

Module 8

Gender Violence and Sexual Harassment



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Expected Outcomes

1. Staff and students sensitized about gender violence and sexual harassment in institutions of higher education and equipped with the skills necessary for reducing and eradicating gender violence and sexual harassment.
2. Staff and students educated about the negative effects of sexual harassment and gender violence on teaching and learning in institutions of higher education.
3. Institutions motivated to conduct research, teaching and training on gender violence and sexual harassment.
4. Management of staff and students better equipped to handle issues of gender violence and sexual harassment.
5. Staff and students empowered to resist, report and facilitate the sanctioning of staff and students who are responsible for sexual harassment and gender violence.
6. Incorporating issues of gender violence and sexual harassment into institutional gender policies and programs.

Definition of Sexual Harassment

Gender-based violence is defined by the UN in the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women*, CEDAW as "...any act that is likely to or results in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats or acts of ...coercion, arbitrary deprivations of liberty... private or public... in the family, community." Included here are such actions as battery; rape; sexual abuse of children; dowry violence; genital mutilation and other traditional practices that are harmful to women; harassment and intimidation at work and in educational institutions; trafficking in women; forced prostitution and state-sanctioned violence against women.

Sexual harassment has been defined in terms of the subjective experience of the person targeted by the behaviour and by the degree to which the behaviour was unwelcome and unwanted by that person. It covers a broad spectrum of sexual violations and its usage may vary to include or exclude forms of violence such as rape and battery, which are usually recognized in many laws.

In academic contexts, gender violence takes specific forms, which affect men and women's struggles and chances for attaining academic qualifications and jobs. Cultural contexts flavour what is legitimately accepted to be gender violence and what is not. The definitions are based on varied cultural contexts and their resonance will vary according to the structures and cultural locations and practices of institutions.

What Types of Behaviour Exemplify “Harassment” and “Gender Violence” in Institutions of Higher Education?

- Demanding sex in exchange for good grades, a job or promotion to a higher grade.
- Sexual assault of students or staff during academic consultation.
- Sexual bullying by attacking the dress and commenting on the bodies of staff and students.
- Sexualizing the work or classroom environment by referring to students as 'wives', using specific students as examples on sexual issues, expressing wishes to perpetrate sexual acts on colleagues.
- Scratching students' or colleagues' palms, patting their bottoms or grazing their breasts in classrooms or corridors.
- Collective assaults on women staff or students, defacing election posters with sexual messages or humiliating students during induction, orientation or lectures with sexual talk or jokes.
- Placing sexually abusive messages, pictures and comments about students, staff and others without their consent through IT facilities within and outside the institution.
- Coercion of women to seek protection from male predation by cults, brotherhoods and other bodies on campuses.

These are some examples of gender violence and sexual harassment. They are not exhaustive and you might add on to this list using experiences from your institution.

Activity 8A

1. List examples of sexual harassment in your institution.
2. What are the present systems for reporting sexual harassment (a) of students by staff; (b) of staff by staff; (c) of staff by students? Are such reports frequently made? If not, what are the reasons for it?

Institutional Context

Institutions of higher education are grappling with issues of justice, fairness, gender equity and democracy. The education and training of students take place in multicultural and multi-ethnic environments where student from different social, economic, age, gender, class and religious backgrounds mix in pursuit of learning. The productivity and quality of teaching and learning in educational institutions is affected by the gender climate that is created in these institutions as all these diverse people interact frequently.

Predominantly, students in colleges and universities are between 18 and 25 years of age and are in their youth. This fact affects the expectations, knowledge, behaviours, attitudes, learning patterns, emotional and social intelligence of the students. Many students are raised in patriarchal cultures where their gender expectations may be in direct contradiction to that encouraged in colleges and universities. For example, in patriarchal societies, men may regard young women as 'prey' and the rituals of courtship may involve some coercion,

exclusion from social and political activities, disparaging of vocal or activist women on campuses and decrying the disciplining of violent staff and student men.

