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Abstract

While it remains uncontested that women and girls continue to face various kinds of sexual harassment at home places and within societies, concerns over a trending phenomenon known as "thigh-for-marks" within university have attracted close scrutiny from various interested stakeholders. This has prompted an exploration of the phenomenon in order to ascertain its implications on the educational as well as sexual and reproductive health rights of learners. Using qualitative lenses, the study found out that this form of sexual harassment is associated with intense psychological trauma, compromised educational output, loss of social capital and increased susceptibility to HIV/AIDS. Applying developmental social work principles, the paper advocates for robust sexual harassment policies within universities as clear reporting systems in order to safeguard the sexual and educational rights of students from outright infringement. The paper further argues for the adoption of a school social work model within institutions of higher learning in order to strengthen psycho-social support services in universities.

Keywords Education · Sexual and reproductive health rights · HIV/AIDS · Psycho-social support · Social work

Introduction and Background

The issue of women's rights and their subjugation dates back before the first, second and third waves of feminism (Baehr, 2013; Van eerdeewijk & Mugadza, 2015). These waves of feminism sought to challenge unjustified laws and practices which violated women's rights. Today, women issues as they are often called have been widely embraced by the United Nations' programs. Various international laws and initiatives have been crafted to respond to the violation of women's constitutional rights (Mashiri, 2013; UNDP, 2020). Such instruments and initiatives are then cascaded by respective countries as a sign of commitment to the empowerment of women's dignity and worth. Likewise, Zimbabwe has adopted these statutory instruments as well as the Sustainable Developmental Goals, particularly SDG 4 and 5 which focus on quality education and gender equality respectively.

While strides have been made with regards to the empowerment of women's rights in Zimbabwe, the evidence on ground attest to the truism that women are still subjected to a myriad of practices that violate their rights (UNDP, 2020) such as their sexual harassment in public tertiary institutions (Bwititi, 2020; Mundopa, 2020).

In an attempt to provide a legal launching platform for empowering women empowerment processes, the government of Zimbabwe is signatory to a number of international instruments that uphold women's rights. For a long time, Zimbabwe country has been actively participating in programs with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women of 1979 (CEDAW) and the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women resolution 48/104 of 1993 (Mafa et al., 2020). These international commitments outlined to give a framework for the rights every woman should enjoy. In both the works, an emphasis is made on an array of women's rights including sexual and reproductive health (SRH) rights. This is also buttressed by the nation's Constitution of 2013 which underscores these sexual and reproductive health rights according to the Constitution of the Republic of Zimbabwe (2013). The right to:

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