Inclusion of sex education in the curriculum: A strategy geared towards addressing the prevalence of sexual violence in institutions of higher learning

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Abstract: Sexual violence is a pervasive problem infiltrating institutions of higher learning across the world. This newly named "pandemic" has long-term detrimental effects on students' academic and social lives. This paper reports on a qualitative study that interviewed students, security personnel and student counselling staff members of three institutions of higher learning in KwaZulu Nata (Durban), to examine the social context of sexual victimization of female students in institutions of higher learning. Findings presented that universities are microcosms of society, and the culture of society is always expressed on university campuses. Influential factors which are reflective of an individual's family socialisation, background, and culture, permit behaviour leading to sexual violence. When students interact with one another, gender stereotypes are reinforced, allowing for inappropriate behaviours such as sexual violence. Additionally, the study found that students lacked information and education about their rights, as well as the ability to give or withhold consent. This paper foregrounds the nature of sexual violence and how it is a complex problem driven by a combination of factors including educational and cultural background, and socialisation. This highlights crucial ways in which university campuses reflect wider social dynamics and universities are in an advantageous position to address these dynamics using the curriculum. Therefore, the main recommendation of this paper is for the inclusion of sex education into the entry-level curriculum for all first-time entering students. This is envisioned to be a short programme covering a wide range of critical topics such as basic human rights, gender and sexuality, sexual intercourse, consent, lifestyle, alcohol consumption, and substance use. This will contribute to the development of a student's identity that is founded on information that will help students make informed decisions and contribute to attempts to curb sexual violence in institutions of higher learning.

Keywords: consent; education; gender; human rights; sexuality; sexual violence; university.

Introduction

South Africa as a country deals with cases of sexual violence daily. Infants, youngsters, the elderly, males, and females have become victims of the unavoidable act of sexual violence. The issue of sexual violence amongst young people is an important area of concern in public health, social sciences, and criminology in particular as it is a violation of human rights. One cannot deny the fact that males also fall victim to sexual victimisation but for this paper, the focus is on the sexual violence directed at female students in institutions of higher learning as statistics reveal that young women are sexually violated more concerning males or other women in the general society.

Sexual violence has a range of contributory factors and effects that have been greatly discussed across research studies. This paper pays consideration to discussing how sex education can contribute to curbing the problematic nature of sexual violence. Findings emanating from a comprehensive study on the social context of sexual victimisation direct this paper to the recommendation that sex education plays a crucial role in the fight against the high rates of sexual violence in institutions of higher learning.

Preliminary literature

A term that best lists all the sexual victimisation acts is that by[1] Non-consensual sex (NCS). This term is interchangeably used as sexual abuse, sexual violence and sexual coercion, in general, was operationalized to encompass a range of behaviours including unwanted penetrative sex, attempted rape, unwanted touch, as well as non-contact forms of abuse such as verbal harassment or forced viewing of pornography. These acts may include any coercive situations in which the victims lack realistic choices available to prevent or redress the situation, for example, physical violence, threats, intimidation, emotional manipulation, and deception.

Non-contact sexual violence involves the exhibition of sexual organs by the abuser or the exposing of genitals to the abuser, watching the abuser masturbate, looking at pornographic material, being filmed for pornographic use and sexual harassment [2]. Most of the abusers are likely to have an existing relationship with their victims. These results correlate with that of [3], who found that persons known to the victim perpetrated higher proportions (78% and 89%) of sexual assaults. The idea of the sexual act being non-consensual may vary in different contexts due to either cultural beliefs or awareness of the individual rights of people. Sexual violence is a major problem on university campuses, with 20% to 25% of women reporting sexual assault victimisation during their time in college [4&5].

Findings from many studies are consistent with transnational comparative studies showing that prevalence rates of sexual violence are higher in low- and middle-income countries than in 26 high-income countries[6]. Sexual violence among students remains a major problem confronting colleges and universities across the country [7].

