

Women Students' Management of Alcohol- Related Sexual Risk at a South African University

Authors : Shakila Singh

Abstract : This research was conducted at a selected South African university campus with women students who drink alcohol. The purpose of the study was to examine their perspectives on the role of alcohol in their lives, their understandings about women's vulnerability to alcohol-related sexual risk and their strategies against these. The study draws on feminist principles and practices to challenge gendered inequalities that legitimate and facilitate violence against women. Recognising the danger of focusing on risk management in ways that place the burden of responsibility entirely on young women to prevent their violation, this article focuses on women students' agency in managing risk while taking up opportunities for self-discovery. Participation was voluntary, and a student-researcher administered an open-ended questionnaire to 55 participants. The findings suggest that young women position alcohol- use as a common activity at university, and that it gives them much pleasure. They recognise that it is riskier for women and articulate valuable strategies to manage the risk to their sexual safety when drinking. These include drinking within supportive networks, avoiding financial dependence, and managing their alcohol intake. This article argues that alcohol at university is an integral part of expressions of gender and sexuality and that risk-taking is a normal part of university students' lives. Consequently, arguments about equality need to consider risk-taking as part of young people's lives and promote ways of managing alcohol-related risks, rather than imagining that alcohol can be avoided entirely.

Keywords : alcohol-related sexual risk, drinking at university, managing risk, women students

Conference Title : ICGE 2024 : International Conference on Gender and Education

Conference Location : Crete, Greece

Conference Dates : July 22-23, 2024