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PREVENTING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN STUDENTS EVERYWHERE

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The sexual conquest for a nineteen-year-old man is one step on the ladder to perceived success –Not so for the nineteen-year-old woman who did not consent ... she is violated (adopted from anonymous).

Abstract

This paper addresses issues of violence against women and girls with special reference to tertiary institutions and drawing examples particularly from university colleges and campuses. In the discussions, various forms of VAWG are flagged out to demonstrate the nature and contexts within which they occur. The paper acknowledges that while male in the same institutions may experience comparable gender-based violence from women or other men, research has shown that proportionately more women than men suffer this kind of violence and that its consequences results in relatively greater devastating effects for women. Within tertiary institutions, it is arguable that the relatively free atmosphere that has minimal restriction on dating, partying and mating presents unprecedented risks which most women students tend to take for granted and which their male peers also take advantage of to practice masculinities characterised by pervasive sexual violence such as rape, harassment, stalking and verbalised sexual abuse. Social constructionist theory guides the discussions leading to recommendations for preventive measures which locate education, awareness creation and skills-building as the fundamental drivers of policy-directed strategies aimed at preventing violence before it occurs to demand second order responses. (Word count 187)

Key words: VAWG, tertiary institutions, acquaintance/date rape, date-rape drug, sexual misconduct

* The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of the United Nations

Contextualising feminism and VAWG

Locating feminist theorising on VAWG

This paper opens with a brief contextualisation of Feminist thought that offers the fundamental springboard for ideological, theoretical, methodological as well as analytical discourse on prevention of violence against women and girls (PVAWG). Since the nexus of feminisms hinges not only on the challenging and eliminating of the multiple forms of discrimination, oppressions and injustices against women, it is imperative to lean on feminist theorising while interrogating VAWG as one of the most de-humanising of these oppressions. Notably, most feminisms ideologically converge around women's liberation from multifarious forms of oppressions all of which are essentially centred on female sexuality as revealed in many feminist studies that demonstrate VAWG as the pervasive by-product of patriarchal cultures in which men are socialised to control women's bodies and thoughts both in private and public settings. Consequently then, when women and girls begin to understand that "*their individual experience of male violence has an objective social basis and social origin*", they concomitantly begin to participate in feminist theorising (Humm, 1995: 293). The focus on PVAWG within tertiary institutions of learning, especially universities, colleges and campuses, logically foregrounds two major feminist concerns regarding women's safety, namely the nexus of economic and sexuality power relations, especially in heterosexual contexts.

As in many other social contexts, VAWG often takes the form of rape, battering, incest, sexual harassment, and pornography, among other related acts of abuse, which are oftentimes perpetrated by men as they act out scripts of presumed manhood/masculinity. The explicit use of feminist perspectives in the exploration of how men perform masculinities has resulted in the systematic understandings of concept of 'masculinities' and how the relevant constructions are linked to schooling/formal education as well as other social institutions as exemplified in sophisticated scholarship by theorists such as Connell (1994), Brod & Kaufman (1994), Sewell (1994), as well as Mac An Ghaill (1997), among others. Feminist theories have also helped to highlight not only the gender dimension of men's power over women but more so, the diversity in masculinities through which violence against women is concurrently constructed and essentialised in what is referred to as 'men's contradictory experiences of power based on varying contexts' (see Brod, 1987; Hearn and Morgan, 1990; Kaufman, 1993). In addressing PVAWG, Coltrane's (1994) caution regarding clear distinction of the pro-feminist position that focuses on the gender power relations using academic interpretive frameworks that help to legitimately locate constructions of masculinities and their ensuing manifestations within a gender analysis. The relevance of this caution becomes critical especially in the contexts of stereotypical clichés such as "boys will be boys" that tend to celebrate and glorify male bonding in acts that are harmful not only to other males but more so to women and girls – in this case, through male violence.

Why tertiary educational institutions and PVAWG?

The concept of tertiary in the context of education is used to refer to the third stage/level of education that entails all post-secondary education. It includes but not limited to universities which are a key component of the tertiary educational systems where higher learning activities are organised. Hence, tertiary institutions encompass the public and private universities, colleges, technical training institutes, community colleges, nursing schools, and research laboratories; distance learning centres, among others that award certificates, diplomas, or academic degrees at this level. As a key component of tertiary educational institutions, the university is distinguished for its concern with higher education (teaching and learning), research and community service as well as the granting of academic degrees,

diplomas and certificates in a variety of subjects at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels (see online Macmillan Dictionary Thesaurus, 2009-2012). Hence, PVAWG ought to remain a core concern for tertiary institutions as part of their social responsibility.