Research suggests that adolescents and young adults experience forms of sexual victimisation at rates higher than any other age group, and those college students are at increased risk for some forms of violence compared with their same-age non-college peers (Fisher, Cullen, & Turner, 1999)19. This means that rates of sexual violence for female students are likely to be higher compared to those of females in the general community. What also tends to happen is that the "spillover" from the community in which the institution is located, may cause the rates to be high in the institution because perpetrators commit the same act of sexual violence.

Despite increased attention to this issue, reported rates of sexual violence differ significantly, which is largely due to definitional inconsistencies, including methodological and measurement used to estimate the prevalence of sexual assault. Definitional issues and inconsistency in the types of victimisation measured across studies (e.g., forcible rape, completed rape, attempted rape, sexual coercion, unwanted sexual contact, incapacitated rape, and alcohol- and drug-facilitated rape) contribute to differences in prevalence findings [10]. What might be considered sexual violence by one person might not necessarily be that way for the other, depending on the level of understanding of one's rights and the issue of sexual victimisation. In addition, beliefs and practices in a certain area may have a different definition of what sexual victimisation is, causing differences in rates due to identifying and reporting sexual victimisation.

The #MeToo movement and subsequent campaigns on college and university campuses across the world have brought the pervasiveness of sexual violence against women to the fore in a context where voices against such violence are often silenced. It is argued that in South Africa, sexual violence is rife and women and girls experience rape and other forms of gender-based violence on a 'large and seemingly uncontrollable scale'. For example, while over 40,000 rapes are reported to the police per annum [11], it is estimated that only 14% of perpetrators face conviction in South Africa [12].

In 2018, Former Higher Education and Training Minister Naledi Pandor organised an emergency crisis meeting with universities after close to 50 rape cases were reported on campuses across the country. Statistics handed to her office by universities and public colleges have revealed that a shocking 47 students were raped in the 2017 academic year. Pandor disclosed the scary data to Parliament, as a written reply to questions by the EFF's Nontando Nolutshungu. The University of Cape Town told Pandor it recorded nine rape incidents in the year 2017, making it the institution with the highest number. It was followed by Walter Sisulu 32 University with seven.

A great body of literature has sought to give an understanding of the factors that escalate the risk of sexual violence among university students, mainly by focusing on the characteristics of victims or perpetrators. The factors highlighted here are those that could affect both the victim and the perpetrator leading to the act of sexual victimisation. The experience of violence in the family, early sexual debut, and a higher number of sexual partners are associated with a higher probability of sexual violence among women only. However, it is pivotal to stress that no single factor can explain the occurrence of sexual violence, which is believed to stem from complex interactions between factors on different levels that are individual, relationship, community and societal risk factors, respectively.

Rape culture effectively undermines the citizenship of women and girls, demoting them to 'second-class citizens' and serving to control their behaviour through a culture of silence, fear, and shame. The effects of such experiences are long-lasting and life-threatening. Research has gone as far as to suggest that perhaps the impact of rape exceeds that of other crimes. The same can be said for any other form of sexual victimisation. This is a concern, as previous research has shown that experiencing sexual victimisation during late adolescence or young adulthood can have far-reaching consequences, including unwanted pregnancy and increased risk of psychological, sexual and reproductive health problems[13]. The health consequences of sexual violence are well documented and include both short-term and long-term health problems such as depression, eating disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder, and suicidal ideation [13, 14,15&16] as well as injury, sexually transmitted infections, and chronic illness [18 &19]. All these effects mentioned have a detrimental effect on the progress of the student's career and well-being.

Research objectives

To derive the findings discussed in this paper, the following were the research objectives: (1) to examine the nature and seriousness of sexual violence against female students in the selected institutions of higher learning in KZN (Durban); (2) to determine the contributory factors to sexual violence against female students in the selected institutions of higher learning in KZN (Durban); and (3) to investigate reasons why female students do not report sexual violence in institutions of higher learning in KZN (Durban).

