

Responding to and Preventing Sexual and Gender Based Violence Related to Ragging, in University of Kelaniya: A Case Study

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Abstract : SGBV which refer to acts of inflicting physical, mental or sexual harm or sufferings that deprive a person's liberty based on one's gender or sexuality is known to occur in various forms. Ragging in educational institutions can often be one such form of SGBV. Ragging related SGBV is a growing problem despite various legal, policy and programme initiatives introduced over the years. While the punishment of perpetrators through the criminal justice system is expected to bring a deterrent effect, other strategies such as awareness-raising, attitudinal changes, and the empowerment of students to say no to ragging and SGBV will lead to enlightened attitudes about the practice in universities. Thus, effective regular prevention programmes are the need of the hour. The objectives of the paper are to engage with the case of a female fresher subjected to verbal abuse, physical assault and sexual harassment due to events which started as a result of wearing a trouser to the university during the ragging season. The case came to the limelight since a complaint was made to the police and 10 students were arrested under the anti-ragging act. This led to dividend opinions among the student population and a backlash from the student union. Simultaneously, this resulted in the society demanding the stricter implementation of laws and the punishment of perpetrators. The university authority appointed a task force comprising of academics, non-academics, parents, community leaders, stakeholders and students to draw up an action plan to respond to the immediate situation as well as future prevention. The paper will also discuss the implementation of task force plan. The paper is based on interviews with those involved with the issue and the experiences of the task force members and is expected to provide an in-depth understanding of the intricacies and complications associated with dealing with a contentious problem such as ragging. Given the political and ethical issues involved with insider research as well as the sensationalism of the topic, maximum care will be taken to safeguard the interests of those concerned.

Keywords : fresher, sexual and gender based violence (SGBV), sexual harassment, ragging

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