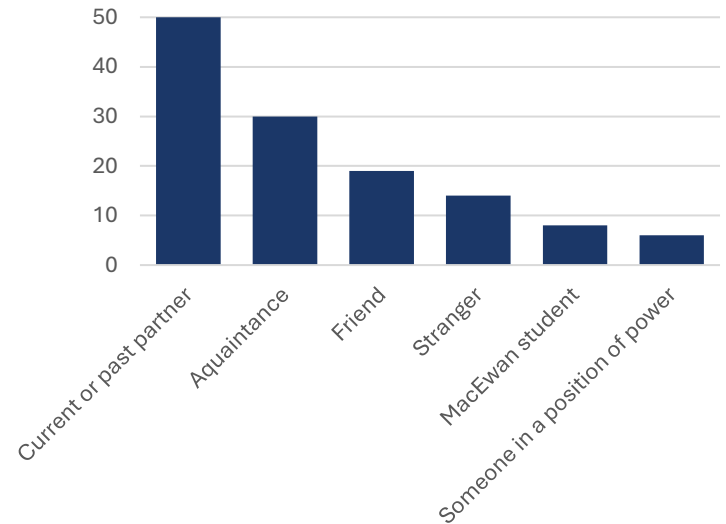
Coercion such as threatening to tell lies, end the relationship, spread rumours, or continual verbal pressure was common. Thirty-five percent of students who experienced sexual assault also experienced coercion.

Alcohol and drug use were common for both the survivor and the person causing harm. Forty-seven percent of survivors reported the person causing harm was drinking or using drugs at the time of the assault. Thirty-six percent of survivors reported they were unable to consent to sexual activity because they were drinking or using drugs.

Sexual assault was most likely to occur off-campus



Most sexual assault was done by a current or past romantic partner or an acquaintance

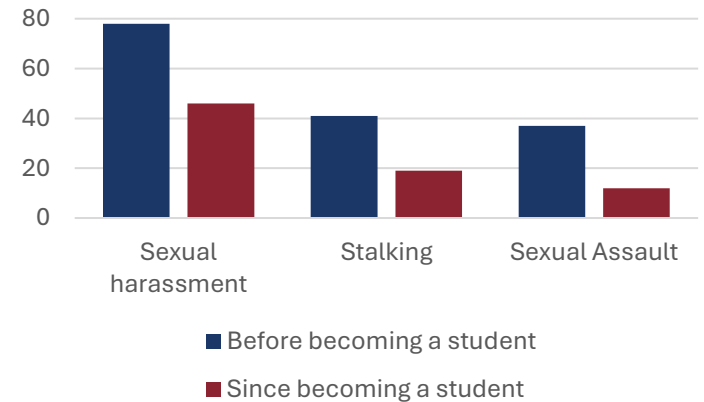


Sexual and Gender-Based Violence

Overall, experiences of SGBV are common. Nearly all students have experienced sexual harassment at some point in their life. More than two-thirds have experienced stalking or sexual assault at some point in their life. Twice as many men as women or gender diverse people reported having heard someone make offensive comments. Twice as many gender diverse people as women or men had witnessed SGBV happening to someone else.

Since becoming students:

- 1 in 2 have experienced sexual harassment
- 1 in 5 have experienced stalking
- 1 in 10 have experienced sexual assault



Most occurrences of SGBV happen off-campus. Nearly half of all sexual harassment and stalking take place online, through social media, instant messaging, or text.

