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# Policing toxic masculinities and dealing with sexual violence on Zimbabwean University campuses

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**Authors:**
Simbarashe Gukurume[1,2,3] 
Munatsi Shoko[3,4] 

**Affiliations:**
[1]Faculty of Humanities, Sol Plaatje University, Kimberley, South Africa

[2]Faculty of Social Sciences, Stellenbosch University, Cape Town, South Africa

[3]Faculty of Theology and Religion, University of Pretoria, Pretoria, South Africa

[4]UNESCO, Masvingo, Zimbabwe

**Corresponding author:**
Simbarashe Gukurume, simbarashe.gukurume@spu.ac.za

University campuses are framed as sexualised spaces marked by high sexual risk-taking behaviour and toxic masculinities that often fuel abusive relationships and sexual violence. More often, the most vulnerable groups, to this violence include sexual minorities, girls and students with disabilities. Drawing on qualitative ethnographic research and semi-structured interviews with students and staff from two universities in Zimbabwe, this article examines how toxic campus 'cultures' and campus sexual economies can be transformed and made more inclusive and safer for all students. The study uses Pierre Bourdieu's theory of practice, especially the field and habitus to understand how toxic masculinities are produced and reproduced on campus, as well as how everyday practice on campus can be instrumentalised to reconfigure coercive sexual practices and toxic masculinities. Although there is a huge body of research on sexual violence in Zimbabwe, very little of this has focused on the prevalence and experiences of this phenomenon within university campus spaces. Therefore, little is known about how students experience, perceive, and navigate sexual violence on campus, as well as institutional responses to sexual violence. Consequently, this study seeks to fill this gap and contribute to the burgeoning scholarship and debates on sexual violence, including coercive sexual practices and heteronormativity in university campus spaces. We seek to contribute to three sustainable development goals, that is goal 3 (good health and well-being), goal 5 (gender quality) and finally goal 10 (reduced inequalities).

**Contribution:** This article foregrounds the ways in which institutions of higher learning respond to sexual violence within the university campus. The key contribution of this article relates to how students' religious and socio-cultural subjectivities shaped or mediated experiences of and perceptions on sexual violence on campus. Consequently, we assert that the campus religious 'field' and students' spiritual 'habitus' had a huge influence on the campus sexual economies. The research contributes to the field of Biblical Theology engaged with Gender Justice, Health and Human Development.

**Keywords:** sexual violence; university students; sexual harassment; agency; peer pressure; toxic masculinities.

## Introduction and background

The first author, came across Linda in 2015 while conducting interviews for another research project. He was introduced to Linda by Mary, an interlocutor who was also Linda's best friend. Linda explained that she had been a victim of various forms of abuse from her boyfriend. This started when Linda's boyfriend suspected that she was having an affair with an elderly man, a NABA.[1] Linda proclaimed that: 'At one point I was badly beaten and had to go to the hospital for treatment, this abuse became frequent and when he was drunk, he would force me to have intercourse with him and always used threats of violence.

She continued,

'This seriously affected my mental health and academic performance as I struggled to focus on my studies and even missed classes and failed to submit my assignments on time.'

After enduring the abusive relationship for several months, Linda decided to break up with her abusive boyfriend, but the boyfriend refused to accept Linda's decision to end their relationship.

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1.NABA is an abbreviation for Non-Academic Bachelors Association, a moniker created by tertiary students to refer to men who are not students at tertiary institutions, but who come on campus usually in search of students who can be their girlfriends.

Instead, he threatened more violence. Linda was forced to seek protection from the authorities, although she did not report her former boyfriend for previous violence and abuse for the fear of getting him suspended or expelled from the university. Linda's story might be unique, but it was not unusual. In fact, it resonated strongly with some of the stories shared by our interlocutors during interviews and informal conversations. Many scholars have highlighted that female students who experience sexual violence like Linda during their time at university are more likely to drop out of school, and if they remain, they tend to have poor academic outcomes (Banyard et al. 2020; Compton et al. 2022; Mengo & Black 2016).

