

Redefining the gender narrative: sexual harassment and intimate partner violence in selected institutions of higher learning in Zimbabwe's tertiary institutions

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Abstract

This study explores the discourse on sexual harassment and gender-based violence among leaders, organizations and higher institutions of learning in Zimbabwe. The study seeks to challenge and understand how gender-based violence (GBV) survivors frame their understanding and experiences of sexual harassment and GBV in a tertiary institution. The Zimbabwean government approved a public sexual harassment policy and the Education Council for Higher Education should adopt the policy and monitor its implementation in tertiary institutions. The study examines intimate partner violence from an intersectional feminist perspective which views GBV as a result of patriarchy and other discriminatory and repressive practices. The paper explores the lived realities of students in tertiary institutions. A qualitative approach based on the premise that it enables the participants to share their lived experiences and reflect on their interpretations and opinions of the phenomenon in context (de Vos et al, 2014) was adopted for the study. The methods to generate data which were adopted include focus group conversations and life history narratives with women and girls. The twenty participants who participated in the study were purposively selected. Out of the study, it was established among other findings that provocative conversations or dialogues between the survivors, victims, perpetrators, faculty, management and the rest of the student body can help to understand GBV and sexual harassment. Several points of intervention to minimize gender-based violence and sexual harassment in tertiary institutions can contribute to improving the quality of higher education in Zimbabwe. The study recommends resources such as digital security, physical security, consultations with victims and survivors to recount their experiences in a safe and supportive environment. There should also be scaling up on counselling and allow the survivors and victims to be part of the process of effecting changes among students and faculty.

Key words: intimate partner violence, sexual harassment, gender – based violence, women and girls