In addition, campuses tend to be male-dominated, creating male-tolerant cultures and environments, which sometimes tolerate, encourage and /or condone gender violence and sexual harassment. In turn, the male-dominated environments in higher education encourage transactional sex between dominant men and subordinate men and women, in the context of confusing and vague authority, transparency and accountability structures. In some cases, gender violence also undermines institutional authority and standing as when cults, gangs and other structures of organized gender violence paralyse institutional structures.

Institutions of higher education produce the most skilled and valued human resource power and this human resource base has to have value added to it not only in terms of technical or disciplinary competence but also in attitudes, values and behaviours. Students from higher education institutions graduate into higher positions of authority and leadership in various economic, social and political fields locally, regionally and internationally. However, the presence of sexual violence or harassment can only hinder or compromise women students' abilities rise to higher positions of authority or leadership, be it while they are in university or when they go into the workforce.

Sexual harassment and gender violence may also render institutions of higher education less attractive as workplaces for people, particularly women, who may feel unsafe and violated in these institutions. This perpetuates the skewed gender figures in many institutions of higher learning. Therefore, sensitizing all stakeholders to the consequences of gender violence is helpful for them in their everyday conduct and career choices, as well as in their personal attitudes and behaviours at work.

Economic problems also exert enormous pressures on students, making them violent or docile in the face of social challenges. In dual sex societies where men and women seldom mix outside the family or where students attend sex-segregated schools, gender violence and sexual harassment may occur when males meet women outside family structures. The pressure on men to succeed in terms of achieving a status of dominance, may present opportunities for men to prey on vulnerable women. Another trigger for this kind of behavior can arise from the alienation of male students who may be unable to afford to finance dates, outings and consumer goods for female students in their cohorts. This may foster destructive gender politics between young male students and older male staff, poisoning the gender climate for all players in educational institutions. Young male students may also be hostile to female staff.

In general, the gender climate in institutions of higher education is affected by the sexual interactions between all players, men and women in these institutions. Gender violence may accompany the academic competition for grades, for status, for promotion, for recognition and all these issues need to be addressed in all institutions since they constitute a state and unstated part of higher education politics.

Another reason adduced for gender violence is that it is a feature of societies which are in transition, that those that are have just had civil wars, apartheid, military rule, etc. In such societies, gender violence is not uncommon.

Framework for Fighting Gender Violence and Sexual Harassment

Ideally, gender violence and sexual harassment may be addressed as part of an institution's gender policy that protects men and women as workers, students and in any other function in institutions of higher education. It may be possible to develop a gender policy first, although this may be a time-consuming process. In such cases, it is possible to follow the steps outlined in the module for developing a gender policy. It is within this gender policy that a specific section on gender violence and sexual harassment will fit.

In some institutions, there might not be any gender policy and it might not be possible to develop and implement a fully-fledged one. In such instances, it might be necessary to use ordinances and regulations supporting the right to education, the right to access instruction, safe teaching and learning environments, academic and social support, safe work environments without any threat to physical, social and emotional integrity of the worker, etc. International Labour Organisation (ILO) conventions, national constitutions and codes from workplaces may be used in this context. It may also be necessary to develop a sexual harassment policy in the context of a general gender policy, which tackles workplace and classroom violence.

