RESEARCH ARTICLE:

"Just Shut Up and Take It": South African University Students on Sexual Harassment

Sahara Jagath[1] and Vijay Hamlall[2]

Abstract

Sexual harassment and gender-based violence have become pervasive and normal within South African society. This trend is of grave concern at colleges and universities. Drawing on the social construction of the gender theory approach, this study explored the perceptions and experiences of sexual harassment among students at a South African university. The nature and causes of sexual harassment were examined. Twenty undergraduate students — twelve females, five males, one queer and two bisexual students—participated in this study. Data was generated using individual interviews and focus group discussions. Sexual harassment was prevalent at the university in the form of verbal, non-verbal and physical harassment. We argue that harassment stems from broader constructs of masculinity and patriarchal power that challenge and effectively silence victims. Non-reporting of harassment largely sanctions sexual harassment at the university. Female students were the main victims of gender-based violence with male students being the main perpetrators. LGBTQIA students were found to be vulnerable to harassment, mainly because of their sexual preference. The study revealed the need to create better awareness of what constitutes sexual harassment and gender-based violence and suggests that victims, perpetrators and university staff collaborate to tackle the scourge. We propose the necessity for focused and ongoing education and awareness campaigns on campus.

Keywords: sexual harassment; South African university students; masculinity; non-reporting

Introduction

Sexual harassment in universities is a serious global problem and has been identified as a severe educational hazard, affecting approximately twenty-five percent of all female students worldwide (Bondestam and Lundqvist, 2020). This study explored the perceptions and experiences of sexual harassment among students at a South African university to identify its nature and causes.

Sexual harassment at universities is seen as pervasive, although there is still limited data on its prevalence across countries and regions to adequately define the scale and scope of the problem (Dion, *et al.*, 2022). In South African universities, sexual harassment, and gender-based violence (GBV) have become endemic and have reached alarming levels (Davids, 2019; Makhafola, 2020; Finchilescu and Dugard, 2021). A more recent study by Hendricks (2022) has shown that, despite sexual harassment awareness campaigns, sexual harassment is prevalent and rampant in universities in South Africa. However, studies of sexual harassment of students at South African universities are limited. Furthermore, existing studies primarily focus on harassment perpetrated by staff and faculty, with a particular emphasis on quid pro quo sexual harassment. Further, calls have been made for more qualitative studies to explore sexual harassment among students at higher education institutions in South Africa (Oni *et al.*, 2019). Therefore, this qualitative study aimed to explore the perceptions and experiences of sexual harassment

[1]Durban University of Technology, saharajagath@gmail.com | http://orcid.org/0009-003-2028-7934
[2]Durban University of Technology, vijayham1@gmail.com | http://orcid.org/0009-003-2028-793

among students at a South African university. The nature and causes of sexual harassment at the university were examined.

Many studies of sexual harassment have focused on the experiences of victims and the behaviour of perpetrators without reflecting on how constructions of masculinity affect violent behaviour. However, there is an increasing awareness of the need to also consider how masculinity construction and societal expectations of male behaviour can contribute to or shape attitudes toward sexual harassment. It is important to determine the nature and causes of sexual harassment in every institution to develop strategies that will help in the prevention and reduction of its occurrence. This study draws on Judith Lorber's theory of social construction of gender, which maintains that gender is continuously constructed and reconstructed through human interaction and social life. As a result, gender becomes a part of the stratification system, which unevenly positions men above women (Lorber, 1994; 2000). Thus, it may be extrapolated from the theory that sexual status and behaviour may reflect gender status. The thread of masculinity construction runs throughout this paper. We argue that understanding of proving manhood and the shaping of masculine identity relate to the nature and causes of sexual harassment. Of course, there are several contextual factors that feed into the events that occur in the enactment of sexual harassment. We consider this constellation of factors to be causes of sexual harassment.

