

**THE WORKERS' PARTY YOUTH WING  
MAKE YOUR VOICE HEARD ESSAY COMPETITION 2020**

**2<sup>nd</sup> Prize**

**SEXUAL MISCONDUCT IN LOCAL UNIVERSITIES: NIPPING IT IN THE BUD  
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*Abstract:*

*This paper discusses the rise in sexual misconduct cases in Singapore's local universities. It includes the long-term effects that victims endure as a result of such misconduct and the factors that lead offenders to commit such acts. More importantly, this paper aims to tackle this issue head-on with a proposed change and modification to the current Sex Education Programme carried out in secondary schools. This change would allow for comprehensive education, open discussion, and greater awareness on sexual abuse that acts as a deterrent against sexual offences.*

**Introduction**

Based on a report done in 2019 by **TODAY Singapore**, there have been **56 cases of sexual misconduct** recorded over the span of three years, involving students from the six local autonomous universities [1].

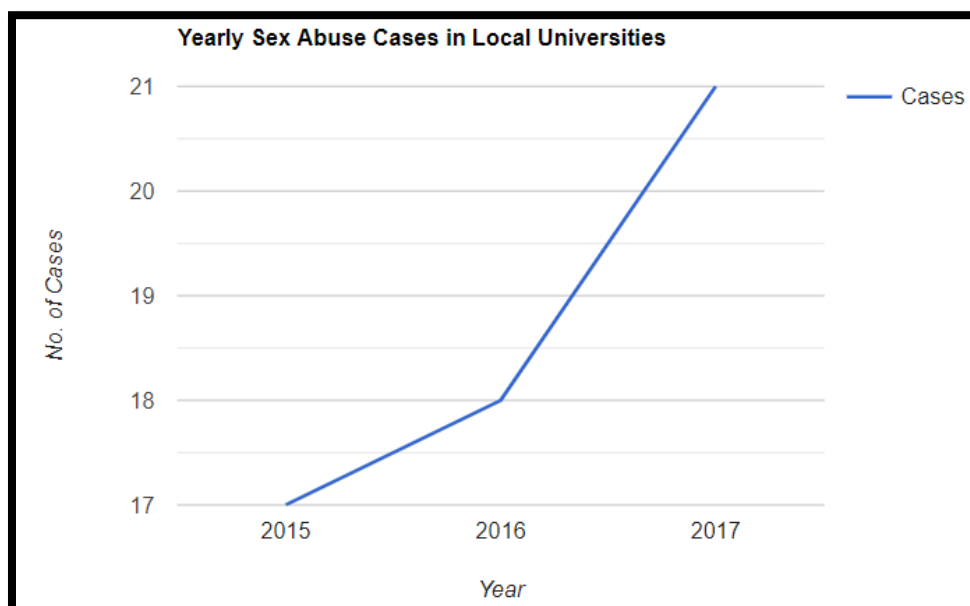


Figure 1.

As seen in the graph above, there is a steady increase in the number of sexual abuse cases, year after year. While the increase is not drastic, it is concerning that there is no drop in the number of cases either.

In an article by the **Straits Times**, Nominated MP Ms Yip Pin Xiu noted that while the autonomous universities registered 56 reports of sexual misconduct over the academic years of 2015 to 2017 as mentioned previously, many more of such cases could have gone unreported due to the stigma surrounding sexual violence [2].