Linda's story clearly encapsulates the toxic and hegemonic masculinity that underpins campus cultures, as well as the salience of sexual violence and intimate partner violence (IPV), all of which are types of gender-based violence (GBV) on campus. The story is not only enlightening in what it reveals about the vulnerability of female students to abuse and violence but also the ways in which abused students often suffer in 'silence'. Over the years, the violence, abuse, and harassment of female students have rapidly increased in the country (Gukurume 2022). In fact, in a recent enquiry held jointly by the parliamentary portfolio committees on higher and tertiary education, innovation, science and technology, as well as women affairs, community and small to medium enterprise development across 10 tertiary institutions, revealed the pervasiveness of GBV within these campuses (Gukurume 2018; Mashininga 2022;[2] Moyo 2022[3]).

As per McDougall (1998), sexual violence is defined as:

[…A]ny violence, physical or psychological, carried out through sexual means or by targeting sexuality. Sexual violence covers both physical and psychological attacks directed at a person's sexual characteristics…. (p. 8)

The definition is further elaborated to show that sexual violence includes stripping a person naked in public, some harmful traditional practices such as cutting a person's genitals, and forced penetration into a person's vagina or anus with the use of a penis or any object (commonly referred to as rape) (McDougall 1998). In the light of, people of all sexes and genders can experience sexual violence, although the most vulnerable are women and girls. However, scholars such as Gqola (2015) argue that rape can only be experienced by a woman or a person who is feminine. Another definition according to World Health Organization (WHO) (2002) states that sexual violence and/or assault is:

[A]ny sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or acts to traffic, or otherwise directed, against a person's sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting, including but not limited to home and work. (p. 10)

Similarly, Christensen (2013) points out that sexual violence relates to a persistent and overwhelming spectrum of sexual behaviour that are exerted on an unwilling recipient that

results in physical, psychological, and social consequences. Therefore, our article focusses on sexual violence because it disproportionately affects women more than men, and also because within the contemporary Zimbabwean society, sexual violence has become widespread and is condoned, with little room for recourse for survivors (Fidan & Bui 2016; Gukurume 2022). According to Bengesai and Khan (2021) IPV is a recurrent social problem in Zimbabwe and is a consequence of patriarchal attitudes that promote the superiority of men in marital relationships while simultaneously denying women any form of agency.

Sexual violence is not only a Zimbabwean problem but it is also a global public concern. Despite the global and local commitment to eliminate all forms of violence against women and other vulnerable groups, in recent years, the sexual violence targeted at women has increased substantially to alarming levels (Gukurume 2022). This has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, where gender-based and sexual abuse were regarded as a pandemic within a pandemic (Dlamini 2021; Mantler et al. 2022; Shoko 2021) or a shadow pandemic within the African continent (Oyafunke-Omoniyi, Adisa & Oileye 2021). According to the WHO (2021), sub-Saharan Africa has the second highest prevalence of IPV globally with much of this occurring in educational institutions. In spite of its pervasiveness within university campus spaces, there are very few studies that have focused on this phenomenon (Branch, Richards & Dretsch 2009; Singh, Mudaly & Singh-Pillay 2015; Singh & Mynde 2017; Sears 2021). As such, very little is known about how university students experience and navigate sexual violence on campus. Therefore, this study is an attempt to fill this knowledge gap through a qualitative study of sexual violence at two universities in Zimbabwe.[4]

Sexual violence within Zimbabwean university campus spaces is not new. In fact, it is a phenomenon that has a long and protracted history dating back to colonial times when the first university was established in 1955 (Gukurume 2018, 2019). However, coercive sexual practices, sexual harassment, and other forms of sexually related violence have increased substantially (Gukurume 2022).

