

Reporting and Preventing Sexual Assault among Students at a Selected University in South Africa

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KEYWORDS Sexual Abuse. Students. Coping. University

ABSTRACT Generally, young women are at considerable risk of becoming a victim of an acquaintance rapist. It is therefore necessary to ensure that all colleges and universities have policies regarding sexual assault and development of preventive programmes should be a national issue. The present study sought to investigate the strategies used by university students to report and prevent sexual assault. A survey was conducted. Simple random sampling was used to select 37 participants. The participants filled out a questionnaire. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics. Results showed that although the participants agreed to low reporting rate, the reasons given were to protect the integrity of the individual as opposed to fear of victimisation. In addition, the majority of the participants had knowledge regarding personal responsibility and institutional responsibility in the prevention of sexual assault. Some of the participants however, had limited knowledge regarding aspects to be included in the sexual assault prevention programme. Future studies should be conducted with larger samples drawn from different institutions to increase the generalizability of the findings.

INTRODUCTION

Sexual assault on campus is a phenomenon that is happening in most of the colleges and universities worldwide. It is estimated that 371 out of 100 000 women become victims each year and the incidence can be as high as one in four when attempted rape and coercion are considered (Chng and Burge 1999). Rapes that occur on college campus are usually committed by someone known to the victim (Chng and Burge 1999). The Department of Justice in the United States of America says that one in every five women will be the victim of attempted or actual sexual assault during their time spent at college or university (Johnson 2006).

Rademakers et al. (2008) found that women are much more likely to have been sexually harassed than men. The research found an overall occurrence of 20 percent in the two medical schools. A remarkable finding in this research was that 2/3rd of the perpetrators of this harassment were patients (Rademakers et al. 2008). The prevalence rate of sexual harassment in medical schools in the Netherlands was found to be low compared with international rates. However the number of women is still 1 in 3-5. Students stated the experience affected their professional conduct afterwards and they doubted their judgment about whether certain behavior should be considered appropriate, especially when other col-

leagues did not seem to regard the incidence as problematic.

The study conducted by Chng and Burge (1999) in the University of North Texas found that 45 percent of the population sampled either knew a survivor of rape or themselves raped. This affirms that rape is still a relevant issue on college campus and that rape prevention programs are still needed (Chng and Burge 1999). Suggestions for future programs include using testimonials from rape survivors, editorials and panel discussion raising student "personal knowledge" of rape survivors which in turn could raise empathy levels (Chng and Burge 1999).

A college survey conducted by the National Victim Center between the period 1995-2013 reported that rape and sexual assault victimization of female non-college (7.6 per 1000) students was 1.2 times higher than the college for students (6.1 per 1000) date (Bureau of Justice 2014). In Nigeria, stories of female undergraduates who have been compelled to drop out of college because of the real possibility of rape or death at the hands of their male-student tormentors are not uncommon (Hourel 2007).

These reports indicate that young women are at considerable risk of becoming a victim of an acquaintance rapist. Thus, it is necessary to ensure that all colleges and universities have policies regarding sexual assault and development of preventive programmes should be a na-

tional issue. Development of preventive programmes is thus important in all institutions of higher education.

In South Africa, the Human Rights Watch found that sexual abuse and harassment of girls by both teachers and other students is widespread and that girls from all levels of society and among ethnic groups are affected. In all the three provinces visited documentation of rape was done which was committed by both teachers and other students.

Research conducted in this area shows that although it is happening, it is underreported and the colleges and universities do not want to talk about it. According to the National Institute of Justice, of America the underreporting is thought to be due to the fact that the victims and the perpetrators are mostly acquainted (Bureau of Justice 2014). In most colleges and universities, they are still battling on how to handle sexual assault accusations. According to a general study in America, less than 5 percent of attempted and completed rapes on campus are actually reported. Romeo (2004) indicated that in a college survey only one out of twenty five women reported sexual assault. Rape is considered the most underreported violent crime in America's population (Bureau of Justice 1997). Even in reported cases, not enough is done to the perpetrators because in some cases, students continue with their studies despite the fact that they are found guilty of violating the university or college rules (Johnson 2006).

