

NUS unit to help victims of sexual misconduct

Prof Sandy Lim, who heads new unit, outlines approach to support students who need help

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Victims of sexual misconduct in the National University of Singapore (NUS) can now seek care and support from a Victim Care Unit.

NUS provost Ho Teck Hua announced the launch of the new unit, the first of its kind in a local university, in an internal circular to students yesterday.

It will provide a central point of contact as well as confidential and professional care to victims of sexual misconduct.

The unit is headed by Associate Professor Sandy Lim of NUS Business School.

As a former field psychologist at the Ministry of Defence, Prof Lim has experience providing psychological support to agencies during crises and national emergencies.

She has also done research in the area of disrespectful or uncivil behaviour, including sexual misconduct.

The unit was set up as part of the university's response to candid discussions and feedback on how sexual misconduct should be handled in institutions of higher learning.

The issue was sparked by a female student who expressed her unhappiness on social media in April with how NUS dealt with her complaint of being filmed by a fellow student while showering at Eusoff Hall.

The unit has five care officers who will work with students who seek help, as well as administrative and research staff.

Victims can contact the unit via a 24-hour hotline, a confidential online contact form or e-mail.

The team will start by working on a survey of the student population to better understand how prevalent sexual misconduct is at NUS and to find



Associate Professor Sandy Lim will head NUS' new Victim Care Unit.

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out how often cases go unreported.

Prof Lim said in an article posted on the NUS website yesterday: "Relying on just statistics from campus security or the police is usually not very accurate, as these are just the reported cases."

"We are here to give (victims) a helping hand so that they have someone to talk to in a safe environment, and to help them along in the recovery process."

IMPACT

She told *The New Paper* in an e-mail interview last night that supporting victims of sexual harassment or assault requires a victim-centred and trauma-informed approach.

"Though some forms of sexual misconduct such as voyeurism might not seem as serious as those involving physical sexual assaults, the adverse impact on those affected by such incidents can be equally distressing," she said.

"My experience with trauma care started early in my career, when I was activated to provide psychological first aid to individuals who lost their loved ones in the SilkAir Flight 185 crash (into the Musi River near Palembang, Indonesia, in 1997)."

Prof Lim added that being exposed to different types of trauma work has given her a deep understanding of the effects of traumatic experiences on individuals, both young and old.

"I hope to apply what I have

learnt from my ground experience and field research to the services we provide in the NUS Victim Care Unit so that we can administer care that is professional and evidence-based."

Aware's executive director Corinna Lim said: "We are glad to hear that (the unit) seems to have been built around values that we practise at our own Sexual Assault Care Centre – respect, empathy, choice."

"More than ever before, sexual assault and harassment on campus is being discussed, and we are glad to see that substantial institutional changes are taking place to pave the way to safer campuses."

"And we hope that through the Victim Care Unit, more survivors get the necessary support that they deserve."

Students contacted by TNP had mixed reactions to the unit.

Miss Shannen Ng, 19, a second-year business student, said: "I guess it is a good idea. Some aspects like the 24-hour hotline could be useful, but it has just started, so I can't really judge (if it will be effective)."

Other students also reserved judgment on the unit's effectiveness.

Associate Professor Jason Tan of the National Institute of Education said while the unit is an excellent move, it is also vital to focus on prevention by ensuring students understand what sexual misconduct is and how to identify if they are victims.

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