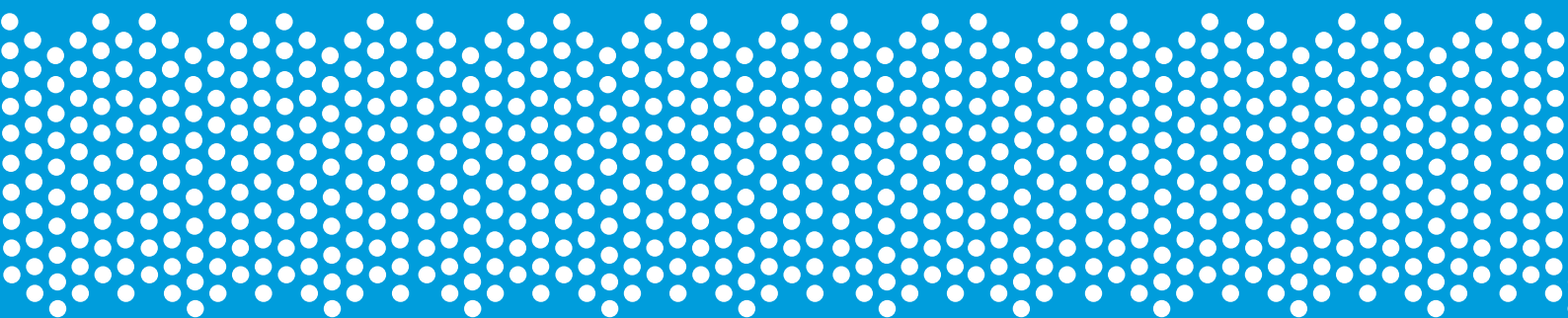




# GUIDANCE NOTE

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## on campus violence prevention and response



Planet 50-50 by 2030  
Step It Up for Gender Equality



# GUIDANCE NOTE ON CAMPUS VIOLENCE PREVENTION AND RESPONSE



**ENDING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN SECTION**  
**UN WOMEN**

New York, December 2018



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The development of this Guidance Note would not have been possible without:

- The courage of the many women and girls subjected to violence who have spoken out about their experiences.
- Activists, especially from women's organizations across the globe, who have advocated for: appropriate service provision and support for women subjected to violence, particularly in university settings; legislative and administrative reforms holding perpetrators of violence to account; and interventions that prevent violence against women.
- The efforts of universities already working towards ending violence against women through policy and programmes on and around university campuses.
- The commitment of UN Women—in particular, country offices in Bangladesh, Colombia, Mexico, Mozambique, the Philippines and Viet Nam—and the Ending Violence Against Women (EVAW) section in headquarters, including Kalliope Mingeirou, Juncal Plazaola-Castano and Alethia Jimenez Garcia for coordinating and contributing to the development of this document. Additional members of the EVAW section who contributed expertise include: Philippe Lust-Bianchi, Laura Capobianco, Dina Deligiorgis, Caroline Meenagh, and Noha Zaghloul as well as our consultants and interns: Robyn Yaker, Dania Al Rashed Al Humaid, Sarah Fraser, Emma Goldberg, Gulika Reddy, and Briana Yerbury for their research and dedication in finalizing the document.
- Input from multiple professionals in the academic field: Nina Cummings, Sexual Assault Prevention Coordinator, Cornell University; Judith Greiman, Chief Deputy to the President, Senior Vice President for Government and Community Relations, Stony Brook University; Marjolie Leonard, Director of Title IX Stony Brook University; Sheetal Ranjan, Associate Professor Department of Sociology and Criminal Justice, William Paterson University, Grant Director, Campus Violence Prevention Programme; Meredith Smith, Assistant Provost for Title IX and Clery Compliance Office of Academic Affairs and Provost of Tulane University; and Chelsea Ullman, Policy Associate George Washington University, Global Women's Institute.
- The integral task of reviewing the guidance note as conducted by the following: Carla Moore, Lecturer in Gender and Development Studies, University of the West Indies; Dr. Helen Mott, Consultant in Women's Rights and the Prevention of Sexual Harassment and Sexual Violence; Elizabeth Sheehy, Law Professor at the University of Ottawa; and Dr. Jennifer A. Wagman, Assistant Professor, the University of California.

