

Understanding gender-based violence at universities

Anthony Collins

anti@webafrica.org.za

- Research over several years (2008-2013) at UKZN Howard College.

- Linked to courses in Violence and Trauma.
- Data from Risk Management Services, Student Counselling and various ad-hoc support and intervention initiatives.

(Gender-based Violence Working Group, Safe Campus Project, Students Against Rape and Hate)

- Several new victim studies (including Gordon and Du Randt), primarily in-depth qualitative research projects.

- Focus topics:
sexual violence against women,
intimate partner violence,
homophobic violence.
- Designed to guide policy and interventions
to reduce gender-based violence on campus,
to improve victim support services, and
to challenge gender-based violence more
broadly in society.

Problems:

- Institutional understanding of GBV and interventions is deeply misguided, linked to popular myths, and based on formal reporting of offences.
- This leads to view that problem is primarily infrequent rape of female students by criminal outsiders who breach security mechanisms of the university.
- The kinds of GBV that are reported tend to follow this pattern, but overwhelmingly it is not reported, and more often takes different forms.

- GBV is concealed by taboos, stigma, shame, and feelings of guilt and complicity.
- Beliefs that sex is a private topic, sexual victimization is shameful, and the victim must in some way contributed to the assaults.

The more the incident does not fit with the idea of a stranger-rape, the more powerfully these myths operate.

- For these reasons crime-reporting statistics are highly misleading, and survey research tend to solicit inaccurate responses.

Both also impose preconceived categories on the phenomena.

- Effective research a relationship of trust which allows open-ended disclosure of personally significant experiences.
- Our research used in depth interviews and focus groups, often building on relationships of trust already establish through teaching and activism.
- Thematic analysis allows conceptualisation of experiences, critical discourse analysis allows exploration of how social meaning shape experience and identities.

Key findings:

- i) sexual coercion is widespread, especially within social and romantic relationships (date rape rather than stranger rape)
- ii) intimate partner violence within relationships is the biggest problem (includes murder)
- iii) widespread hostility to gay and lesbian students and men perceived as effeminate. Includes cases of rape of gay men by straight men

- Most incidents (over 95%) are not reported. Even when reported, many complaints are withdrawn.
- Perpetrators often rely on positions of institutional power.
- Most forms of violence are not linked to failures of security services, but normalisation of violence in social relationships and everyday life. Escalations of ordinary conflict, and extensions of everyday forms of inequality and authority.