Traditional gender norms commonly drive young men to present themselves as strong, competitive, in control, and unburdened by vulnerability. These cultural scripts prize toughness, anger, hostility, and emotional control. Emotions characterised by vulnerability, including sadness, anxiety, and fear, trigger shame and humiliation among many young men (Rice *et al.*, 2018). Di Bianca and Mahalik (2022) argue that societal expectations of traditional masculinity contribute to health issues, relational oppression, and social injustices. They assert that these issues stem from disconnections between individuals and society, which reinforce rigid notions of manhood, especially among boys and young men. For most young men, peers are especially central in shaping and perpetuating masculinity norms. Male peers contribute to the upholding of prevailing masculinity norms by challenging each other physically and verbally or encouraging risk-taking practices (e.g., alcohol, drug use, and unsafe sex). They also challenge each other to show their masculinity through the early sexual conquest of girls. Any violation of masculinity norms is penalized by ridicule, including homophobic insults and bullying (Kågesten *et al.*, 2016).

An international study by Heilman and Barker (2018) found that the strongest driver of harassment by young men was their attitude about what it meant to be a man. The study revealed that young men who believed in toxic ideas of manhood most strongly were most likely to have perpetrated sexual harassment. Heilman and Barker (2018) posited that the driver of young men's harassment, more than any other factor surveyed, was how much they believed in or have internalized toxic ideas about masculinity. Haider (2016) argued that within patriarchy, the female was observed as an object of weakness to assert masculine power and authority and subjugated into gendered norms, resulting in private violence, such as domestic violence, and public violence. Gavidia (2019) concurred that a strong link existed between sexual harassment and conforming to masculine peer norms. Swartz *et al.* (2018) in a longitudinal study of eight universities in South Africa, found that the participants understood gender differences through the lens of patriarchy. The participants saw patriarchy as a social system that perpetuated male dominance and advantage in every sphere of life, both on campus and in society at large. According to most participants in the study, patriarchal practices are learned through culture and perpetuated through socialisation processes (Swartz *et al.*, 2018).

October (2020) opined that too often the focus of intervention programmes has been on women and how they can protect themselves from violence and then take control of their sexual lives. According to October (2020) and Morrell *et al.* (2013), since men largely dictate the timing of sexual engagements and movements of women, interventions need to involve men and boys to end GBV and change attitudes and behaviours. Interventions that include victims and perpetrators could significantly decrease incidents of violence, sexual harassment and GBV. The apartheid regime has left a legacy of social and economic inequality. According to Human Rights Watch (2021), South Africa's president characterized GBV in South Africa as a 'second pandemic' after the coronavirus. Despite the lack of accurate statistics, it is evident that sexual harassment rates are high, both for women and for LGBT people.

However, the South African legislature has only recently begun to address all forms of sexual harassment (Department of Employment and Labour , 2022).

While international institutionally based studies of sexual harassment exist, only a few have been conducted in South Africa, such as the study by Oni *et al*. (2019), and even fewer have been conducted among students at universities. Flowing from the limited research are policy deliberations to reduce sexual harassment against women. Far too often, these policies are used as reactive responses, focusing on trying to 'stop' sexual harassment without giving due attention to promoting non-violent forms of behaviour. As a result, alternative ways of behaviour are marginalised. If universities are to become less violent, they need to increase the imperative on the nature and causes of violence that would inform intervention programmes as proactive measures to address sexual harassment (Saferspaces, 2019). There will never be a simple way of measuring the relative influence of different institutions on sexual harassment; however, to understand and address this scourge, we must explore its nature and causes, which would shed light on the structures, practices and institutional arrangements that will in turn inform intervention strategies.