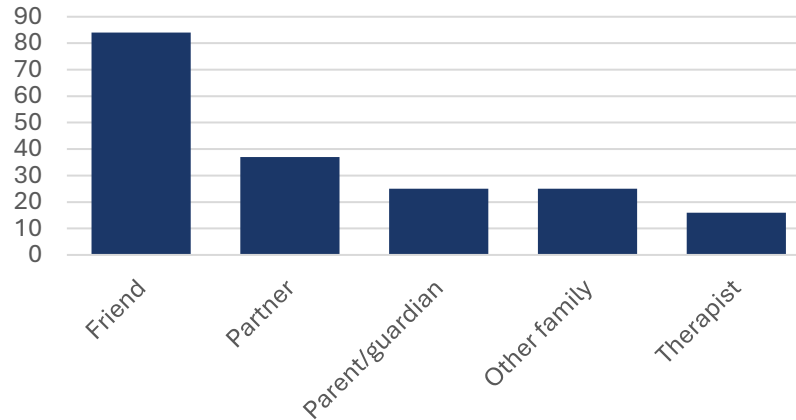
Many survivors experience negative impacts of SGBV. The most commonly reported impacts were:

- difficult emotions (49%).
- struggling to trust or connect with people (36%).
- struggling with physical health (33%).
- trouble concentrating on schoolwork or in class (29%).
- no significant impacts (20%).
- fear for own safety or safety of someone else (19%).

Disclosure Behaviours

If they were to experience SGBV, 78% of students said they would reach out to someone in their personal life. Of the 46% of students who had experienced SGBV, half (53%) told someone who is not staff or faculty at MacEwan.

Students are most likely to disclose SGBV to their friends



Women and gender diverse people were twice as likely not to disclose because:

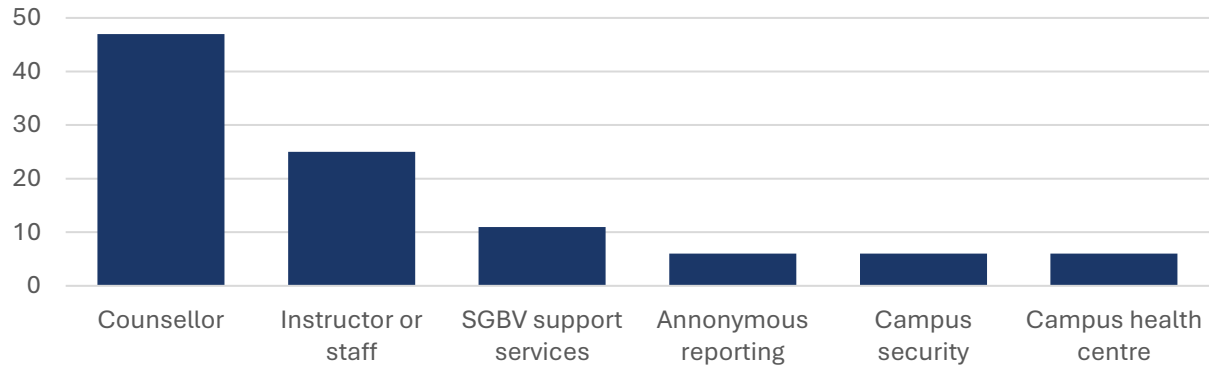
- they thought they would not get the support they needed.
- they were ashamed, embarrassed, or felt they would be blamed.

Women and gender diverse people were 3 times as likely as men to fear retaliation if they disclosed.

2SLGBTQ+ students were twice as likely as straight students to think the available resources would not give them the help they needed.

Disclosure

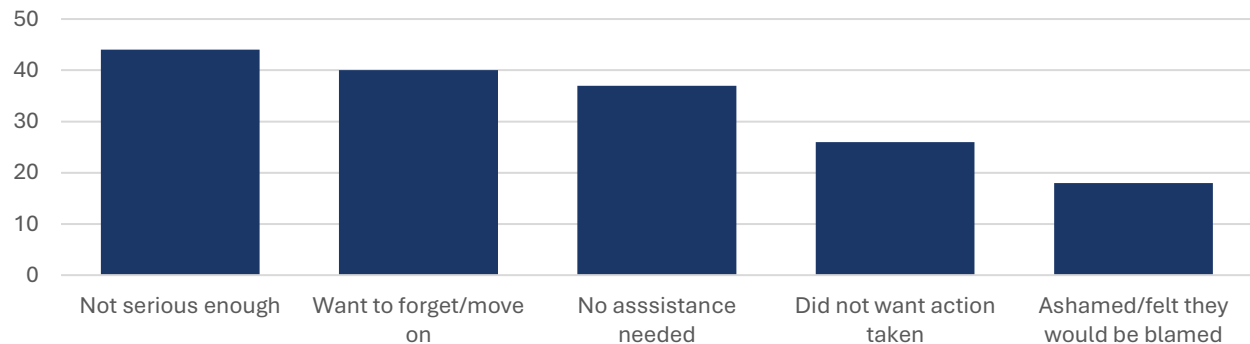
Only 5% of students disclosed their experience with sexual violence to MacEwan University. Of those who disclosed to MacEwan, nearly half (47%) told a counsellor affiliated with the school. Men were 5 times less likely and racialized students were 3 times less likely to seek counselling supports than other students.