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

Despite progress by countries regarding commitments and efforts to end all forms of violence against women (VAW), one in three women worldwide reports having experienced physical and/or sexual violence at least once in her lifetime, mostly by an intimate partner (WHO and others, 2013). Advances have been made in legislation and policies, as well as in improving services for survivors. There has also been an increasing focus on prevention and the need to address the root causes of the problem (CSW 57, 2013). The most significant challenge, however, remains the persistence of attitudes, norms and behaviours that perpetuate negative stereotypes and tolerance regarding VAW.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development commits to the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls (Goal 5) including through ending all forms of violence against all women and girls (Target 5.2), making cities and human settlements safe (Goal 11) including through safe, inclusive and accessible public spaces for women and girls (Target 11.7), and creating peaceful and inclusive societies (Goal 16) (United Nations General Assembly, 2015). This agenda recognizes that violence affects women and girls of all ages in both private and public spheres. The risks and types of violence women and girls experience change over the course of their lifetimes as their relationships and environments likewise change. University<sup>1</sup> campuses create a unique set of risks for women including exposure to, and experience of, violence such as sexual assault, stalking, intimate partner violence/dating violence, and sexual harassment. As a result, specific strategies are required to address VAW, including holding perpetrators accountable.

The elimination of all forms of violence against women is a core part of UN Women's mandate to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of women. In line with the organization's Strategic Plan 2018-2021, which includes one priority area to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls, UN Women is committed to working with universities and other partners to address VAW and promote gender equality on and around university campuses around the

globe, including through specific initiatives such as the HeForShe IMPACT 10x10x10 Initiative.<sup>2</sup>

Although VAW on university campuses has long been both severe and widespread, it has recently begun to attract increased attention in the media and among university personnel and students. This has spurred specific initiatives to understand and address the problem of violence within the university context. Such initiatives are crucial because universities can act as key institutions to eliminate and prevent violence against women, establishing norms that can yield broader societal influence.

Research and anecdotal evidence indicate that VAW is a severe problem at universities globally. Experts believe that most incidents go unreported. The research evidence is compelling and alarming:

- A 2014 U.S. Department of Justice report, using data from 1995-2013, estimated that 80% of people raped or sexually assaulted on college campuses do not report the incident(s) to police (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2014).
- 23% of female undergraduate university students reported having experienced sexual assault or sexual misconduct in a survey across 27 universities in the United States in 2015. Rates of reporting to campus officials, law enforcement or others ranged from 5% to 28%, depending on the specific type of behaviour (Cantor and others, 2015).
- An average of 7.4% of undergraduate female students across nine campuses in the United States experienced physical abuse or sexual assault by an intimate

<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of this paper, the word “university” refers to an institution of higher learning that offers an advanced degree beyond secondary education including technical colleges. University students are most commonly 18 years of age or older—the legal age of adulthood in most contexts. The word “university” is used here interchangeably with other terms that describe the same institution, such as “college” (in the United States).

<sup>2</sup> For more information about the HeForShe IMPACT 10x10x10 Initiative, see <http://www.heforshe.org/en/impact>.

partner during the 2014/2015 academic year alone (Krebs and others, 2016).

- 76% of female university students across eight universities in Bangladesh reported incidents of sexual harassment (UN Women, 2013).
- A national survey showed that 51% of students in Australia faced sexual harassment at least once in 2016 and 6.9% of students faced sexual assault at least once in 2015 or 2016 (ABC News, 2017).
- 62% of students have witnessed or experienced some form of gender-based violence on campus in Spain (Valls and others, 2016).
- 70% of women at Cairo University experienced sexual harassment in 2015 (Ali and Abdunnasser, 2015).

The negative effects of VAW—on the physical, mental, and emotional health of survivors—are well known.<sup>3</sup> In a university campus setting, these consequences are compounded by the unique conditions of campus life.