Theoretical framework

Though limited in number and scope, sexual violence theories clarify the role of human sexual aggression in offending as well as social and individual attitudes toward the actual offence, the offender, and the victims. Given the gravity of sexual violence and its devastating impact on victims, it is critical to recognise these theories for both academic and practical purposes. This paper considers the complexities of the problem of sexual violence, as well as the variety of the causal factors presented. As a result, two theories were used to explain and comprehend sexual violence. The Routine Activity Theory [20] and the Integrated Theory of Sexual Offending [21] were used. A convincing explanation of sexual abuse is likely to be multifactorial, incorporating several aetiological pathways leading to the onset and maintenance of sexual offending, according to research. The first theory is more of a victimological explanation for sexual victimisation. The concept of this theory is that the presence of the three contributing factors (suitable target, motivated offender and lack of guardianship) can collectively increase the likelihood of a predatory crime occurring. This theory predicts that people are more likely to be victimised if they (1) live in a high-crime area, (2) go out late at night, (3) carry valuables, (4) engage in risky behaviour such as drinking alcohol, and (5) are without friends or family to watch over or help them.. The routines activities theory is crucial in explaining the sexual victimisation of female students because it identifies the main factors that predispose females to sexual victimisation. Typically, female university students reflect the five predictions shared by this theory. Young women who frequent bars for alcohol consumption may increase their risk of being raped (which is common among teenagers and young adults) because they are easy targets and their attackers can justify raping them because they are intoxicated and lack guardianship.

The second theory which is the Integrated Theory of Sexual Offending takes a multidimensional and multidisciplinary approach to explaining the problem of sexual violence. The ITSO identifies three causal factors (biological, ecological, and psychological) that, when combined, result in clinical issues. Level I theories identify multiple core factors related to sexual offending, whereas Level II theories propose single factors related to sexual offending aetiology. Level III theories are micro-models that specify the cognitive, behavioural, motivational, and social factors that contribute to the offender chain or relapse process [22]. Consideration of these factors leads us to the conclusion that sexual offending emerges from a network of relationships between individuals and their local habitats and niches, rather than being the result of individual psychopathology. These theories, when combined, provide a comprehensive explanation for sexual violence.

Methods

This paper reports on the phenomenological tradition of studying the lifeworld as it is experienced by participants. Furthermore, exploratory research was conducted to determine the nature of a problem. It is not intended to provide conclusive evidence, but rather to aid in the understanding of the problem. The researcher used this paradigm to thoroughly address the study's key research questions, allowing for a better understanding of the social context of sexual violence of female students in institutions of higher learning. The need for this particular research to be qualitative was to allow the researcher to extract knowledge of sexual violence through words, expressions, and even narration. Three sites were chosen for the research. To comply with ethical procedures, these locations were designated as institutions A, B, and C. The selection of these institutions was based on the fact that they are the only three

government-sponsored, contact-learning universities in the Durban area where the study was being conducted. The chosen sample was representative of informants who have firsthand knowledge of the problem of sexual victimisation. The sample consisted of 48 participants broken down as students, student counsellors and security staff members from the three selected institutions. One-on-one, open-ended interviews were conducted to gather data. Thematic analysis was the primary descriptive strategy that aided in the search for patterns of experience within a qualitative data set; the product of thematic analysis was a description of those patterns as well as the overarching design that connects them. Findings relevant to the research objectives and questions will be discussed.

Discussion of findings

The broad aim of the study was to examine the social context of sexual violence among female students. The aim can be achieved by first learning how participants perceive the phenomenon and what they consider to be sexual victimisation.

Conceptualising sexual violence

Several understandings emerged from the narratives, including behaviours and acts that were both physical and verbal, as noted below:

The phenomenon was described by student participants (S) as follows:

"Sexual victimisation is whereby someone wants to engage with you in sexual activity without your consent" (A: S2)

Participant S explained a range of victimisation:

"It starts from sexual harassment; the comments people make that are sexual. It also goes to the extent where someone forces someone to have sex with them against their will. It starts from minor sexual moves all the way to completed rape" (A: S4).

Furthermore, participant S states that:

"I would describe it as males using their position of power to take something that does not belong to them to violate another person sexually" (B: S3).

The use of power is also mentioned as Participant S stated:

"... is when someone who has power manipulates people who are inferior to them for sexual gratification" (C: S1).

In addition, student counsellors (SC) described sexual victimisation as:

"It is when a person is put in a vulnerable position just because of the other person trying to make sexual advances on that individual that is not willing to take part in those sexual advances" (A: SC1).