This article examines the ways in which students encounter various forms of everyday sexual violence on campus and how they experience and navigate it. In this article, we show how campus cultures and 'normalised masculinity' as well as 'toxic masculinity' have merged to reproduce various forms of violence within university spaces in Zimbabwe. There is a huge body of literature on violence within campus (Ajayi, Mudefi & Owolabi 2021; Fielding-Miller et al. 2021; Gouw 2018; Singh 2015). Bhana (2012) asserts that girls face multiple vulnerabilities to sexual violence within and beyond the campus spaces. Much of this work foregrounds a dominant and essentialist framing of boys as perpetrators and girls as victims of the campus violent cultures. However, there is emerging scholarship that deconstructs this dominant

narrative and looks at how girls have also been perpetrators of violence (see Bhana 2008). In addition, Shoko et al. (2020) shed light on how some girls facilitate the incidence of sexual violence by acting as pimps, arranging their female classmates as unknowing sexual partners for sexual predators.

## Practice, field and habitus

To understand the complexities of sexual violence on campus, we use Pierre Bourdieu's theory of practice. For Bourdieu ([1980] 1984, [1977] 1987, [1980] 1990), practice is the product of the sum of the habitus, various capitals, and the field. Alistair Macintyre (1985) notes that:

> To enter into practice is to enter into a relationship not only with its contemporary practitioners but also with those who have preceded us in the practice, particularly those whose achievements extended the reach of the practice to its present point. (p. 194)

In this sense, the term 'practice' relates to norms, values, and even deviant behaviours that have become common within a specific context or field. In this case, the campus becomes the field and the campus norms and cultures become the habitus.

Bourdieu's view on the field is that of a social space within which interactions occur, such as a university. However, this social space may exist within other social spaces and also have other social spaces existing within it simultaneously. While Thompson (2014) and Martin (2003) both worried about the blurred boundaries between Bourdieu's fields, the reality is that social spaces do occur within other social spaces with blurred boundaries between them. For an example, universities exist within towns, provinces and countries with inter-linkages existing between all these spaces.

In relation to habitus, Bourdieu ([1977] 1987) perceives it for an individual or a group as a predisposition, a tendency, or an inclination. Thus, for people within a specific social group or class, habitus is reflected in objective perception, and action that is common within the group. However, while a habitus may be embraced or condoned by one group, the same may be frowned upon by individuals from other groups. This explains why practices such as polygamy or wife inheritance are embraced by some groups, while they are frowned upon by others. Therefore, the field is an arena or space of contested ideologies and norms where various actors seek to assert themselves and their ideology and worldview over others. For us, the complex interplay between the 'field' and the 'habitus' as well as the various capitals within the field, helps us to understand the production and reproduction of specific sexual practices that can either exacerbate or ameliorate the prevalence of sexual violence on campus.

## Methodology and methods

This study employed a qualitative methodology and utilised several qualitative data collection techniques such as in-depth and semi-structured interviews. According to Fontana and Frey (2008), in-depth interviews are a critical primary data gathering technique for research related to people's experiences, inner perceptions, attitudes and feelings of reality. Therefore, in-depth interviews were ideal for this study, whose intention was to capture the lived experiences and reality of the students themselves from their own perspectives and narratives. In fact, the in-depth and unstructured nature of the interview guide and questions, enabled the participants to sway discussions and engagements in complex and diverse ways and directions. This enriched the nuances and quality of the data collected. Similarly, while the unstructured interview questions afforded the participants the freedom to express themselves in as much detail as they deemed fit, they also gave the researchers the opportunity to probe for detail and clarity on grey areas and interesting topics under discussion. We also conducted key informant interviews with university officials and student leaders as a way of corroborating narratives from students. We conducted 40 interviews, with 20 interviews from each university. Of the 40 participants purposively sampled, 25 were women and 15 were men and included students and university officials. In addition to primary data, we also relied on and used secondary sources of data, especially newspaper articles on sexual and GBV. Ethical clearance for the study was obtained from Great Zimbabwe University (GZU) School of Humanities Ethical clearance committee.

