

Sexual Harassment at University: Male Students' Perspectives

Authors : Shakila Singh

Abstract : Sexual harassment continues to be a problem both in educational institutions and workplaces with the main victims being women and the main perpetrators being men. The achievement of quality education demands to create safe learning spaces for all students and requires extensive and integrated interventions. This article draws on the data from a broader study that aims to create safer learning environments at university by addressing gender violence. It attempts to understand male students' perspectives about their role in sexual harassment on the campus. It is a move away from interventions that place the responsibility of prevention of sexual harassment, on women. The study adopts an interpretive paradigm within a qualitative approach. The sample comprises twenty male university students who were purposively selected because they live in the campus residences. The main data generation methods included focus group discussions and individual interviews. Findings show that while many male students agree that victims of sexual harassment are mainly women, they also suggest that men are victims of sexual harassment by women. Male students have varying understandings of what constitutes sexual harassment. They position themselves as victims who feel harassed by women's dress and behaviour. Male students also felt under pressure by sexual advances made by women that forced them to comply in order to protect their masculinity. This article argues that social norms of masculinity are powerful drivers of behaviour that play a key role in the perpetuation of sexual harassment. Male students who feel strongly against sexual harassment of female students are constrained by their masculinities in their ability to act against it. Effective interventions need to actively engage students in reflecting on and challenging social and cultural norms that contribute to violent expressions and to develop alternatives with them.

Keywords : gender violence, male students, sexual harassment, university students

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