Two assaults at York end violent week at five Ontario universities

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TORONTO (CUP)—In the first week of Classes, there have been eight sexual assaults at five university campuses across Ontario.

The first occurred on 1 September at Carleton University in Ottawa, leaving one woman in hospital with a broken jaw and a dislocated shoulder. On 3 September, two were separate attacks at Laurentian University in Sudbury, where women were attacked on a number of campus areas.

The following evening in Waterloo at Wilfrid Laurier University, a woman was sexually assaulted while dancing at a frosh party. Also on 4 September, a young woman was sexually assaulted when two students from the University of Ottawa while on a trip to neighbouring Gatineau.

Then, on 7 September, two students at York University were sexually assaulted last week. Police are looking for two men in their 20s.

Two students have also been arrested in relation to the attack in Gatineau, all of the other assaults remain at large.

The perpetrator in the attack at Carleton University on 1 September may have been caught on camera, but cannot be identified without proper quality video surveillance.

"The video we have is [taken] from a great distance, so when we zoom in, it becomes grainy, and that doesn't help with identifying the person," explained Constable Isabella lemma, a spokesperson for the Ottawa Police. "This [video] gives us a location and a time," she said, "but it doesn't help with identifying the person."

Police are looking for anyone, regardless of their university, who may have been walking near or along the path where the attack occurred, as they believe it is a sexual assault.

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ALEX BILYK
York University Spokesman

Meanwhile, Carleton University has conducted special presentations to residence students to make the community more aware of safety procedures on campus, and officials are encouraging students from going out alone.

"I give the clear message here, really the beneficial one, is to give a warning to students to be on the lookout, to watch out for their safety," billy said. "A lot of them are leaving home for the first time, being away from home for the first time, and they better understand that their environment has changed.

Ashley McPherson, a five-year English student at York and a resident of the area where the incident took place, said the incident made her and her roommate look at their safety precautions more closely, and prompted them to start locking their rooms doors at night.

"During fresh week, you hear, 'Oh just leave your door open, people just won't walk in to say, 'Hey you think, 'OK, I'll leave my door open, and people will come by and introduce themselves, maybe they should tell people after a certain amount of time, 'Shot your door, and lock it," McPherson said.

Police are still uncertain how the two attackers at York got into the residence, which requires a swipe card to open the front door. However, McPherson said that students often hold the open for others, making it easy for an outsider to get in.

Detective Christine Long of the Toronto Police Service Crimes Unit, who is investigating the assaults at York, said that while the eight across the province are isolated, she believes there is a higher risk of assault at university campuses because people are not familiar with the area.

"They are at higher risk. It’s a different environment than a city, which is a blend of both community and business, whereas a university is kind of like a big house that teaches," she explained.

"I guess the clear message here is that everyone should be safe and not allowing an opportunity for an attack.

"Just common sense needs to be followed (if you have means, money, and opportunity—so don’t create an opportunity for anybody)." Long said.

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