"It is unwanted, unsolicited sexual behaviour that is also unwarranted by the recipient. It is sexual victimisation when no consent is given" (B: SC3).

Security service (SS) participants offered:

"It is a violation of someone else sexually without their consent" (A: SS1)

"It is whereby an individual forces themselves on another individual without consent being given. This is normally for sexual gratification or humiliation of the other individual" (B: SS4).

The above definitions include elements considered in the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act 32 of 2007, which states that "any person ('A') who unlawfully and intentionally commits an act of sexual penetration with a complainant ('B') without B's consent is guilty of rape." In its policy on sexual harassment, Institution A adopted the definition of sexual harassment as defined in South African legislation as "unwanted conduct of a sexual nature". Sexual harassment is distinguished by the fact that it is unwelcome, unsolicited, and unreciprocated conduct with a sexual component. According to [5], sexual violence is defined as any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or acts to traffic, or otherwise directed against a person's sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting, including but not limited to home and work. As can be seen from the three narrative categories listed above, participants defined and described sexual victimisation in similar ways.

Lack of education about consent and sexual violence as a contributory factor

One of the most prominent themes among the factors contributing to sexual victimisation was a lack of education about consent and sexual victimisation. S and SC participants explained this as follows:

"The huge one is not being educated on what is sexual victimisation. Maybe if we grasp that and we get educated about the real definition of sexual victimisation then even the perpetrator or the victim will know that they are being victimised or they are crossing a line they are not supposed to cross" (A: S2).

Both the victim's and the perpetrator's lack of education, as well as the socialisation factor, are mentioned:

"Apart from alcohol consumption, it is a lack of education because some may victimise someone else unaware that they are victimising that person. It is also the background of the person, how they have been taught and raised to treat women" (C: S8).

An S participant mentioned a lack of understanding of both genders' rights and consent:

"It is a lack of knowledge about individual rights. If a person knows that they have a right to say no, then they will not allow their intimate partners or people they are familiar with to take advantage of them sexually. Also if men were taught how to respect and treat women they 132 would not be victimizing them. Not being educated on this is a great contributing factor for both males and females" (B: SC2).

The findings reinforced important knowledge about what constitutes sexual assault, the potential consequences of sexual assault for the survivor, why it is important to report sexual assault, and how to do so. It was also clear that students lacked information and education about their rights, as well as the ability to give or withhold consent. The GBV policy at Institution A is explicit in defining consent and reiterates that consent cannot be obtained using physical force, compelling threats, intimidation, coercion, or any other controlling behaviour. Silence does not imply agreement. According to the policy, consent cannot be obtained using physical force, compelling threats, intimidation, coercion, or any other controlling behaviour. Silence does not imply agreement. Some female students did not have a good understanding of what sexual victimisation is, and as a result, they were victimised but were unable to recognise it as victimisation.

Reasons for underreporting of sexual victimisation in institutions of higher learning

According to [23], most campus sexual assaults are not reported to enforcement or security officials, which makes it difficult to accurately gauge how many occur. This paper discusses that most students do not report that they have been sexually violated for numerous interactional reasons. According to [24], disclosure to law enforcement is more likely when the perpetrator is a stranger when the incident is more severe (i.e., use of weapons, survivor considering the incident to be rape), and when incidents take place on campus. Similarly, findings from a study conducted by [25] revealed that the survivors who did not disclose their sexual assault experiences to victims, crisis, or healthcare centres reported that they made this decision because they did not want to talk about it, did not need assistance, felt that it was not serious enough to report, did not want anyone to know about it, felt embarrassed, and felt that they were partially or fully responsible for what occurred.

This paper discusses findings that are like those of the previous studies mentioned above. Participants provided reasons for underreporting, such as:

Lack of knowledge of what constitutes sexual violence

The A participant offered a realistic perspective:

"The main reason that comes to my mind is the fact that most of the victims are raped by their boyfriends. So, because they are not well educated about what constitutes rape, they will not consider forceful sex as rape and will not report it. The justice system also plays a role because, in most of the stories that are reported in our communities of intimate partner sexual victimisation, the police will be the first people to ask questions such as 'Why did she go to his house if she did not want sex. Hence the victim never reports because the victim will blame themselves and think it is their fault" (A: S8).