Some universities have policies regarding steps to be followed in case of sexual assault. Gonzales et al. (2002) found the following schools to have promising practice namely Central Washington University, Ellensburg, Washington; Lafayette College, Easton, Pennsylvania; Lewis and Clark College, Portland, Oregon; Metropolitan Community College, Omaha, Nebraska; Oklahoma State university, Stillwater; University of California at Los Angeles; University of California, at Santa Cruz and West Virginia State college, Institute, West Virginia. All the universities and colleges have policies with regard to sexual assault. The policy include definition of all forms of abuse, description of circumstances, under which sexual assault occurs, advise on what to do in case of sexual assault, list the sources available in and out of campus.

Various strategies are being used in colleges and universities such as the buddy system, promoting awareness, victim empowerment (PAVE), sexual harassment and assault peer education (SHAPES) and others. In all the strategies the following aspects have been found to cut across:-

- ♦ Individual responsibility such as staying with a friend and to avoid dangerous places, knowing your limits with regard to use of alcohol
- ♦ Institutional responsibility such as having a sexual violence policy in place which is known by everybody, increase campus lighting
- ♦ Influencing policies and legislation
- ♦ Violence prevention workshops conducted by peers
- ♦ Strengthening individual knowledge and prevention of violence programs on campus
- ♦ Self-defense; counseling and advocacy for women
- ♦ Ensuring that prevention of sexual violence become everybody's business
- ♦ Fostering coalitions and networks
- ♦ Establishment of campus sexual response team (Romeo 2004).

The research project which was conducted by the African Gender Institute (AGI) in three Southern African universities (University of Botswana, university of Western Cape and university of Stellenbosch) to evaluate the implementation of policy on sexual harassment revealed that by 2002, just under a quarter of the 18 institutions represented by participants had policies in place. None of the case studies suggested that implementation is being taken seriously as a core strand of the university's interest in building the cultures of democracy. Very few complaints had been formally reported through policy procedures. All case studies revealed pervasive current resistance to the integration of these policies into university life (Bennett et al. 2007). This clearly indicates that issues around sexual harassment which include sexual assault are not taken seriously and is not given the attention it deserves.

The extent of sexual assault in South African schools has prompted the department of Education to introduce life orientation in curriculum 2005. This focused on life skills to empower the learners on knowledge, attitudes, values that are

essential for effective participation in a democratic society. Despite the introduction, the department is still faced with the challenge of improving responsiveness of system to reported cases, encouraging reporting, support of victims, sexual harassment policy and empowering girls to defend themselves.

According to Fraenkel and Wallen (2006), a research problem is anything that a person finds unsatisfactory or unsettling, a difficulty of some sort, a state of affairs that needs to be changed. The problem at the tertiary institutions is that sexual assault is happening internationally and nationally.

Most students do not know what to do in case of assault and cannot find support or assistance such as counseling or prescription of the after morning pill which is provided at the HIV unit within the campus. This would help in the reduction of HIV infection and unwanted pregnancies. Students are usually afraid of disclosing the incident for fear of victimization by the perpetrator. The possible HIV sexually transmitted infection (STI's) and unwanted pregnancy affects the student learning and this can lead to drop-out. Therefore it is important to explore the barriers and chances for assistance in case of sexual violence at the level of students, peers, teachers and institution.

The knowledge and views of students with regard to the components of support programme to be implemented could be useful in developing preventive programme in future. Thus, the information obtained will be of value and will benefit the university, the students and the community at large and it will improve students' learning and reduce possible drop-out.

Purpose of the Study

The aim of the research was to investigate the sexual assault reporting and prevention strategies used by students.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

A survey was conducted with students from the School of Health Sciences. The design allowed for the capturing of students' opinions on sexual assault at the university. A survey therefore allowed for a short and quick study

that gave a picture of the situation that obtained at the participating university.