## Findings
### Forms of sexual and gender-based violence on campus

Sexual and GBV on campus take many forms. The most common include: coercive sexual practices, sexual harassment, and transactional sex. Sexual coercion, where an individual engages in a sexual activity against his or her will, is a common feature in many university campuses in Zimbabwe (Gukurume 2019), Ghana (Rominski et al. 2017), and South Africa (Clowes et al. 2009). From our interviews, we gathered that sexual coercion was prevalent in intergenerational transactional heterosexual relationships that sometimes involve old rich men and women who are referred to as 'blessers'. Such relationships are marked by unequal power dynamics, with blessers having more power on how and when to engage in sexual intercourse. Age difference and material and economic disparities tend to disempower the younger and poor students, especially female students when it comes to negotiating safe sexual practices (Gukurume 2013, 2022; Shoko et al. 2020). These power and resource asymmetries undermine the role of young students in sexual decision making and also their right to refuse sexual intercourse. These power inequities are common and inherent, and normative in gender roles (Clowes et al. 2009). This finding resonates with Compton et al. (2022) who observed that elderly men often used their financial muscles to coerce sex. Similarly, scholars have shown how gendered inequities and attendant socio-cultural mores normalise coercive sexual practices and GBV in several communities (Compton et al. 2022), including the university community. We assert that in masculine and patriarchal spaces such as university campuses, normative gender roles and gender

norms tend to directly mediate female students and academics' vulnerability to sexual and GBV. Within university spaces, a patriarchal habitus (Bourdieu [1977] 1987) is reproduced and this disposition constructs masculinities that tend to produce and reproduce sexual and GBV. This patriarchal and heteronormative habitus allow students and institutions to justify and condone toxic masculinities on campus, which exacerbates the cases of sexual and GBV.

Coerced sexual encounters often occur during date outings with male boyfriends and male acquaintances. Having invested money in these date escapades, male partners often resort to force and violence when their female counterparts refuse to offer sexual service. This was eloquently articulated by Marianne, one of our interlocutors, who explained:

> The moment you agree to go out and the male partners spend money on you, then you are vulnerable. I remember a friend of mine refused the sexual advances of a senior male student who had invested money for the trip to the outskirts of the town. She told him that she was on period: and he became very aggressive and threatened her, but fortunately she was not physically abused but many female students end up being beaten or coerced into sex. (Interlocutors, 21, Female, Masvingo)

Similar stories were shared pertaining to the circumstances under which female students find themselves vulnerable to coercive sexual encounters and rape. However, what is interesting about Marianne's story is the agency of the female students. This contradicts dominant discourse in transactional sexual relationships, which frame female students as passive victims of sexual predatory practices by male partners. Marrianne's story attests to de-toothing, a form of sexual agency, where female students are able to navigate sexual advances in transactional relationships. De-toothing is described as a scenario in which female students enjoy material benefits in transactional relationship, including money and gifts, while creatively avoiding consummating a sexual promise to their partners. For some students, this is framed as 'erotic capital', a scenario where they seek material benefits— 'economic capital'—from their valued sexuality. As such, following Bourdieu ([1977] 1987) we frame the campus as a 'field' or an arena of contestations where various actors, in this case female students, male students, female staff, male staff and 'blessers' are all competing for various forms of capitals.

Interestingly, some of our participants also reported other forms of sexual violence, which included verbal and emotional abuse. Insults, body shaming, sexist humour, and comments were also quite prevalent on campus. The patriarchal habitus that dominates the campuses where this study was conducted tend to normalise this subtle form of violence. Worryingly, some of them were so deeply ingrained in the campus social fabric that they become 'misrecognised' by both perpetrators and victims. Consequently, they go unreported and are often condoned as normative ways of being a masculine student. With regard to the prevalence of the concealed forms of violence, one of our interlocutors, Thandiwe, explained an ordeal that she encountered:

> At the end of my first week on campus as a first-year student, I went to a disco to which I was invited by a senior female student who stayed in the same boarding house as me. I thought it was just part of being a university student, but I ended up walking back alone from that disco venue after I realised that the senior female student wanted to set me up with a NABA for a sexual encounter. From that time, she has been horrible to me, she and her male friends laugh at me and call me 'Johnnie Walker', and they also shame me about my body structure. I had to find another place to stay to avoid this abuse. (Interlocutors, 20, Female, Harare)

The experiences faced by Thandiwe provide clarity on some of the nuances that are involved in sexual violence. Evidently, female students on campus can also perpetrate sexual violence that is targeted at fellow women, and they are also able to facilitate its occurrence.