Of those who disclosed at MacEwan:

- 84% felt believed. Nearly 100% of 2SLGBTQ+ and gender diverse students said they felt believed.
- 50% were kept informed about how their situation was being handled and that the number of times they needed to retell their story was minimized.

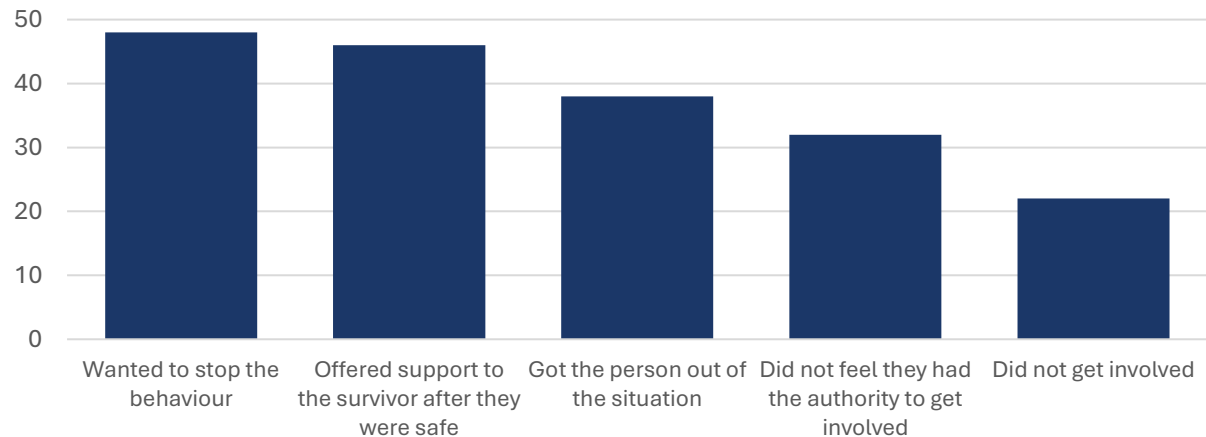
Of those who chose not to disclose to MacEwan staff or services, the most common reasons were that they did not think what happened was serious enough, they wanted to forget about the experience, or that they did not need assistance.



Bystander Actions

Since becoming a student, 13% of students had witnessed someone make sexually inappropriate, harassing, discriminatory or violent behaviour towards someone else. Nearly half (48%) wanted to stop the behaviour. Gender diverse and 2SLGBTQ+ students are twice as likely as other students to have witnessed SGBV. Nearly 3 times as many women and gender diverse students report getting involved in situations they are witnessing compared to other students.

Nearly half of all students who witnessed SGBV wanted to stop the behaviour



Students are interested in learning more about supporting survivors of SGBV.

- 79% of students want more training and information on how to intervene as a bystander.
- 79% want training and information on how to respond to a disclosure of SGBV.