A few studies of sexual harassment at South African universities have identified broad causes that relate to environmental, structural and cultural factors, which include socio-economic conditions, class segregation, grading and scheduling, and racial and religious bias (Akpotor, 2013; Ngidi and Moletsane, 2015; Peacock, 2019). The Saferspaces (2019) report on GBV at higher learning institutions proposed that higher learning institutions in South Africa are not homogenous and consequently are likely to have a commonality between risk factors and nature, but institutional norms play a tremendous role. The report noted that gender inequality, attitudes and beliefs, and hegemonic masculinity influenced the likelihood and response of sexual harassment and GBV occurring on campus. Research conducted by the Higher Education HIV/AIDS Programme (HEAIDS, 2010) at South African universities suggested that poverty, hunger, desperation and social mobility are contributing factors that compel women to use their bodies to survive.

There is no reason to believe that the studies mentioned above all relate to a common cause of sexual harassment since these studies relate to different contexts and eras. While the contexts in the above studies of GBV and sexual harassment vary, male dominance is connected to them all and a key argument in this paper is that understanding these connections is necessary and important.

Methodology

A qualitative approach was used in this study. The strength of qualitative research is its ability to provide complex textual descriptions of how people experience a given research issue and information about the 'human' side of an issue (Denzin and Lincoln, 2012). Recent studies by Oni *et al*. (2019) in South Africa suggest that qualitative studies are more suited to the sexual harassment and victimisation of students in higher institutions in South Africa.

The participants in this study consisted of twelve female, five male, one queer and two bisexual students between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five. Altogether, twenty university students participated in this study. The participants were recruited through referrals from the student representative council. Men play an active role in shaping women's identity and controlling their behaviour. For this reason, the study also gave a voice to male students. The group was diverse in terms of culture, language, ethnicity, race and socio-economic status. This study utilised individual interviews and focus group discussions for data generation. One-on-one interviews were conducted with all participants to ascertain their personal experiences and opinions about sexual harassment at the university. Each interview lasted for approximately 45 minutes. Eighteen participants were interviewed virtually via Microsoft Teams and two via WhatsApp video call. Three focus group discussions were conducted after completing all the individual interviews. The first focus group comprised five female participants, the second comprised four males and one queer participant, and the third comprised one queer, one bisexual, one male and two female participants. All focus group discussions were approximately 45 minutes in duration. The same interview schedule was used for all the focus groups.

This study utilised inductive analysis, in which "patterns, themes and categories emerged from the data rather than being developed prior to collection" (Azungah, 2018). In the inductive approach, theories about what is happening are grounded in direct programme experience rather than being imposed on the setting by pre-determined constructions (Patton, 1990). In our analysis of the transcripts, we looked for recurring regularities in the data. This was the first pass at coding the data. Through this process, we accumulated an array of recurring concepts, phrases, topics, patterns and loose themes. The second pass through the data involved combining any ideas that overlapped with one another. This process involved organising ideas and identifying the axes of the key concepts. We used a series of provisional categories to devise broad categories based on our familiarity with the research data and field of study. This process is commonly known as axial coding (Neuman, 2000). The last step was to closely examine the many propositional statements that emerged from the data categorisation and develop core generalisations or ideas. Some of the propositions were more important than others in contributing to the focus of the inquiry. These propositions formed the major themes of the study.

Findings and Discussion

We started our discussion with an analysis of the nature of sexual harassment as reported by the participants and then proceeded to discuss the causes of sexual harassment at this university.

Theme 1: Nature of sexual harassment

In our discussion on the nature of GBV, we classified the enactment of the violence into the various forms that manifested themselves on the university campus, which was organised into two main categories: verbal harassment and physical harassment. The responses from the participants revealed that the male students held different views about what constitutes verbal harassment from those of the female students. Most of the male respondents did not regard their suggestive remarks, crude sounds and comments directed at the female students as harassment.

> *"When we whistle and make comment[s] about the girls, they must understand that we are simply admiring them. That is how men do it."* (Phila, male-Male focus group)

> *"These modern girls, they want attention. Me telling them that they look sexy and hot and even when I ask them to go on dates, it's nothing. … If you are a man, you say these things; it excites them."* (Ndumiso: male-Male focus group)

> *Girls like boys who talk dirty, it's showing passion. We boys know this."* (Gerald: male-Male focus group)

Female participants, in contrast, were quite vociferous in that any behaviour that made them feel uncomfortable was regarded as sexual harassment with undertones of GBV.