According to [27], following sexual assault, the first interpretation of the event as a crime or assault called "rape acknowledgement," occurs, before they can self-identify as a victim or survivor and be acknowledged and labelled a victim or survivor by others. Acknowledgement and labelling are also linked to being able to disclose an assault receive social reactions or support from others and begin to cope in adaptive ways with the aftermath.

This paper reveals that when a student is violated by their intimate partner or someone they have consented to sexual intercourse before, it is unlikely that the victim will identify the incident as sexual violence. This is indicative that female students are not yet well educated about their rights and giving consent. They are victimised, sometimes repeatedly but do not know that they are being victimised. In a campus sexual assault investigation by the [26], it was reported that most victims of sexual assault did not report it, particularly if drugs and alcohol were involved, and many females did not consider the incident in question a sexual assault. In cases where alcohol was involved, the incident is labelled as "bad sex" or "a hookup" when by its nature, it is sexual victimisation.

This paper supports this noting that little research has been conducted among college students suggesting that the main reasons for non-reporting are survivors' perceptions that the incident was not serious enough. According to [25] and [28] lack of certainty that crime or harm was intended, and a desire to avoid other people finding the victimisation. Most female students who have been victimised will conclude that the perpetrator did not intend to harm them due to not knowing their rights, hence not reporting the incident to formal structures.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Much of the incidences discussed in this paper are related to intimate partner violence. This is one of the contributing factors to the sexual violence of female students. The violence that exists in intimate relationships escalates to sexual victimisation. Female students are forced into sexual intercourse by their male partners, consent is not given and sometimes these cases are not even identified as sexual violence because the female student labels it as 'bad sex' when in fact they are violated.

This leads the discussion to another contributing factor which is the lack of education about consent and sexual victimisation. This paper discusses that female students are sexually violated due to not possessing adequate knowledge of giving and receiving consent. Lack of sex education negatively impacts the sexual decisions of both the victim and the perpetrator. This paper concludes that some perpetrators do not know that they are sexually violating a female student because they do not identify their behaviour as violent. An example of this is that culturally men are conditioned to be initiators of sexual intercourse and women receivers. When a female does not consent, the male gets a signal to pursue further due to the 'hunter' conditioning, not realising that it is now sexual victimisation. This paper therefore recommends the inclusion of sex education in institutions of higher learning.

Embedding of sex education as a strategy to curb sexual violence.

The introduction of sex education in the curriculum at entry-level modules is a proactive approach to addressing the issue of sexual violence. Male and female socialisation differ significantly, with males conditioned to be dominant and females conditioned to be submissive. Sexual stereotyping and sexual scripts play a significant role in student engagement. HEIs are uniquely positioned to challenge such assumptions. Perhaps incorporating such components into the curriculum and hosting dialogues on mutual respect culture.

Such open interaction will conscientious students, especially given the analysis's mention of a knowledge gap among males. Furthermore, security staff members should give presentations during orientation while introducing this course to familiarise students with the details of the institutional policies and security protocols. University administration frequently assumes that students are well-informed when studies of this nature reveal that students are not well-informed. Higher education institutions must bridge the knowledge gap by developing and implementing a mandatory sex education module for all first-time entering students.

This paper acknowledges that one of the selected institutions under study has implemented a sex education programme for all first-year students. Other institutions can use this as a model to ensure that this module covers a wide range of critical topics such as gender, sexuality, sexual intercourse, consent, lifestyle, alcohol consumption, substance use, and basic human rights. This will contribute to the development of a student's identity that is founded on information rather than experience. Unfortunately, many students form an identity because of the consequences of poor decisions that are aided by a lack of information. Students will be in a better position to make informed decisions if the institution commits to developing their students at the entry level, such as not participating in nightlife associated with alcohol consumption because this increases their chances of victimisation.