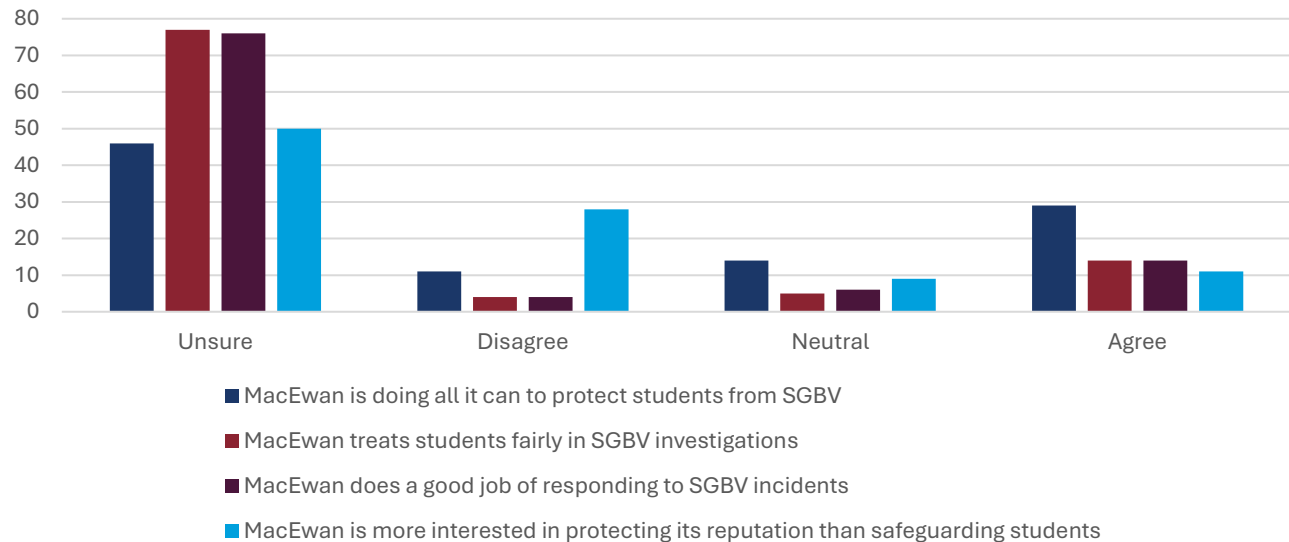
Student Perceptions of SGBV

Students reported that they are generally aware of the supports and resources available for SVGB on campus.

- 73% know where to go to file a report of sexual violence.
- 54% are aware of OSVPER.
- 53% know where to go to access support for SGBV from MacEwan University.

However, the majority of students were unable to say whether MacEwan’s overall approach to SGBV is fair, proactive, and effective.

Students are unsure about MacEwan’s institutional approach to SGBV



Students’ top suggestions for addressing SGBV at MacEwan were to:

- increase awareness/provide more training/resources.
- increase support for victims including underrepresented students.
- have better enforcement/those doing harm are held accountable.
- provide judgement-free mentors/supports.
- have mandatory prevention training program/consent training.

Student Perception Trends

Between 2019* and 2023, students were less likely to agree with statements that reflect myths or misconceptions about sexual assault including agreeing that:

- “sexual assault is actually consensual sex that is regretted afterwards” (11% vs 6%).
- “sexual assault happens because one person did not realize the other was not consenting” (19% vs 12%).
- “people who are sexually assaulted while high or drunk are somewhat responsible” (13% vs 6%).

Other perceptions did not change over time including:

- “sexual assault is often committed by someone the person knows” (66% vs 69%). Students identifying as gender diverse, 2SLGBTQ+ or white were most likely to agree with this statement. Straight students, men, and racialized students were least likely to agree.
- “false reports of sexual assault are rare” (39% vs 45%). Students identifying as 2SLGBTQ+ or gender diverse were significantly more likely to agree with this statement than other demographic groups.

Students’ perceptions of sexual harassment also changed over time:

- more students agreed that “some forms of SGBV such as sexual harassment are tolerated at MacEwan” (5% vs 20%). This result may be due to greater awareness of sexual harassment.
- fewer students agreed that “people are too easily offended by sexual comments” (20% vs 13%).