Image and Culture of Sexual Harassment

One of the problems encountered within institutions of higher education is the image amongst young, immature and frustrated male students of the sexual harasser as a “hero” who defies authority, and one of the ways in which he defies authority is through the disrespectful, and sometimes violent, treatment of women, whether these be fellow students or lecturers. This “macho” behaviour is fuelled by the fact that within these institutions, and indeed within the society as a whole, young males from poor urban backgrounds are not able to date fellow women students as they lack the economic wherewithal to compete with older, middle class, often married businessmen, who frequent the campuses and date young women students. This phenomenon known as the “sugar daddy” syndrome, results in young women students finding sexual partners from outside the campus who are able to fund them with both basic needs such as food as well as with luxuries. The percentage of young women who have “sugar daddies” is not known, but is estimated at almost half the women students in one focus group discussion with women students from the University of Zimbabwe. Student poverty, as a result of the introduction of Structural Adjustment Programme in the 1990s, which cut subsidies for food for tertiary students, is such that students from lower income families are not able to feed themselves whilst on campus. Unlike the situation in the United States where students easily find jobs to supplement their income, in most African countries, there are no such part-time jobs reserved for students. Quite a sizeable number of young women students now resort to going out with older wealthy men as one of the solutions to this challenge. Some women have two partners, an older “sugar daddy” who supplies their present needs; and a younger student who is reserved for marriage. One way of lowering the incidence of sex for survival by poor and vulnerable women is to create a system of part-time and holiday work for students to enable them to earn some money for their keep. This can be done through a partnership between the state, the higher education institution and donors for programs, which allow students to do social service work during their vacations in return for sufficient funds to pay for their food during the year. A return to greater state subsidy for student food

may also be advisable.

Young frustrated male students may target women students as a whole with indiscriminate violence. Women students who return to the campus late or who try to utilize the library in the evenings may face rape or a violent beating from these groups of frustrated young men, who may have had their resolve “strengthened” by alcohol. Alcohol abuse may be another expression of the macho culture and of their frustrations. There is thus a class aspect to sexual violence, where virtually destitute male students who now form a sizeable percentage of students as a result of the democratization of higher education, are excluded from normal dating activities as poorer women students may consider rich middle aged and old men as more suitable dates.

On the other hand, middle class married men may find young women students as highly attractive “dates”. These men utilize their prestige and ability to pay to attract many women. There is thus a culture whereby young, attractive and educated women are exploited as prestigious acquisitions and even as the “property” of rich men. Such older men are promiscuous, often carriers of HIV/AIDS, and use their financial largesse to enjoy the company as well as sexual services of many young women. The rich man as a predator, exploiting vulnerable and low income young women, is another cultural image. However, the anger of young low-income male students appears to be never targeted on these “predators”, who may actually be admired for their flashy cars and promiscuous life style. Instead the anger is targeted against the young women who exploit the rich men and how are at the same time the victims of these rich men.

In higher education institutions, women students who do not want to be identified as the “toys” of rich businessmen may instead choose to be identified with a religious group on the campus. Such religious groups promote abstinence from sex outside of marriage. Unfortunately, the negative side may be that young religious men may feel justified to harass and attack women who are outside their circle of religious devotees. Joining a religious sect may provide women students with “protection”. Refusal to join a religious sect may be sufficient to stereotype a woman student as “promiscuous”, and therefore a legitimate target for sexual harassment and violence.

Societal values constitute one of the important factors that must be taken into consideration in dealing with sexual harassment. The culture by which men see women as images of property and prestige, whilst some women utilize this culture to link themselves more closely with powerful and prestigious men, reflects on some of the present cultural values of the society. Academic women who have freed themselves from the restrictive roles assigned to them by traditional mores may also find themselves the targets of sexual harassment: rejection of the very limited roles assigned to them by feudal custom may mark them out as “feminists”, that is “rebels” against “African” traditions, and therefore legitimate targets for attack.

There is clearly need for cultural workers to examine present sexual values more critically, with its main players including the rich male predators; the young women students who allow themselves to become partners and usually victims of these rich male predators; the male religious fanatic who sees women outside of his religious circle as legitimate targets for sexual harassment and violent attack; and women students who can only win respectability through adherence to some religious grouping or sect. The higher education culture reflects

the culture of society as a whole, and this society is in many cases changing from a traditional culture where the role of women is narrowly circumscribed as devoted to the home and family rather than in an independent career, to a new culture where women may be regarded as equal partners. Novels, short stories, drama and film are possible ways of mirroring the present dilemmas in societies in transition.