## Sexual harassment

Incidences of sexual harassment also sometimes interlink with sexual coercion and transactional sex. Some of the female students who are most vulnerable to sexual harassment are those who engage in transactional sex (Masvaure 2009). Just like sexual coercion, sexual harassment takes various forms, which we categorise into less common and more common forms, the less common forms including stalking, pestering, threats if one does not agree to sex, and incidences when a woman can be held against her will, even temporarily, as a way of trying to force her into unwanted sex. One of our interlocutors, Maita, had this to say:

> Blessers and boyfriends have this in common about them. Especially if they have spent a bit of money on you or you have had sex with them before, they feel that they are now entitled to have sex with you whenever they want. This is when they start to be rough, and they can go as far as holding you hostage just so that you agree to sex. I usually refuse to go to distant places if I know that I don't want to have sex with a person. Because what would I do if they threaten to leave me there. And being a female student, I will not be having any money sometimes, just wanting to have a good time. (Interlocutors, 22, Female, Masvingo)

Maita's words show the dangers of engaging in transactional relationships. The practice of de-toothing that was illustrated here, is often frowned upon by blessers and boyfriends, often leading to violence and threats of violence. Although female students sometimes feel that favours should not always be followed by sex, most of their partners do not feel the same. One of our interlocutors who was a key informant, Chamu, pointed this out:

> Most female students who encounter sexual harassment or even get beaten by boyfriends would be facing allegations that they spent the man's money. It is clear that the men spend on the girls expecting to get sexual favours in return. (Interlocutors, 24, Male, Harare)

Chamu's explanation provides clarity on how most cases of sexual harassment occur. However, there are other cases that do not necessarily mean that the female student would have shown any interest in the perpetrator in any way. Chamu went further to explain that there are times when a man who

is interested in a female student decides to make her life uncomfortable because she is refusing his overtures. This is often a behaviour that is adopted by men in positions of power such as lecturers, administrators, or student leaders. They can threaten the female student by saying that they will give her low marks, or they will deny her accommodation on campus or other benefits that students are entitled to. This form of sexual harassment is coupled with an abuse of authority, and perpetrators use it repeatedly because it would have yielded results at some point. In addition, another key informant, Natsai, pointed out that the perpetrators are very innovative so that they perpetrate such sexual harassment through intermediaries, who are usually students, so as for them to be able to maintain deniability.

In addition to the aforementioned less common forms of sexual harassment, the more common forms of sexual harassment include body shaming, public humiliation, and jeering. Natsai pointed out that it is almost an everyday occurrence on campus to hear students whistling naughtily at a female student who is dressed skimpily. Some of the reactions can even take the form of jeering or hurling body-shaming insults at the female students. However, this is not only perpetrated by male students, even some female students can join in and sometimes they can take the lead. Staff at the institutions may also pass negative comments in public places such as in classrooms, dining rooms, or in other spaces on the campus grounds. Some of this is targeted at individuals who identify as sexual minorities, and Mucha explained this as follows:

> For people who look different, it is actually very bad. Especially those females who look and act like tomboys, they encounter a lot of jeering and public humiliation because they usually do not have sympathisers. (Interlocutors, 23, Female, Harare)

The plight of sexual minorities in Zimbabwe is closely linked to the legal status of same-sex marriage, which is criminalised by the Constitution of Zimbabwe 2013 under section 56(3), as well as sodomy, which is criminalised by the *Criminal Law (Cordification and Reform) Act, Cap 9:23, Section 73 of 2004*. Because of widespread public misinterpretation of these laws, some individuals may feel vindicated to publicly attack individuals whom they suspect to be sexual minorities (Shoko, Vermaak & Rudman 2022). This is normalised and reproduced because of what we call the heteronormative habitus that many students and academics imbibe and embody. The heteronormative habitus (Bourdieu 1987) reproduces the hegemony of heterosexuality and suppresses as well as 'otherise' all other sexualities. Consequently, violence against non-heterosexual sexualities becomes normalised.