*2019 data was reported in *MacEwan University Sexual Violence Climate Survey 2020*.¹¹

Opportunities for Action

The data from the 2023 climate survey on SGBV has provided valuable information to inform OSVPER’s strategic approach to policies, programming, and services relating to sexual violence prevention and response. Based on these findings, we have highlighted the opportunities for action outlined below. Each action corresponds to one of OSVPER’s strategic goals for sexual violence prevention and education, outlined in the *Sexual Violence Prevention and Education Framework*.¹²

Strategic Goal #1: Foster a campus environment grounded in respect and consent, where the root causes of sexual violence are understood and each member of the campus community feels connected to the work of building a community free of sexual violence. (Culture of Consent & Support)

Potential Action	Rationale
<p>Create or enhance workshops, trainings, campaigns, events, and other awareness initiatives, such as Consent Action Week or Healthy Relationships Week, to include discussion of online stalking & harassment. Include information on where to access support.</p>	<p>Sexual harassment is the most commonly reported type of SGBV. Nearly half of all stalking and harassment takes place on social media, text message, or online. Given this, there is an opportunity to both educate about this type of SGBV and to offer support to those experiencing it.</p>
<p>Create or enhance specific messaging and awareness initiatives to counteract perceptions of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • false reports of sexual assaults as common • stranger sexual assault as common 	<p>While it is well established that false reports of sexual assault are rare, 55% of students disagree or are unsure about this. 31% of students disagree or are unsure if sexual assault is often committed by someone the survivor knows. In contrast, only 14% of survivors reported the person causing harm was someone they did not know. These significant perceptions have not changed since 2019. This provides an opportunity to target messaging to counteract inaccurate narratives in media and entertainment.</p>
<p>Create or enhance initiatives to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • promote OSVPER and its services • ensure students are aware of supports available to them <p>Consider search engine optimization for common terms on the MacEwan website.</p>	<p>Many students are impacted by SGBV but nearly all do not disclose to MacEwan. While it is acknowledged that students may chose not to disclose to MacEwan for several reasons, it is important that they are aware of the services and supports available to them. The survey data isn’t clear on whether students are aware of services and are choosing not to access them or they are unable to access services because they are not aware of them. However, it suggests students are not aware of all services. For example, only about half of students know about OSVPER or know where to access support services for SGBV. Another example, when “harassment” is searched on the MacEwan website, OSVPER is the last link on the page. Students may not be able to access the information they need when they are looking for it.</p>

Opportunities

Strategic Goal #2: Provide opportunities for students, staff and faculty to develop skills to promote healthy, respectful, and caring relationships. (Healthy Norms and Relationships)

Potential Action	Rationale
Partner with other services on campus to promote programming, resources, and engagement, such as Sex, Alcohol & Harm Reduction, on alcohol and drug harm reduction strategies.	Alcohol and drug use were very common for both survivors of sexual assault and the people causing harm. Increasing the use of harm reduction strategies when taking alcohol and drugs may help reduce the occurrence of sexual assault.
Enhance existing programs such as Bringing in the Bystander to include discussions of situations where alcohol and other drugs are being consumed	50% of students who witness SGBV would like to help stop it. However, a significant percentage do not get involved. Students are interested in more training and information on how to intervene as a bystander. There is an opportunity to provide information and supports to students to increase bystander interventions.

Strategic Goal #3: Equip the campus community with skills for responding to sexual violence and supporting survivors. (Response and Support Skills)

