

“It’s just not going to happen to me.”:

**Addressing fear and gender-based violence among
female residence students at the University of
KwaZulu-Natal**

Sarah Frances Gordon¹

*¹Department of Psychology,
University of Cape Town
South Africa*



Prevalence of Gender-Based Violence

- Prevalence of GBV in South Africa
- Rape Capital of the world
- In 2012, 55201 rapes were reported to the police.
- Female homicide is 6 times higher than the global rate.



Gender-Based Violence at UKZN

- Mabel Palmer Residence Rape- 2007
- Safety Review- 2007
- GBV activism groups
- Security budget expanded



Insidious Trauma

- Brown (1996, p.105) argues that a woman does not have to be raped to experience the psychic trauma of gender-based violence as the “absence of safety in the daily lives of women and other non-dominant groups” becomes a source of trauma.
- As a woman living within this dangerous context where GBV is prevalent, normalized and eroticized by men, the implications for trauma are inevitable.
- How can we not be affected?

Research Design

- Explore how female residence students at UKZN understand and experience gender-based violence and safe sex practices.
- A social constructionist approach is used to explore how female UKZN residence students' talk reveals the ways in which they construct their understanding of these issues.

Data Collection

- Unstructured interviews
- 12 female residence students from Howard College Campus
- What problems do you and other woman face in residence?
- Fear, safety, security, gender-based violence & safe sex practices

Data Analysis

- Discourse Analysis

- ❖ Discourses of Fear

- ❖ Discourses of Women's Responsibility

- ❖ Discourse of Male-Dominated Relationships

- ❖ Discourse of Sex-as-Exchange

- ❖ Stranger Danger Discourse

- ❖ Abuse of Power Discourse

- ❖ Discourse of Speaking and Silence

Findings & Discussion

- Discourse of Fear
- “It’s just not going to happen to me”.
- ❖ P2: Well, you know, you never like to think that the people you live with can rape you or could do something sexually like harass you. You never want to think that but there are times where you have to face the reality, the possibility that it’s something that could really happen.

- Abuse of Power Discourse
- Reports that RMS security has been verbally abusing and sexually harassing students.
- ❖ P3: He was asking her out and trying to get to her room and trying to talk to her. Trying to see how far he could get with her.
- ❖ P3: He was harassing her. She was uncomfortable about the whole thing.

- Increasing distrust in University services especially RMS

❖ I: So you don't feel safe in res?

❖ P4: No I don't. Not at all. Even with the RMS that is there because sometimes they sleep (laughing) so you can cry no one will hear you.

- Discourse of Speaking and Silence
- Story of Sexual Assault in Residence

❖ P1: But from that day I realised that oh my word you think you know someone then something like that happens. So what if he raped me. You know? Nobody would have really believed me.

❖ P1: : I've tried to make it clear that what you did was not right. I don't like him anymore. I don't want us to be friends. That's what I tried to do and also talk about it. I like to talk about it. I want people to know that this happened.

- P5: I've never seen anyone who said "It has happened to me" not that they would. People don't say things.
- The power of a secret is diffused by a good listener- Rebecca Campbell

Conclusion

- One of the women, in this study speaks about these challenges that we face as women.
- *“We face rape. We face all things”.*
- Construction of womanhood that normalises gender-based violence; the fear of men; the fear of rape and acknowledges and accepts the silence of women as part of our society.

Questions?

- Do we live in a culture of violence against women?
- Why is it so accepted?
- As women are we all affected by this insidious trauma?
- When confronted with reports of violence and fear in tertiary educational institutions, how do we protect our students?
- What are the appropriate measures?

Contact Details:

gordonsarah44@gmail.com