Population and Setting

The participants were drawn from the University of Venda which is situated in the Thulamela Municipality in the Limpopo Province of South Africa. Established in 1982, the university draws its students both nationally and internationally. The majority are South African followed by Southern African countries especially Zimbabwe, East Africa and West Africa. The University of Venda is a comprehensive university that offers both theoretically-oriented and practically-oriented courses across different disciplines.

Sampling

Cluster sampling was used to select participants from four departments (Advanced Nursing, Nutrition, Psychology and Biokinetics) in the School of Health Sciences. The method was chosen because it gave every student in the university the chance to be selected and thereby avoiding any bias. A sample of 37 first and second year students was selected. Only first and second year students in the school of Health Sciences were included in the research because these are most vulnerable group of sexual violence. There were nine male and twenty-eight female participants. Their ages ranged from 17 to 30+ years. All participants were of Black African ethnicity.

Research Instrument

A questionnaire was administered to the participants. The questionnaire was designed for a broader study that comprised of 37 questions that were divided into six sections. The sections were the socio-demographic details, knowledge of sexual violence, personal prevention of sexual violence, institutional prevention, the effects of prevention programme, and measurement of the effectiveness of the programme. The questionnaire had statements that the students had to rate on a five point Likertscale. The grading of the scale was as follows: Strongly disagree = 1; disagree= 2; uncertain=3; agree=4; strongly disagree= 5. To ensure that the instrument was reliable, the draft instrument was given to ex-

perts for further development and then pilot tested with ten students who did not participate in the main study.

Data Collection

The research was conducted in two phases. In phase one, literature regarding best practices in prevention of sexual assault in institutions of higher learning was searched to get the best practice. In phase two, questionnaires were distributed to obtain data from the participants. The questionnaires were administered to the participants who were given adequate time to complete it and give back to the researchers.

Data Analysis

Data were analysed using descriptive statistics. Response frequencies and percentages were calculated.

RESULTS

Table 1 shows that the majority (28) of the participants indicated that cases of sexual violence should be reported to the campus health clinic (48.6%) and campus security personnel (31.4%). Only one participant felt that sexual violence should be reported to the lecturer.

Table 2 shows means and standard deviations of the participants' responses to the various sexual assault prevention strategies. The mean score of 4.5 and above describes the most

Table 1: Reporting of cases of sexual violence (n = 37)

<i>Where to report</i>	<i>Response frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Campus health clinic	17	48.6
Campus security personnel	11	31.4
Lecturer	1	2.9
Friend	2	5.7
Parent	3	8.6
Sexual partner	1	2.9

common variables agreed to for particular items. For the individual prevention of sexual violence, the items most agreed to were awareness of the surroundings, knowing your limits mostly when it comes to alcohol, watching for unwanted visitors, avoiding being alone and watching your keys. All these have a mean score of 4.5 and above. Institutional responsibilities in the prevention of sexual violence had the following items as most agreed; safe environment, increasing street lights, awareness of other related programmes, training of staff and students regarding management of sexual violence.

DISCUSSION

Participants had a satisfactory understanding of personal responsibilities in the prevention of sexual violation. This was very much encouraging because it will be much easier to include these aspects in the prevention programme. Personal responsibilities included as-

Table 2: Mean scores prevention strategies (n= 37)