Potential Action	Rationale
Enhance trainings, resources, and initiatives for target MacEwan counsellors, instructors & professors, such as Responding to Disclosures of Sexual Violence at MacEwan and the Sexual Violence Support Guide Program, to ensure they address: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Trauma-informed responses to disclosures Providing accurate and timely information about resources and supports to survivors Explore the revision of the MacEwan Sexual Violence policy and procedures to address concerns around communication and trauma-informed handling of complaints, and connection to resources and supports.	Of those who disclosed to MacEwan, 47% told a counsellor and 25% told an instructor, professor or other staff member. However, less than half felt they were allowed a say in how the situation was handled, felt they had adequate information on available supports, felt their academic accommodation needs were met, were kept up to date on how their situation was being handled, and felt they did not have to repeatedly retell their story. This suggests there is opportunity to support those most likely to receive disclosures with additional education, resources, policy, and procedures.
Create or enhance trainings, resources, and initiatives which provide students the skills to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Respond to disclosures Provide accurate and timely information about resources and supports available to survivors 	78% of students say they would reach out to someone in their personal life if they experienced SGBV. So, students are a key audience for skill development in responding to disclosures. Further, students are interested in this topic - 79% of students want specific training and information on how to respond to a disclosure.
Undertake initiatives to build trust with 2SLGBTQ+ campus communities and enhance the visibility of OSVPER. Consider targeted or enhanced programming to reach this community.	2SLGBTQ+ students were twice as likely as straight students to think the available resources would not give them the help they needed.

Opportunities

Strategic Goal #4: Promote accountability and responsibility across the university in preventing and addressing sexual violence. (Community Accountability)

Potential Action

Promote and incentivize workshops, trainings, resources, and initiatives such as Bringing in the Bystander which provide students the skills to intervene as a bystander.

Rationale

50% of students who witness SGBV would like to help stop it. However, a significant percentage do not get involved. Additionally, students are interested in this topic - 79% of students would like more training and information on how to intervene as a bystander. There is an opportunity to provide information and supports to students to increase bystander interventions.

References

1. Khan, F., Rowe, C. J., and Bidgood, R. (2019). *Courage to Act: Developing a National Framework to Address and Prevent Gender-Based Violence at Post-Secondary Institutions in Canada*. Toronto, ON: Possibility Seeds.
2. MacEwan University. (2020). *Building Momentum – Operational Plan 2020/21-2025/26: Sexual Violence Prevention, Education & Response Program*. Edmonton, AB: MacEwan University.
3. Sexual Violence Prevention and Education Committee. (2021). *Sexual Violence Prevention and Education Framework*. Edmonton, AB: MacEwan University.
4. MacEwan University. (n.d.) *Teaching Greatness: Strategic Vision 2030*. Edmonton, AB: MacEwan University.
5. Sexual Violence Prevention and Education Committee. (2020). *MacEwan University Sexual Violence Climate Survey 2020*. Edmonton, AB: MacEwan University.
6. Leger. (2023). *Alberta Post-Secondary Student Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Survey 2023: MacEwan University*. Edmonton, AB: Leger.
7. Harris, Jessica C. (2020). *Women of Color Undergraduate Students' Experiences with Campus Sexual Assault: An Intersectional Analysis*. *The Review of Higher Education*, 44(1), 1-30. <https://doi.org/10.1353/rhe.2020.0033>.
8. Howard, R. M., Potter, S. J., Guedj, C. E., & Moynihan, M. M. (2018). *Sexual Violence Victimization Among Community College Students*. *Journal of American College Health*, 67(7), 674–687. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07448481.2018.1500474>
9. Silvera, S. A. N., Goldfarb, E., Birnbaum, A. S., Kaplan, A., Bavaro, J., Guzman, M., & Lieberman, L. (2022). *Racial and Ethnic Differences in Perceptions of Campus Climate Related to Sexual Violence*. *Journal of American College Health*, 72(2), 645–653. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07448481.2022.2054277>
10. Vespi, E. (2024). *Technical Report: MacEwan University Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Climate Survey 2023*. Edmonton, AB: Hatch Collaborative.
11. Sexual Violence Prevention and Education Committee. (2020). *MacEwan University Sexual Violence Climate Survey 2020*. Edmonton, AB: MacEwan University.
12. Sexual Violence Prevention and Education Committee. (2021). *Sexual Violence Prevention and Education Framework*. Edmonton, AB: MacEwan University.

MacEwan University Sexual and Gender-Based Violence
Climate Survey 2023: Student Perceptions and Experiences