Social marketing, which is the use of a communications approach to highlight the values which underlie certain forms of behaviour, may be another approach to this problem. UNICEF is one of the most experienced and successful exponents of social marketing to influence behavioral change, and its model can be successfully emulated.

Sexual Harassment of Students by Staff

In many African universities, there are allegations of male staff propositioning vulnerable female students, threatening to fail them, and or else enticing them with the promise of higher grades. Lecturers are in a position of authority with the power to pass or fail students. Utilizing this power position for sexual favours is clearly unprofessional, and goes against the code of ethics governing the teaching profession. Staff student relationships can be governed by a number of regulations such as:

- Development of an ethical Code of Conduct governing the relationship between staff and students, explicitly outlining what is defined as sexual harassment. Students should then be encouraged to report any forms of sexual harassment. Students who make reports should be confident that their reports are treated with confidentiality, so that they will not be faced with reprisals from a powerful male lecturer. Documentation is important, so that a lecturer who persistently indulges in sexual harassment will accumulate a record.
- There should be follow-up actions against persistent offenders, beginning with verbal warnings, and culminating in suspension and dismissal where this is appropriate. A grievance reporting system must be instituted which will not result in further victimization of the women who report.
- Gender violence and sexual harassment must be integrated into mainstream teaching, research and other learning processes. This will enable the problem to be addressed openly, rather than as at present where victims will hide out of fear of further victimization.
- All materials for inducting academic and support staff, visitors, students and other stakeholders must contain information that raises their awareness of the institutional stance against gender violence and sexual harassment.
- At all institutional events, it is necessary to raise awareness and sensitise participants to the institution's gender stance through inclusion of men and women as staff and student participants, providing safe and secure convenience and other facilities for men and women, providing pamphlets on gender violence and sexual harassment etc.
- All stakeholders must make commitments to taking holistic and comprehensive approaches to changing attitudes and behaviours that tolerate, condone and encourage gender violence and sexual harassment.
- The institution's leadership must be perceived to make a commitment against

gender violence through recruiting and promoting men and women's presence, making the workplace and classrooms safe for men and women and punishing perpetrators without fear or favour.

- There must be transparency in the implementation of the policy and programs and the regulations and procedures must be clear, accessible and available to all sections of the institution.
- There must be clear lines of responsibility for the implementation of the policy and program and the processes must be swift and effective if they are to have any credibility.

Sexual Harassment of Staff by Staff

From focus group discussions in the University of Zimbabwe in 2003, it appears that secretarial staff are very vulnerable to sexual harassment both from staff and students. Occupying middle level administrative posts, they may be threatened with loss of their jobs by their immediate supervisors if they fail to respond to demands for sexual favours. They are also vulnerable to sexual harassment from students, who may treat them with disrespect.

Young women academics may also face sexual harassment and demands for sexual favours from senior male academics. Such propositioning may be seen as culturally acceptable in societies where powerful men are often polygamous, and social climbing by young ambitious women may involve choosing powerful male figures as mentors. However such relationships can deteriorate into sexual exploitation.

The staff Code of Ethics should cover sexual harassment of staff by their immediate supervisors, as the sexualisation of professional relationships has a corrosive impact on academic freedom and excellence.

Sexual Harassment of Students by Students

The sexual harassment of students by students is fairly rampant in many institutions of higher learning, partly because baiting women students is seen as acceptable young male behaviour, particularly in public situations. Women students who compete for office in student politics may suffer severe sexual harassment, whereas women students who compete in beauty pageants may escape such treatment.

A student Code of Conduct which includes sexual harassment as an offence needs to be developed, with clear lines for reporting incidents, and for dealing with culprits.