## Drivers of sexual violence on campus and students' everyday experiences

Substance abuse was cited as one of the key drivers of risky sexual behaviour, including coercive sexual practices and GBV. Linda's story is illustrative in the way it highlights the intricate nexus between substance abuse and the prevalence of sexual

and GBV on campus. According to several scholarly works, for many male students (UBAs), excessive beer drinking is one of the many ways through which hegemonic masculinities are articulated on campus (Chagonda 2001; Gaidzanwa 1993; Gukurume 2022). Indeed, excessive drinking of alcohol and concurrent multiple sexual escapades are often valorised by many male students on campus as a powerful way of affirming their masculinity with deleterious consequences on student safety and security on campus, especially female students. This was affirmed by one of our key informants, a janitor working in student accommodation, who explained:

> Complaints of harassment and abuse including unwanted touching and whistling at female students are quite pronounced during the weekend, when many students go out for drinking and come back drunk. Some will even threaten female janitors, demanding to visit female students outside the visiting hours. (Interlocutors, 41, Female, Harare)

This was also highlighted by many of our interlocutors during the interviews. Many of them felt that when drunk, some of the students behaved wildly and often instrumentalised violence masculinities towards other students. Such embodied actions of toughness by students are often celebrated by their colleagues as heroism and a demonstration of UBA[5] machismo through violence and threats of violence. Therefore, such violent habitus often accentuate violent campus cultures that also reproduce sexual and GBV. In addition to alcoholism, peer pressure is also one of the key drivers of sexual and GBV within university campus spaces in Zimbabwe. Participants noticed that there is intensive pressure to enter into relationships, some of which are unequal and end up being abusive and exploitative relationships.

## Patriarchy and toxic masculinities

In addition to the aforesaid drivers of sexual harassment, the patriarchal nature of Zimbabwean society also contributes to the existence and perpetuation of sexual violence on campuses. As shown here, Zimbabwean law criminalises same-sex marriage, and misrepresentations of these laws have been driven by patriarchal systems. Similarly, women's position in Zimbabwean society is governed by patriarchal hegemonic systems. These are perpetuated in society by both male and female agents who support the predominant authority of men over women, and the belief that men are inherently naughty and unable to control their sexual behaviour. The other side of this argument holds on to the belief that women are at the mercy of men, while at the same time they should be chaste and hold on to their virginity so that they may be suitable wives (Buthelezi 2006). The interlocutors we spoke to presented female students as individuals who are at the mercy of men in many different ways. Both UBAs and NABAs hold a power over female students because of the economic resources or positions of influence they have on and off campus. The way men hold these positions of power is in line with what Bourdieu ([1980] 1990) referred to in his concept of the practice, which is a

5. UBA is an abbreviation of University Bachelors' Association, which is a moniker referring to any male university student.

product of current social developments together with historical influences on the prevailing status quo. This real and perceived position of authority and power is part of a patriarchal habitus (Bourdieu [1977] 1987) where masculine power is reproduced through the mundane forms of everyday practices and talks on and off campus. For us, the male–female students' distinction (Bourdieu [1977] 1987) is based on campus cultures reinforced by patriarchal stereotypes where male students are expected to be aggressive and assertive, where a no to unwanted sexual advances is interpreted as a yes (Masvawure et al. 2009). Therefore, the experiences of female students with sexual violence are worse when they do not have any men in positions of authority to support them.

## Institutional responses to sexual and gender-based violence

In dealing with the problem of sexual violence, the two institutions have devised several measures. In our interviews, it was found that there have been interventions with regard to awareness raising and curriculum development that unsettles hegemonic forms of masculinities, which tend to fuel risky sexual behaviour and sexual coercion on campus. For example, at one of the two universities, gender was a compulsory module taught to all students beginning at the first-year level. In relation to how the university was addressing the problem of violence on campus, Mr Amos, a key informant, observed:

> We have an ordinance that all students are aware of. This ordinance discourages any form of violence and abuse on campus. During orientation, we always try to make it clear that anyone who violates the ordinance will be penalised, and this is how we try to stop gender-based violence and sexual exploitation on campus. (Interlocutors, 52, Male, Harare)