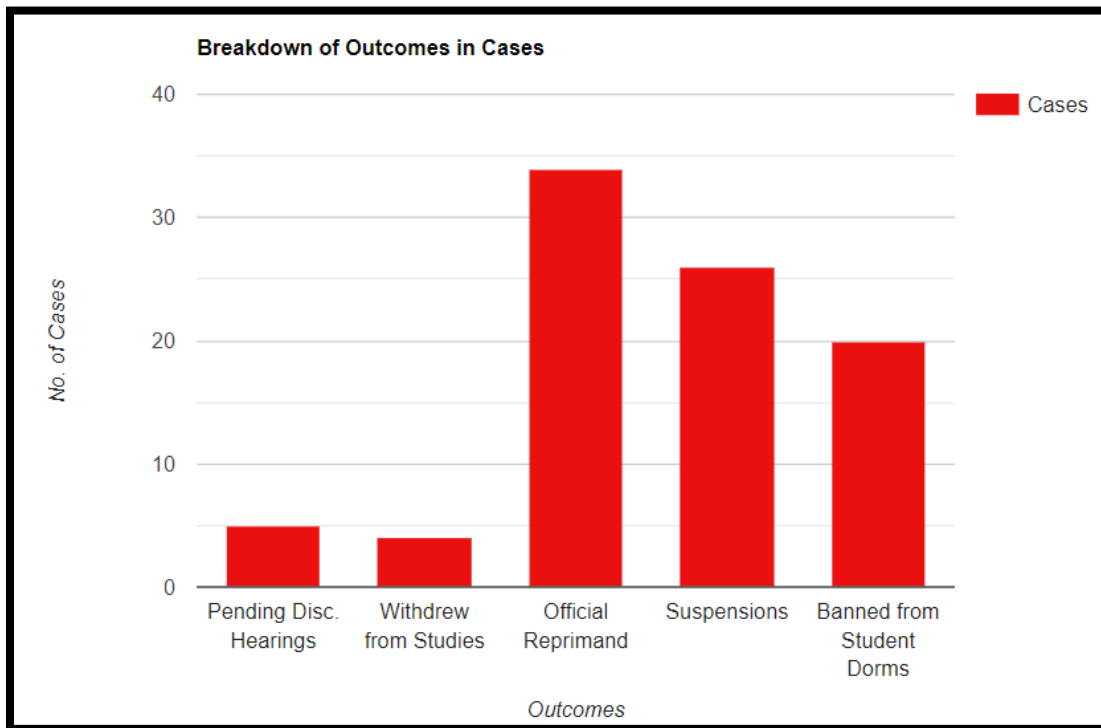


Figure 2.

Based on the chart above, as reported by **TODAY**, then-Education Minister, Mr. Ong Ye Kung shared in Parliament that, of the 56 cases; five were pending disciplinary hearings (as of 6 May 2019) while four students withdrew from universities before punishments were meted out. For the remaining 47 incidents, 34 were issued official reprimands, 26 given suspensions of up to two academic terms, and 20 barred from entering students' dorms [1].

### Measures Taken So Far

That being said, in response, the autonomous universities have taken measures. **TODAY Singapore** reports that, when contacted by the newspaper, an NUS spokesperson described such measures as making it “*difficult for people to film*” from the exterior of cubicles. These measures include; electronic locks on restrooms in hostels, 300 cameras by end-May 2019 and 860 shower cubicles to have their gaps covered by the end of 2019. The shower cubicles will be covered with full-height doors. Aside from NUS, then-Second Minister for Education, Ms Indranee Rajah, indicated that the Singapore University of Social Sciences (SUSS), is working together

with the police to train its security personnel in the inspection of its toilet cubicles and ceilings for spy cameras [1].

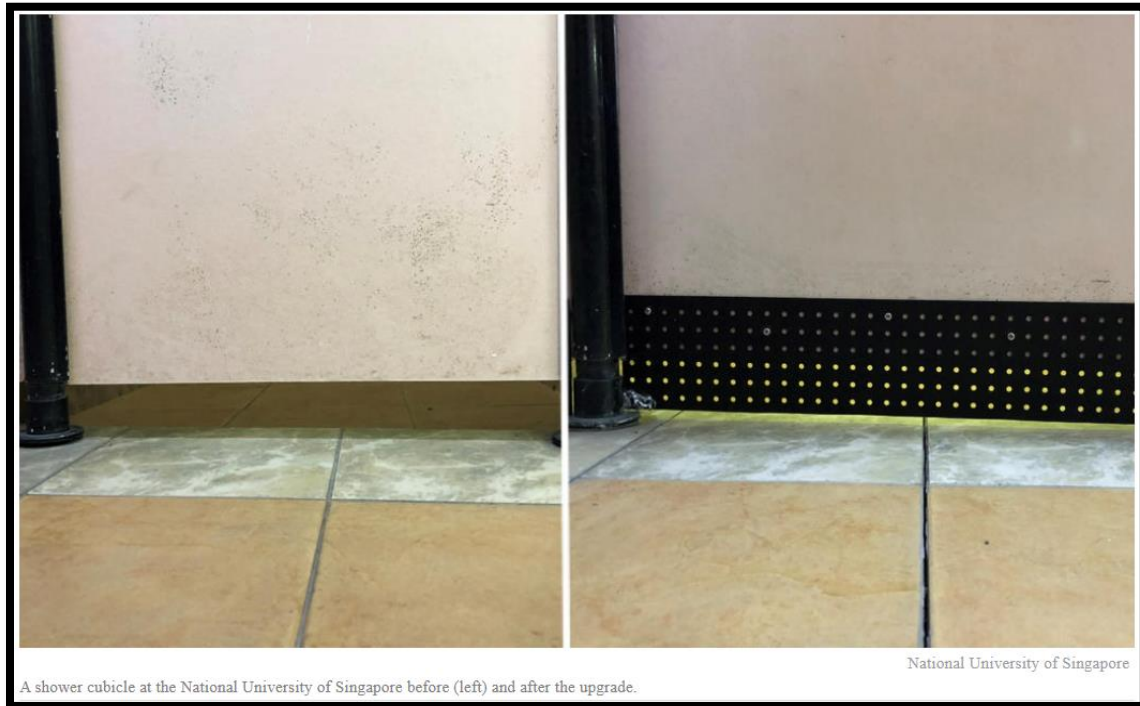


Figure 3.