Arguments against Actions against Sexual Harassment

As an advocate against gender violence and sexual harassment, your colleagues, students or peers may ask the following questions:

- Gender violence and sexual harassment are personal issues, so why does the institution have to interfere in people's personal and individual relationships?
- Why should academics, teachers and other staff have to focus on gender violence and sexual harassment when they are not in the curriculum or in disciplinary regulations?
- Sexual interaction between men and women is normal and is part of African cultures. Why should we make a fuss over courtship and culturally accepted ways of proposing love?
- Relationships between students and staff are between consenting adults so why do we have to accept western ideas that make these relationships criminal?
- Unmarried male staff may choose to marry their female students and courtship will begin in the institution. Is that sexual harassment?

All the questions above can be answered through reference to the purposes and objectives of higher education, the stated visions and missions of particular institutions and the personal, professional and institutional interests of stakeholders in higher education.

Preventive Programmes against Gender Violence and Sexual Harassment

The responsibility for dealing with sexual harassment and gender violence rests with different structures and units within an educational institution. These structures may be management, academic, and student welfare departments. Thus, academics and students may be concerned about gender violence and sexual harassment in the classrooms, meetings and offices, while students and student affairs officers may be concerned about gender violence and sexual harassment in halls of residence, sports and recreational areas, health and peer education and student finance units. Management and administration may be concerned about sexual harassment among staff as well as between management and staff with respect to hiring, firing and promotion. They might also be concerned about gender violence between staff and students in registration, financing and adjudicating student life on campuses. Students may also be concerned about gender violence and sexual harassment among students in competition for research funds, books and other learning resources, accommodation, political office and campus employment.

There is a variety of preventative programs that are possible depending on the environment and set up in your institution. Interventions can include physical changes which can minimize the dangers of gender violence and sexual harassment. They can include sensitization and orientation programmes aimed at changing perception and attitudes towards sexual harassment. They can include punitive actions against transgressors.

Physical Changes

A number of physical changes can decrease the likelihood of gender violence and sexual harassment of the worst types on campuses. These can include:

- Better lighting on campuses in the evenings.
- Building women's hostels closer to libraries, laboratories, and computer rooms.

- Providing suitable study facilities and computers within women's hostels so that they can study in a safe environment in the evenings.
- Employment of guards at strategic points on the campus.
- Removal of alcohol availability close to women's hostels. Students' bars can be located strategically so that drunken male students do not easily attack women students.
- Providing safe and secure transport to and from halls of residence, hostels and accommodation to classes, laboratories and other places where learning takes place.

Sensitisation and Orientation Programmes

Various categories of people need to be sensitized to the divergent forms of gender violence and sexual harassment that may occur on campuses of higher education institutions. Depending on the structures of your institution, you could consider involving the following structures in handling activities on gender violence and sexual harassment:

- Vice Chancellors
- Registrars
- Deans of Faculties
- Directors/Deans of Student Affairs
- Directors of Student Health
- Proctors and tutors responsible for disciplinary machineries
- Wardens and residence/accommodations managers/Residence hall executives
- Student Executive/Representative Councils
- Heads of student clubs, societies, newspapers
- Heads of women's clubs and caucuses
- Peer counselors/student counselors/ student representatives.

It is important to examine the roles of various players in order to indicate the advantages and disadvantages of giving priority to any one of them in tackling sexual harassment and gender violence.

The following actions should be taken:

- Raise awareness of risks of gender violence and sexual harassment by documenting incidents and publicizing them.
- Educate men and women through lectures, pamphlets, audio visuals and drama, about risk factors and circumstances such as date and acquaintance rape, intimate violence and sexual harassment on campus.
- Teach basic life skills on personal interactions between students, students and staff and between staff.

Skills Training on Sexual Harassment for Key Personnel

- Every member of an institution needs to develop values, behaviours and life skills which enable them to interact in a positive manner with people of divergent

backgrounds by sex, gender, age, income, ethnicity, race and religions. Careers may advance or decline on the basis of this ability or inability to handle relationships with colleagues, superiors, subordinates, acquaintances and friends.