> *"These comments that they make, especially when they [are] in a group, just irritates the hell out of me."* (Nontobeko: fe female-Individual Interview)

> *"The sly remarks and catcalls—I don't like it. To me, this is sexual harassment, and worse, the boys won't admit it. They see it as a joke. It can affect a person in a bad way."* (Pauline, female-Mixed focus group)

> *"They give these silly comments and remarks. … what business is it as to who I am dating or even having sex with? It is very frustrating; my sexual partners and their gender is my business. It's not right when they talk to make me feel small."* (Portia, female-Mixed focus group)

While, in most cases, the male students admitted to verbal taunts. It is significant to note that they did not consider their actions to be harassment. In the main, the male students perceived their verbal gibes as less serious and not harmful to the females. Most of the male students felt that it was expected of them as males and was normal displays of male behaviour. While this behaviour was perceived by the male students as flattering and flirtatious, the female students perceived it as intimidating and harassing. Recent studies of sexual harassment also found that men and women tend to have opposite perception gaps of GBV (Sánchez *et al.*, 2022; Crittenden *et al.*, 2021). It is important to understand the kind of masculinity that men construct and how it contributes to and influences the

way men treat women. Men who subscribe to certain versions of masculinity attempt to maintain and prove their masculinity through public displays of asserting power and control over women (Messerschmidt, 2019). We see evidence of this mentality among some of the male students: "*That is how men do it;*" "*If you are a man, you say these things*"; and "*We boys know this*".

The interviews conducted also revealed that physical sexual harassment of female students was very prevalent on campus.

> *"I have been physically touched in my privates many times. As you pass, a smack on the bums, [or] worse. Even when you try to push them away, it's not always possible."* (Zola, female: Individual Interview)

> *"… as a queer, the worst is the corrective beating forced onto you because you are told that you need to be normal."* (Mthoko, male-Mixed focus group)

> *"Girls are physically sexually abused; I have seen it many times. [I am] not going to lie."* (Gerald, male: Individual Interview)

> *"Sometimes the touching is so polite and gentle—the touch in the lower back, the stroke of hair—you don't realise that it is sexual harassment…. You think it's unintentional …. Then suddenly, before you realise it, you [are] pushed up against a wall, a tree and it turns violent so very quickly."* (Angela, female: bisexual: Mixed focus group)

> *"I am Bi. Not all males can handle that I am attracted to females as well. I don't hide and am not ashamed of this. I have been exposed to violent, aggressive behaviour. Physically grabbed, shoved and shaken up to fix me."* (Kate, bisexual: Individual Interview)

> *"Girls like it when we are rough and tough; they want it … to be touched in a certain way … They pretend to be ethukuthele (angry), but it's just an act. The real guys know how to give them what they want".* (Sipho, male: Mixed focus group*).*

Physical sexual harassment took the form of unwanted touching, smacking, subtle stroking and being physically rough. The queer student and the bisexual student both mentioned that they were physically assaulted to "beat" and "shake" them, to "fix" and make them "normal". It was found that the assailants in numerous cases targeted the victims to force them to conform to societal expectations.

In some instances, the sexual harassment was blatant, as described by Zola (female participant), Gerald (male participant) and Mthoko (queer participant), while in other instances, the harassment was subtler, as narrated by Angela (bisexual female participant). In Angela's case, the subtle harassment quickly escalated to blatant and overt harassment. From the evidence above, it is clear that generally, many male students displayed dominance, control and power over their female counterparts. This converged with the findings of Makhafola (2020) at the University of Johannesburg, in that women are constantly reduced to sexual and reproductive beings, and this is 'problematic in shaping' women to be well-adjusted and productive human beings.