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3 There can be multiple negative effects due to VAW beyond the initial physical injury including ongoing poor physical and mental health and various stress-related disorders. For instance, VAW can lead to drug and alcohol abuse, eating and sleep disorders, physical inactivity, poor self-esteem, post-traumatic stress disorder, smoking, unsafe sexual behaviour, self-harm and even suicide. Furthermore, violence during pregnancy has been associated with miscarriage, late entry into prenatal care, stillbirth, premature labour and birth, fetal injury, and low birth weight or small-for-gestational-age infants. See World Health Organization, Pan American Health Organization (2012), Understanding and Addressing Violence Against Women, [http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/77432/WHO\\_RHR\\_12.36\\_eng.pdf?sequence=1](http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/77432/WHO_RHR_12.36_eng.pdf?sequence=1)

Survivors may face challenges related to living in proximity to perpetrators, sharing classes or other spaces, diminished academic performance, the financial strains of having to take school leave, difficulty maintaining anonymity and social functioning around campus, alcohol abuse, and more (United States Department of Justice, 2014). Beyond the impact on survivors, such violence also has deleterious impacts on the university and campus community at large. Inadequate prevention and responses to such violence perpetuate the problem, putting other students at risk. Further, insufficient response conveys the message that such violence is tolerated within the institution and that the institution fails to meet its obligations and academic purpose. Inaction also fuels a more general tolerance of VAW. **In enabling women to learn, universities have an obligation to keep them safe and to help them have a life free from violence.**

A key principle underlying this guidance note is that while national legislation may fall short of addressing VAW, university administrators can still affirm their public commitment to addressing this human rights violation through policies and processes that ensure all students, especially women and girls, can learn and live in a safe campus environment. As national legal and policy frameworks evolve to address the issue of campus VAW, students, staff, and faculty need to play active roles in holding university administrators accountable for addressing such violence within a broader strategy for promoting gender equality and women's empowerment.

## 2. PURPOSE AND SCOPE

This guidance note offers practical direction for addressing VAW on university campuses and presents a series of actions that universities can take to: (1) ensure an enabling institutional environment to prevent and respond to VAW; (2) address the needs of survivors through the provision of adequate services; and (3) prevent violence at multiple levels.

The note is intended to support universities and university administrators, UN staff working with universities in this area, civil society partners, students and other relevant stakeholders—particularly in middle- and low-income countries where there are few resources for addressing VAW. UN Women recognizes that addressing violence on campuses requires comprehensive efforts embedded within larger national, local and community strategies to address VAW and achieve gender equality. This guidance note, therefore, represents only part of a larger strategy required to address VAW. As universities vary greatly, both across and within countries, a one-size-fits-all approach is not feasible. This guidance note highlights key principles and actions that are expected to apply across contexts, while the specifics of their implementation require careful consideration, dialogue and planning by individual institutions and users.

The note focuses on sexual harassment and assault, intimate partner violence/dating violence and stalking. The principles and actions presented in the following sections can also apply to violence against female faculty and staff, but the current paper focuses on violence against female students. Universities should adopt targeted measures to address the needs of specific groups, including those most vulnerable and at risk (e.g. students with disabilities, migrants, and those from ethnic minorities, lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transgender, intersex, and queer (LGBTIQ) individuals). Universities should adopt an intersectional approach to addressing VAW on campuses and understand how

groups, more detailed analysis regarding interventions is beyond the scope of the current document. For further information on intersectional approaches to gender equality and ending violence against women (EVAW), consult UN Women's forthcoming [brief on "Leaving No One Behind"](#).

It is essential that students recognize their right to learn and live in safe and empowering environments. When universities fail to adequately respond to VAW, other stakeholders—including faculty, university staff, parents and donors to the university, community groups, and women's rights organizations—must engage with students and survivors to support their advocacy and connect them with external services and resources. Moreover, it is critical that national governments develop and implement legislation that mandates adequate university responses to VAW to ensure that students have the opportunity to learn and live safely.

The methodology for the development of this note included a desk review, technical inputs from UN Women staff in headquarters and the field, select interviews with representatives from universities in the United States, as well as inputs and reviews from experts working on VAW in universities in Canada, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Jamaica. Finally, while this guidance note aims to be relevant to university campuses across the globe, it acknowledges that given different geographic and cultural contexts, audiences will be at significantly different stages and capacities

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