



**Letter to the Editor – Ottawa Citizen
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OCTEVAW reacts to Carleton's response regarding sexual assault on campus

The Ottawa Coalition to End Violence Against Women (OCTEVAW) is shocked that Carleton University would perpetuate victim-blaming.

The idea that a woman who has experienced an assault of any kind should have to have had a “proper lookout” for her own safety is infuriating. Are women to assume that everywhere they go they are at risk for violence? This response reinforces the myth that women are entirely or partially responsible for assaults perpetrated against them.

It is not a far-fetched claim to say that violence against women is a systemic problem that is engrained in many aspects of our society and is often allowed to continue unchallenged.

This example just proves it.

“We keep reiterating the same messages over and over,” states Erin Williams the Executive Director of OCTEVAW. “When another type of crime occurs, do we suggest that somehow the victim could have prevented it? It's the responsibility of our entire community to promote women's equality and to say, ‘We will not accept violence.’ Blaming and attempting to discredit women who are survivors of violence are just not acceptable.”

What is acceptable is holding aggressors accountable for violence and undertaking meaningful preventative measures. Such measures can include working with men to take a stand against violence and to talk to other men about rethinking their learned attitudes and behaviours.

Leaders in our community, like academic institutions, should be the first to set straight the stereotypes often associated with sexual violence. Carleton itself spent considerable amounts of money in the last two years to increase security measures. However, now blaming the student can only harm her and does not absolve them from their responsibility. All students have a right to a school free from violence.

We are shocked because we would have expected Carleton to issue a more supportive response and many in the Ottawa community would agree with us.

OCTEVAW is a coalition of organizations and individuals dedicated to ending violence against women and, through leadership, education, advocacy and political action, to promoting a coordinated response to women and their children who have experienced abuse. **For more information please visit www.octevaw-cocvff.ca**

This letter was written in consultation with the Sexual Assault Network (SAN).