Sexual harassment can take many forms and the ambiguity can make the victim confused and doubtful. Although the male students agreed that physical more violent behaviour such as rape and assault is sexual harassment, they did not recognise the verbal and non-verbal forms of behaviour as problematic and did not regard the behaviour as serious. This aligned with other research findings that the more severe the behaviour (rape and assault), the greater the possibility of the incident being labelled as unacceptable and denounced (Olawale *et al.*, 2021; Davids, 2019; Kabaya, 2016). In this study, none of the participants indicated that they were victims of rape or committed rape in their discussions of sexual harassment. It could have been that the survivors of rape were too embarrassed or ashamed to discuss rape with me, but we cannot show that they actively concealed this information.

Khumalo *et al.* (2021) noted that among young men at a university in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, there was a dominant form of masculinity that influences boys' and men's understandings of how they must act in order to be 'acceptably' male and that this dominant mode is associated with reinforcing what Judith Butler (1990) coined as

the 'heterosexual matrix'. Enforcing and affirming heteronormativity is the standard of what it means to be a 'real' man. We found in this study that many male students drew on their understanding that heteronormativity equates to being normal and engaged in acts of physical violence as a way of affirming their resistance to non-traditional gender identities. However, it does not automatically follow that all men accept or aspire to meet these norms for masculine behaviour.

Theme 2: Causes of sexual harassment

It is clear in the report on GBV in South Africa (2016) that the cause of sexual harassment cannot be attributed to a single factor but to an interplay of individual, community, economic, cultural and religious factors interacting at different levels of society. An important aim of this study was to investigate the causes of sexual harassment in this setting of the university. Below, we discuss some of the broad causes of sexual harassment at this university.

Heilman and Barker (2018) argue that GBV is an expression of the fragility of masculinity and the perpetuation of masculinity and male dominance. While this violence can be discussed in terms of men's aggression, it operates within the dualism of activity and passivity, masculinity and femininity. Neither can exist without the other. This is not to blame women for being beaten, nor to excuse men who beat. It is but an indication that the various forms of men's violence against women are a dynamic affirmation of masculinity that can only exist as distinguished from femininity. Studies by Davids (2019) on GBV in South African universities and Heber (2017) confirm the link between GBV and these factors. This argument was very evident in the testimonies of both male and female students in this study. It was also evident that the young men used violence or the threat of violence against the females to affirm their masculinity by exploiting female passivity.

> *"We, girls are always the victims; they feel it's their right, they laugh at us when we refuse. We are afraid to fight back. … They have more power…. Don't say no…. You [are] at fault... Just shut up and take it!"* (Sindy, female-Individual Interview)

> *"The truth is, men do this because of the feeling of power. Men feel superior to women. Women are their toys. They have to prove themselves as men."* (Mthoko: queer-mixed focus group)

> "*Let me show you what a real man can do…. The negative comments follow me, especially when with a female partner…. They cannot accept that I like being with females as well. There is a feeling that I threaten their manhood."* (Kate, bisexual-Individual Interview)

> *"There is power when the boys are in a group; the whistling, the comments … we do it also to be accepted…. The more we give girls a hard time … the more we accepted."* (Gerald, male-Individual Interview)

> *"Men use force. That's the way it is. We have to show everyone that we are men."* (Sipho, male-Individual Interview)

Haider (2016) argued that sexuality is socially constructed as gendered and that the sexual source of oppression is a symptom of the gendered social order. According to Kabaya (2016) and Jewkes *et al. (*2015), the abuse of power and power disparities are drivers of sexual harassment. Men perpetrate sexual violence as a declaration of their authority over and control of women.