Furthermore, this will teach students that avoiding having multiple sexual partners lowers the risk of sexual victimisation. This paper also finds notes that some perpetrators are not aware that they are victimising a student. This calls for extensive education on acceptable human behaviour and respecting human rights as outlined in Chapter 2 of the Constitution. Male students who have predominantly been identified as perpetrators need to be exposed to sex education that teaches them what is acceptable behaviour and what is not. The concept of consent is a crucial one for

male students because it is a lack of understanding of this concept that results in sexual victimisation incidents in intimate partner relationships. As revealed in other studies, if males understand consent, they will be in a greater position to immediately stop sexual advances if the female does not give consent. This important information will contribute to a safe campus and residence climate where students will be positively informed about their lifestyles and decision-making.

Along with this recommendation, the following could be beneficial towards addressing the nature of sexual violence in institutions of higher learning;

Creation of dialogue with students to build awareness and promote information sharing Participants expressed dissatisfaction with the level of disengagement adopted by institutions of higher learning. According to the findings of the study, the student body is not actively involved in issues of sexual victimisation in their institutions. As a result, there is a schism between the student body and the leadership of the institution, which oversees raising awareness and devising interventions. In interviews, participants argue that addressing the issue of sexual victimisation requires a collaborative effort. At the policy level, the institution must involve the student body in ensuring that policy objectives address the student's safety needs.

This can be accomplished through a series of dialogues to gather information from students about the location of the problem and how it can be addressed. In terms of awareness, this paper suggests that using students as primary facilitators of awareness is the best way to achieve it. Tutors and residence assistants must be at the forefront of awareness campaigns and programmes, as it will create a greater impact compared to a seminar held by members of staff that students cannot relate to.

Student participation in policymaking and inclusion in interventions will increase trust and reliability. Input from students, who are the university's primary clients, will ensure that both proactive and reactive interventions are problem-specific rather than generic. Victims will no longer have a "them vs. us" mentality and will be able to approach university structures to report victimisation and seek assistance. Victims' primary points of contact will be the same tutors and residence assistants. One participant argued that it is easier to report violence to a fellow student rather than to old security personnel. In line with the recommendation to initiate dialogue, an extension of this recommendation is to use emails to raise awareness by informing the student community of any report of sexual victimisation on the university's campus.

This initiative will keep students informed about what is going on in their institution, as well as raise awareness and caution. Students are vulnerable to victimisation when they are unaware that their safety is jeopardised, perhaps at night or in their residences, due to an identified perpetrator. Keeping them up to date on safety and security issues will benefit their safety.

Employing permanent visible awareness

In addressing issues of sexual violence against female students, awareness plays both a proactive and a reactive role. Awareness is critical in both preventing students from being victimised and directing students to available support structures if they are victimised. According to the discussion in this paper, higher education institutions are making adequate efforts to raise awareness. There is, however, room for improvement. Most participants were unaware of where they could report if they became victims, and they were also unaware of how to contact their student counselling division. This creates a significant gap in the provision of assistance to students who become victims.

It was also discovered that awareness efforts are ineffective because they occur infrequently. This paper suggests that permanent visible awareness be implemented. Every day, posters, banners, and stations must be visible to all students. The use of a technique to raise awareness for COVID-19 was successful because information was always available. A study participant stated that when you open your laptop for work, there are COVID-19 tips on TV, office walls, and shop walls. The participant went on to say that no matter how ignorant one is, this level of disease awareness forced citizens to learn about it and provided information on how to prevent infections and treat them. This approach should be taken in the case of sexual assaults in institutions of higher learning. Sexual assault is a pandemic in higher education institutions; therefore, strategic and robust interventions with long-term effects are required.

In conclusion, the emerging themes discussed reveal that sexual violence is widespread and urgently needs to be addressed. It is not enough for institutions of higher learning to have sexual harassment and Gender-Based Violence policies; the institution must also vigorously and comprehensively implement problem-oriented rather than generic interventions. To eradicate the "silent pandemic", the DHET, institutional leadership, student body, and other

stakeholders must work together. This paper offers both proactive and reactive recommendations that will make a significant contribution to addressing sexual violence in institutions of higher learning.

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