In addition, the two universities emphasised that they do have interventions around life skills training. Life skills programmes provide teachings that reconfigure and transform norms and values that tend to reproduce campus cultures that condone the acceptability of sexual violence and exploitation on campus. In an interview with a key informant, it emerged that life skills interventions equip students with the necessary skills and knowledge to respond best to situations that can predispose them to sexual violence. For our key informants, life skills training and teachings are an efficient way of confronting the habits and the cultural scaffolding of rape culture (Gavey 2005), which drives coercive and non-consensual sexual practices on campus. We observed that the life skills training at both universities was similar to the bystander intervention and rape myth programmes (McMahon & Banyard 2012; McMahon 2010) of dealing with sexual violence in other countries. According to these scholars, the bystander intervention approach has become an efficacious way through which to engage the university community on sexual violence prevention. In fact, the bystander technique empowers the majority of students to be willing and has the capacity to unsettle or disrupt situations that could potentially trigger sexual violence but most importantly to castigate social norms that support and maintain sexual violence as well as to be effective and supportive interlocutors to the survivors of

sexual violence. Unfortunately, there was also evidence that life skills programmes at the universities are often poorly attended, and it is usually the same students who repeatedly attend. It was encouraging to observe that both male and female students who attend the programmes hailed them as empowering.

In an interview with Mrs Goto, a key informant in the student affairs division at one of the universities, it emerged that the institution often invoked the national GBV strategy, which is guided by the *Domestic Violence Act of 2007*, when dealing with workplace and campus-based cases of sexual and GBV. Mrs. Goto explained:

> We are always guided by the provisions of the national gender-based violence strategy when handling cases of that nature. We have zero tolerance for gender-based violence and any form of abuse on our campus, so when a case is reported, we take decisive action and also offer psychosocial support services for survivors. (Interlocutors, 43, Female, Masvingo)

Some of this social support came from peer groups who are trained to be bystanders to survivors of sexual violence. Although one of the universities has a policy on sexual harassment, many of our interlocutors felt that it is one thing to have a policy but quite another to implement it to protect students. As such, some participants felt that institutions are not strictly enforcing sexual harassment policies and other instruments to safeguard vulnerable students. It is important to notice that some of our participants felt that interventions and policies to arrest the scourge of sexual and GBV tended to be reactive rather than proactive in nature. Similarly, life skills training was not compulsory and therefore some students did not attend sessions. This meant that those who did not attend lacked information about sexual violence, the institutional reporting system, and potential recourse. This clearly shows how deeply ingrained habitus (Bourdieu [1977] 1987) accumulated over several years of socialisation makes it very difficult for students to change their practices and ways of asserting their masculinities on campus.

Both universities acknowledged the availability of on-campus counselling for victims and survivors of sexual and GBV. On campus counselling is often performed by a professional, counselling psychologist and then moves to peer-to-peer counselling for those who have shared their experience with a friend.

# Conclusions and recommendations

This study examined the prevalence and drivers of sexual violence on two university campuses and the ways in which university authorities respond to and police sexual violence. We assert that within Zimbabwean university spaces, sexual violence is an everyday reality. It manifests in complex ways and is often triggered by toxic and risky sexual practices, patriarchal norms, substance abuse, peer pressure, and toxic campus cultures, which condone sexual violence as a way of asserting hegemonic masculinities. We

argue that sexual violence on campus is complex and our analysis goes beyond dominant narratives where female students and members of staff are framed as passive victims of sexual violence. Instead, we show how male and female, as well as gender non-conforming queer students, can be victims and perpetrators simultaneously. We also argue that while university authorities respond to sexual violence through a myriad of intervention activities and programmes, such interventions are often reactive than proactive and hardly succeed in arresting sexual violence. Therefore, higher education institutions must take sexual violence seriously and lead the way in preventing it through policies and programmes that are effectively enforced and implemented.

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The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

## Authors' contributions

S.G. and M.S. contributed equally to this work.

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## Data availability

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

## Disclaimer

The views presented in this publication are those of the authors, and do not necessarily portray the views of UNESCO as well as the O$^{3\,PLUS}$ Project.

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