- Most of the graduates in higher education have to develop professional skills to interact with clients, patients, customers, competitors, state and regulatory authorities and other categories of people who may be similar or different from them.
- In many institutions, globalization dictates that people adapt to change very rapidly as they interact with ever-widening groups of partners. This requires the continuous acquisition of new skills, human resources and knowledge from a diversity of sources. There is need to be adept at restructuring and interacting within and with all levels and types of organizations and people.

Provide Support for Sexually Harassed and Violated Women

- Publicise the processes of identifying and reporting sexual harassment and gender violence, their prosecution and punishment.
- Reporting or relating the violation or harassment to someone is an important step. This may be verbal as well as in writing.
- Provide support for the victim(s). This might take the form of counseling, providing a safer place to live or work so that the victim is not intimidated for reporting the violence or harassment.
- If the victim desires it, the grievance handling procedure must be followed until the case is concluded.

Disciplinary Action against Sexual Harassment

In many institutions, student representatives, proctors, tutors and other members of disciplinary committees and machineries deal with issues of gender violence and sexual harassment. This approach has its advantages and disadvantages. It is worth listing both, so that you can make an informed choice for your institution depending on your context.

Advantages

- Proctors and other officers of institutions know the regulations around misdemeanors, violence, harassment and other offences.
- Disciplinary machineries are necessary for responding to sexual harassment and gender violence.
- There is widespread acceptance of legalistic approaches to disciplinary issues in many institutions.

Disadvantages

- In many institutions, proctors and disciplinary officers are almost exclusively men since many institutions have very few women who qualify to hold proctors'

- and other posts requiring seniority, legal knowledge and competence.
- Disciplinary machineries tend to be badly resourced and are only mobilized when there are problems in institutions.
 - Students, particularly males, resent the use of these machineries because they are often used to punish students who break rules on residence, political activity and related offenses. Using such machineries immediately casts the harassers as 'heroes' amongst other students, especially males.
 - These machineries are perceived to be 'toothless', ineffective, bureaucratic and inefficient because of the length of time needed to mobilize them. In many cases, the evidentiary requirements for these disciplinary hearings result in acquittal of violators, discrediting them as means of meting gender justice.
 - There is very little confidentiality in these machineries because of sympathy for violators, the bureaucratic and long-winded processes necessary for disciplinary hearings. Evidence often atrophies or is leaked to alleged offenders, prejudicing the pursuit for justice and the offended.
 - Some of the officers in the disciplinary machineries have no gender or legal training and do not appreciate the gendered nature of some offenses committed by staff and students.
 - The processes and procedures for reporting and laying charges against harassers and violent people are not well publicized amongst students, staff and other stakeholders.
 - There is intimidation of witnesses and solidarity with offenders, be they staff or students, rendering the pursuit of gender justice dangerous for the offended.
 - In some institutions, Vice-Chancellors, Deans, Proctors, Registrars, Wardens, Chairpersons of departments, Directors, student representatives, chaplains, senior officers, managers and administrators are sexual harassers and perpetrators of gender violence, rendering the quest for gender justice and struggles against gender violence non-viable in some institutions.

Conclusion: Making Gender Violence and Sexual Harassment a National Issue

It may not be possible to make institutions of higher learning immediately responsive and active in eradicating gender violence in the short term. Some of these behaviours might be entrenched and it may be useful to make them national issues by linking them to activism beyond specific institutions. For example, it might be more useful to link up with other organizations working on gender violence to produce public information that can be used in campaigns against gender violence in general. It might also be useful to launch programmes of research on gender violence in many locations, comparing and contrasting their incidence, handling and punishment. This might provide an additional incentive for employers, heads of institutions and community leaders to ensure that their institutions are not harbouring or sponsoring gender violence and sexual harassers.

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