Although these measures would successfully complicate any possible attempt to film, it does not deter students from committing such offences in the first place. Should a student be determined enough or have a strong desire to engage in such an act, he/she would find ways to circumvent the measures.

### **Mental Profiles: Victim vs Perpetrator**

In another article by the **Straits Times**, it is stated that NUS has launched a new unit recently which serves to provide emotional support for the victims of sexual misconduct [5]. This was a result of an incident whereby a female student from NUS, Ms Monica Baey, who was filmed while showering without her consent, had expressed despondency with how her case was dealt with by her institution.

Ms Baey, in her Instagram post [5], had mentioned 'I want my perpetrator to never hurt another person the way he hurt me. I want him to get better.' She also shared about how a fellow NUS male student who had committed an act similar to her offender, was simply kicked out of the venue. No further actions were taken against him, which unfortunately resulted in him molesting another female student in school. Ms Baey had felt the need to identify her perpetrator by his name in her initial social media post, in an attempt to dissuade him from hurting anyone else.

This is of concern as it suggests that there is a possibility of offenders reoffending, due to the inability to understand the victim's agony. They are also unable to recognise the maliciousness of their actions and why they feel the urge to continue committing such acts.

Victims of sexual assault such as Ms Baey, often feel a sense of shame, terror, and may even put the blame on themselves for the assault. As a result of the trauma experienced, these victims may develop conditions such as depression, anxiety or post-traumatic stress (PTSD). They have a constant fear of recurrence which could lead to struggles in forming a healthy relationship with the people around them. This is in addition to the physical injuries they may have sustained due to the aggressive nature of acts such as rape and molestation.

As mentioned previously, it seems that offenders fail to understand the nature of their actions. *The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders 5th Edition (DSM V)* defines the criteria for diagnosis for voyeuristic disorder. Firstly, it requires consistent tendencies of being sexually aroused upon watching a person disrobe or engage in sexual activity. Secondly, it requires acting on such desires on a person without consent or the inability to proceed with daily routines without resolving the sexual urges. Lastly, it requires the individual to be at least 18 years of age [6].

Whilst voyeurism in the form of "upskirt" or "shower" videos does not physically harm victims, this is a worrying trend. A 2016 study done by the Johns Hopkins University uncovered that a significant portion of sex offenders reported a history of voyeurism [6]. This suggests that if the problem is not resolved, we could see increased cases of sexual abuse in our universities, as seen in figure 1 [1].

## **Proposal**

What we propose, is to introduce the concept of 'sexual consent' on a secondary school level, as opposed to university [1]. This could be incorporated into Sexual Education Programmes (SEP) conducted by schools, in addition to 'abstinence.' Often, the youth start to experience sexual urges around the ages of 12-13 [7], therefore, it would be prudent for them to be introduced to this concept then.

The proposed new SEP curriculum will firstly; address the struggles that victims of sexual abuse face such as depression, PTSD, and mistrust of others resulting from constant fear of recurrence. Knowing how much of an impact such acts have on the victims' lives, may push the students to think twice before offending.

Secondly, it needs to be made clear to students that it is not shameful, but rather encouraged for them to seek professional help if they experience voyeuristic urges, given the mental nature of the disorder. The professional help can be afforded to students by a school counsellor, or an easily contactable hotline, modelled on what the Singapore Armed Forces Counselling Centre provides. It should be known to the students that the aforementioned bodies would ensure that the students' identities remain anonymous, so as to safeguard their image. This would motivate the students further to come forward upon encountering such urges.

Lastly, students need to be aware of the legal repercussions of sexual misconduct. To that end, included in the revised SEP will be a talk to be conducted by officers of the Singapore Police Force on previous examples and their legal outcomes, similar to drug abuse talks that Central Narcotics Bureau officers conduct in schools.

Ultimately, while rehabilitation is an essential part of reformation, we believe that education is the key to nipping this issue in the bud. By having our youths educated on sexual abuse and consent at an earlier and more impressionable age, it would be more reinforcing than having such

concepts taught late on a tertiary-level [1]. This targets the root cause of the rise in cases of voyeurism and sexual misconduct in our universities, and partly in society as well. As the saying goes, prevention is better than cure, and we believe education can help us achieve this.

## References

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