

Under-reportage of “sex-for-marks” cases within public universities in Zimbabwe

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Abstract

Women around the globe have suffered and still suffer from sexual harassment within their homes, workplaces, and even in schools. Despite the trending of a new form of sexual harassment termed “sex-for-marks” within university settings, there is evidence of under-reporting of these cases. Against this background, the paper sought to investigate factors that may be causing under-reporting of such cases in order to make practical recommendations that can strengthen the reporting mechanism for sexual harassment within institutions of higher learning in Zimbabwe. Underpinned by a qualitative paradigm, the paper shows that under-reporting of “sex-for-marks” cases is influenced by fear of failure, unclear reporting systems, the laxity from authorities in dealing with the cases, and the stigma and shame that is transferred on to the victims. Through the advocacy role of social work practice, the paper calls for the desensitization of sexuality and sexual behavior in order to challenge the culture of silence, which has proved to be the breeding ground for under-reportage of sex-for-marks cases. The paper further encourages universities to consider partnering with theater and music departments to offer edutainment—a way of promoting awareness on sexual harassment and the “sex-for-marks” phenomenon.