<i>Strategy</i>	<i>Sexual assault constructs</i>	<i>Participants</i>	<i>Mean score</i>	<i>Standard deviation</i>
<i>Individualised Strategies</i>	Awareness of surroundings	37	4.51	0.61
	Being assertive	36	4.13	1.02
	Walking with confidence	37	4.05	1.05
	Knowing your limits	37	4.78	0.48
	Watching unwanted visitors	37	4.62	0.64
	Avoid being alone	36	4.78	0.42
	Avoiding isolated spots	37	4.29	0.81
	Watching your keys	37	4.59	0.59
<i>Institutional Strategies</i>	Effective policy	37	4.43	0.73
	Policy to be well known	37	4.43	0.60
	Safe environment	37	4.62	0.54
	Increased street lights	37	4.72	0.45
	Involve all stakeholders	37	4.45	0.55
	Partnering other organizations	37	4.35	0.53
	Aware of other programmes	37	4.67	0.47
	Training of staff	37	4.67	0.47
	Training of students	37	4.78	0.41

pects such as awareness of your surroundings, being assertive, walking with confidence, knowing your limits when it comes to alcohol, watching out for unwanted visitors, avoiding walking or jogging alone especially during the night, awareness of isolated spots, watching your keys and not lending them. This is in line with the information which should be included in the programme to prevent sexual violation on campus like SHAPE (Fischhoff et al. 1987; Romeo 2004).

The majority of the participants indicated a satisfactory understanding of institutional responsibilities regarding sexual violence prevention on campus. The institutional responsibilities include aspects such as effective policy which is effective, policy to be well known around campus, safe environment by increasing lights and visibility of security personnel, involvement of all stake holders, partnership with organizations which deals with sexual violence, awareness programmes on sexual assault on campus, training of staff and students to respond to sexual assault. This is in line with the preventive programmes which are effective such as SHAPE and PAVE (Romeo 2004).

Most of the participants displayed a satisfactory understanding of the effects of sexual assault preventive programme (94.4%). Participants agreed that the programme would increase reporting of sexual assault, increase knowledge regarding sexual assault, improved safety on campus, reduction of HIV/AIDS and STI's, increased output rate of students. The participants had a satisfactory understanding (88.0%) of the measurements or parameters which could be used to check the effectiveness of the programme. The majority of the participants preferred anonymous reporting of sexual assault (80.5%). Sexual violence is one crime that is less reported and this could be due to stigma attached to it. This has been found to be in line with the study conducted by Romeo (2004) where it was reported that only 1 in 25 women reported the crime of sexual violence. This supports the low reporting rate of the sexual violence. The reasons provided for anonymous reporting were to ensure privacy and confidentiality on the part of the victim (46%), avoiding being blamed or judged (29%) and fear of rejection (25%). However, Flack et al. (2014) found high reporting rate from a sample of two hundred and eighty female students in the northeastern United States.

In this study participants showed a limited understanding of aspects to be included in the

preventive programme, they managed to indicate aspects which are crucial to form part of the prevention programme. The suggestions included an integrated unit dealing with all forms of abuse, a clear procedure of what to do in case of assault, education and training of staff and students, involvement of all stakeholders, creation of enabling environment to enable the policy to function and regular evaluation of the programme. The findings were similar to findings by other researchers on what should be included in a sexual violation prevention programme (Fischhoff et al. 1987; Romeo 2004) such as SHAPE and PAVE.

CONCLUSION

The participants demonstrated high level of understanding of sexual violence. In line with what was found in the literature 48, 6% agreed that it is prevalent on campus. Information from participants indicated that both students and lecturers were aware of the prevention and occurrence of sexual violence. They were able to suggest preventive strategies. Although the participants agreed to low reporting rate of sexual violence, the reasons given was to protect the integrity of the individual as opposed to fear of victimization as reflected in the literature.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The policy document on sexual violence should be accessible to all stake holders for the effective management of sexual violence on campus. There is need for training of lecturers, students and non-academic staff in the management of sexual violence. The protocol for reporting cases of sexual assault should be clearly spelt out. It is the responsibility of everybody at the university to fight sexual violence on campus.

LIMITATIONS

The number of participants was small and hence it was difficult to make generalization. The study relied on the perceptions of the participants which may not fully explain the phenomenon. In addition, the participants' perceptions may not be reliable. Therefore future research studies should look on including all the schools and not only one school so that it will be possible to generalize the findings.

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