

Policy Sprint

Human Rights



Policy on Sexual Violence and Sexual Harassment

The University of Toronto's (UofT) sexual violence and sexual harassment policy was approved December 12 2019 and implemented on January 1 2020. The policy is up for review this year. The policy is broken down into multiple subsections that explain privacy and confidentiality rules, how to disclose or report and who to go to when sexual violence/sexual harassment has occurred. There have been critiques of this policy, in particular about the substantial role that policing (campus/municipal) has in the policy.

Prompt

Part of clause 43 in the University of Toronto's Policy on Sexual Violence and Sexual Harassment states that "In an emergency, Campus Police (now known as Campus Safety) or 911 should be the first point of contact" (Governing Council, 2019). However, there has been a long history of not trusting the police with sexual violence allegations, especially amongst marginalized groups who are disproportionately affected by sexual violence (Xing, 2019). Construct a policy brief critiquing the existing policy, and propose alternatives to police in situations of sexual violence and sexual harassment.

Note: The other option that the policy presents is to access assistance at UofT's Sexual Violence Prevention and Support Centre (SVPSC) (Governing Council, 2019, clause 42). However, there are complaints from students that the centre is "inaccessible, confusing, and lacks transparency" (Anielska, 2021).

Executive Summary

It is important for UofT to have a sexual violence and sexual harassment policy in place. However, the policy as it is written right now heavily relies on police (campus/municipal) involvement. Marginalized people are disproportionately affected by sexual violence/harassment and many marginalized people already do not trust the police. Combined with the way that some police have handled sexual violence allegations in the past, people in the university community may not feel safe going to the police in the case of an emergency. While going to the police in a situation of sexual violence is an option for members of the community, UofT must recognize that not all students may feel safe doing so. The University must create alternative ways for people seeking help in cases of sexual violence/harassment that do not only or at all involve the police.

Introduction

Sexual violence and sexual harassment within University communities has been a topic of immense scrutiny lately. Most Universities have a Policy about this issue. Uoft's most recent Sexual Violence and Sexual Harassment Policy was approved on December 12 2019 and implemented on January 1 2020. Every three years, members of the University community including students, staff and faculty will be consulted and the University will amend the Policy as the Governing Council sees appropriate (clause 88). As it has been three years, the Policy is up for review very soon.