The female students' resignation and acceptance (Sindy: *I accept it.... Afraid to fight back…. They have more power…. Don't say no…. You [are] at fault.... Just shut up and take it!")* was a clear indication of patriarchal norms being internalised. In many cases, masculine privilege was deeply ingrained, and thereby, masculine assumptions became normalised. This was evident in this study; for example, Sipho in his narrative, alluded to this: "*Men use force. That's the way it is. We have to show everyone that we are men."* The culture of patriarchy in South Africa privileges men and gives them access to power (Tshoaedi, 2017). The participants interviewed in this study also alluded to the entitlement of men (Sindy: "*It's their rights*") and the minimal consequences of the abuse of power and sexual harassment, which is seen as part of expected gender performance within a masculine culture: "*They feel it's their right"; "The truth is men do this because of the feeling of power"; and "Men feel superior to women."*

Most of the female participants during the individual interviews mentioned that students did not take sexual harassment seriously unless it was rape. Below are extracts from interviews with female participants who did not report the sexual harassment.

> *"I feel uncomfortable about the touching, catcalling, whistling and naming, but I don't report. It's just boys being boys…. Anyway, what will happen. I know these boys. It will just get worse. They will label and pick on me. … Maybe, if it gets to rape… yah... Then."* (Mbali, female-Individual Interview)

> *"… It's not been that serious, like rape or anything. I don't report it. Don't want to look stupid. Happens all the time. I know of a first-year student who did report. Tjoe, it was not nice. She was questioned so much, making out like it was her fault. The person that did it, nothing happened, no action. Worse, this girl was given such a hard time after by male and female students. The boy was udlama kakhulu (very violent) with her."* (Lottie, female-Individual Interview)

> *"You see the boys say and do all these things to us that makes me uncomfortable. They say they are joking and having fun. I know it is wrong, but everyone takes it like a joke. So, I don't report or say anything, also because it will make my life on campus harder."* (Pauline, female-Female focus group)

> *"I did not tell anyone. Don't want them to look at me, label me, and say I'm a tease. What the boys do to us, is not nice. We expected to deliver the goods. It goes with... born a female. But I am too nginamahloni futhi nehlazo (embarrassed and ashamed)."* (Pretty, female-Individual Interview)

> *"These violations are so common. The males do it all the time. We are so used to it. Even in our homes, community. This behaviour is happening everywhere. I don't report. It's like normal behaviour."* (Kate, bisexual-Individual Interview).

> *"We see the females and LGBTQIA+ people abused all the time. We keep quiet. We don't want more agg [aggression] towards us. The drama that follows [is] not worth it. More labelling, stereotyping. Authorities basically do nothing. They just don't know what to do. Most of us put our heads down and get on with it."* (Mthoko, queer-Mixed focus group)

The reasons that students provided for not reporting sexual abuse ranged from not regarding the violations as serious enough, fear of embarrassment and shame, accepting the offences as normal behaviour, fear of being labelled and stereotyping, and concerns that no real action will be taken by the authorities if reported. If sexual harassment is not reported, there will be no sanctions for the perpetrators. One of the major factors linked to higher rates of men's perpetration of sexual violence is the absence of sanctions against perpetrators (Flood *et al*., 2022).

The majority of the female participants indicated that rape was the only form of sexual harassment that should be reported. This suggested that the other forms of sexual assault perpetrated, albeit unacceptable, by the victims were not regarded as serious enough to report. Markram (2020) referred to this as patriarchal silencing that renders women powerless in their capacity to define or communicate their own experiences, as indicated by Pauline, who did not "*say anything*" and Kate, who accepts that "*this behaviour is happening everywhere.*" In the female focus group discussions, students mentioned that they did not report the offences because of the fear of being labelled, stereotyped and victimised. They all declared that the harassment made them uncomfortable and that they knew that it was a violation, but they were afraid of retaliation from the perpetrators and possible physical abuse. According to Gqola (2015), patriarchal definitions of women and gender enable people to adopt protectionist discourses that place doubt on the victim of sexual harassment. Langa (2020); Gqola (2015) and Makhafola (2020) all concurred that women in universities and society at large do not report incidents of sexual crimes out of fear of being doubted by peers, colleagues and law officials. It was the fear of retaliation, stigma and shame that kept Lottie, Andrea, Pretty, Kate, Pauline and Mbali, as well as the many victims on campus, silent. The perpetration of sexual harassment with impunity is enabled by the lack of reporting (Markram, 2020).

According to Davids (2019), individuals are more predisposed to committing GBV on campus because of their belief that they could get away with it. Non-reporting of violations has a direct result of no repercussions, thereby perpetuating GBV and sexual harassment.

The individual interviews and focus group discussions further revealed that social and economic factors played a predominant role in the perpetration and perpetuation of sexual harassment at this university.

> "*Women submit because we have the marche* (money*) and the female students are away from home. They have no money. They have needs. It's soma like a barter, cash for sex...*", (sniggers and laughs). (Gerald, male; Male focus group)

> "*I have had sex with a few first-years. I give them something afterwards.... No big deal. She has what I want, and I have what she wants. Most of the guys are doing this.*" (Sipho, female: Individual Interview)

> "*When we are out drinking, he gets violent sometimes with me; he does not realize what is happening .... He is sweet when he is not drunk. I stick with him for he pays for my stuff. Sees to my needs, even toiletries, even for mensa (*sanitary wear*).*" (Nontobeko, female-Individual Interview)

> "*At home, we have no money. Nobody is working. I have NFAS (*bursary*) to study. But there is no other money.... I had relations where the guys were rough, I accept it. Because they see me right. Pay for my expenses. Take me places.*" (Zola, female-Individual Interview)

> *So, when I came to Tegween (*Durban*) to study, there were guys that I went out with. They do things to your body. I accepted it. I need someone to take care of my expenses. I know it won't be forever. I will get a job after I study.*" (Eve, female-Female focus group)

> Sindy: *I learned to take harassment as men's nature and started to look for tips to be safe in my first year. I need to live; they have the money. I learned to ignore the other abuses.*" (Sindy, female: Individual Interview).

Male power and privilege were wound into the fabric of campus life, where many male students controlled the female students and, in many cases, sexually harassed them as a trade-off to having the financial means to support the economic needs of the female students. Isaacs (2022) opines that a lack of access to money is a primary contributory factor to the increasing levels of GBV.

In all the discussions, interviews and focus groups, the participants revealed that the first-year female students were most vulnerable to sexual harassment due to financial necessity. The lack of financial agency among women was seen as a key cause of sexual harassment on campus. These findings resemble the data from GBV studies conducted by Shefer and Ngabaza (2015) at a South African university, which revealed that it was common for female students to engage in sexual relationships to help them pay for photocopies, study fees, or to raise their social status. This study found compelling evidence that a link does exist between sexual harassment and socio-economic insecurity.

Conclusion

The responses from the participants revealed gendered, divergent views and perceptions of sexual harassment on campus. Whilst the female students were clear that all behaviour—physical, verbal and non-verbal—that was undesired and made them uncomfortable was deemed sexual harassment, many of the male students had different views of what constituted sexual harassment. In many instances, the male students perceived their sexually aggressive behaviour as mere displays of their masculinity. There was sufficient evidence in this study to suggest that certain understandings of what it is to be a man and the shaping of masculine identity relate to the nature and causes of sexual harassment at this university. However, we also argue that there is a range of contextual factors that feed into the events that occurred and that relate to sexual harassment. The South African government ratified and adopted several regional and international conventions and protocols that focus on eradicating sexual harassment. It is therefore important to understand the nature and causes of sexual harassment as a central step

in designing effective policies aimed at its elimination. Under the assumption that social norms influence behaviour, our findings suggest that it would be beneficial to design campaigns that consider the role of men in perceptions of sexual harassment. Masculinity that focuses on male privilege from a patriarchal social order and hegemonic masculinity is an important lens to secure changes in social norms and create an environment conducive to a positive learning environment. The arguments in this paper will provide an understanding of the underlying reasons for behavioural patterns such as sexual harassment, which would allow for effective preventative intervention.

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