The above notwithstanding, tertiary institutions of learning provide a complexity of social sites in which gender-based violence occur, mainly against women students, thus justifying the focus on such institutions as key targets for PVAWG. Compared to lower sectors of education, the learning environments within tertiary institutions are distinguished by academic and social atmosphere that is free of close monitoring of student's social behaviour and one that allows students space to freely interact, develop intimate relationships and practice dating without institutional interference. Thus, both male and female students are able to navigate young adulthood in relation to their sexual orientations while taking full responsibility of their lives within and outside halls of residence, to-and-from their lecture halls/laboratories/libraries—not in the least during their exploration of life outside the institution. For many of the students at this level, this is usually the first time they experience such social freedoms that are not supervised by parents/guardians or teachers. Consequently institutional life becomes a place to pursue academic learning, experiment relationships, particularly mate-searching (mating) as well as dating, all of which are linked to risk-taking behaviour with regard to sexual relationships, alcohol and drug consumptions that are associated with instances of gender-based violence (GBV), especially against the women.

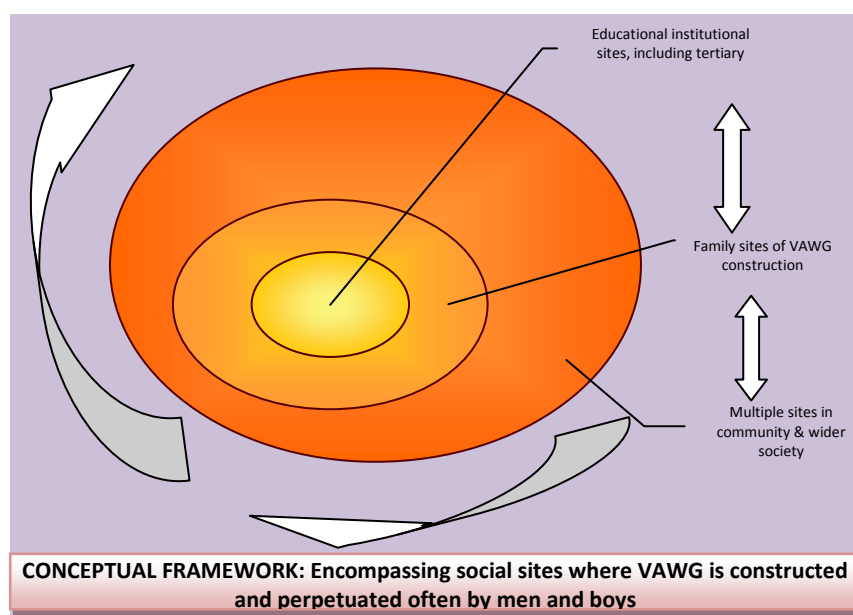
Constructionist conceptual/theoretical framework: Masculinities and PVAWG

Research evidence has revealed, and continues to reveal that, male violence against women and girls comes in many ways that singly and jointly reflect the manifestation of pursuance, enforcement and, oftentimes, tolerance of gendered expectations and fulfilments of services and benefits that patriarchal authority bestows on men and boys and which women and girls are forced to give/surrender (see Pattman and Chege, 2003; Siberschmidt, 2005; Chege, 2007). The contextualisation of constructionist frameworks is vital as it helps to interrogate VAWG within the complexities of interactions of diverse social sites and institutions come into contact through family, community, and broader societal contexts and which in which negotiations of gender relations are an inevitable feature.

Connell's (1994) theorisation of masculinities and power as well as Kimmel's (2000) views on gender power relations have influenced the choice of social constructionist framework as it provides a clear theoretical basis within which to appreciate PVAWG as a mission that deals with fluid social constructions of gender relations that are open to transformations that would support safety and security of women and girls. The framework allows the assumed essence of manhood/masculinities or even of womanhood/femininities to be challenged without losing sight of the contextual considerations within which gender identities are constructed. As Ricardo and Barker, (2008) observe, gender (masculinities and femininities) are 'socially constructed (rather than being biologically given and driven), thus rendering them and their manifestations not only subject to variations across historical and social contexts but also transformable in the various contexts such as material poverty, urbanisation and globalization all of which contribute in one way or other to women and girls' vulnerability to male violence. Literature on masculinity reveals that for boys (and men), the 'understanding of how they have to act in order to be acceptably male' is a crucial developmental undertaking that tends to perpetuate VAWG (Frosh, Phoenix and Pattman, 2002: 75-76). Further,

hegemony/power/supremacy and patriarchy are in turn reinforced and reconstructed by *families, communities and social institutions*. Boys learn what manhood means by observing their families (and significant others), where they often see women and girls providing care-giving (...), while men are often outside the family (...). They

also learn such norms in *schools* and other social institutions and from their peer groups, which may encourage risk-taking behaviour, competition and violence, and may ridicule boys who do not live to these social expectations (Ricardo and Barker, 2008:8). [*My emphasis*].



It is in the backdrop of the above views that PVAWG in tertiary institutions is interrogated in this paper.

While Connell (1994) presents masculinities as the multiple ways that reflect different versions of manhood, it is important to contextually foreground the role that patriarchy plays in directing how such masculinities relate to femininities with gender power relations coming into play within families, communities and societies at large. Specifically, patriarchy draws its practical meanings from historical power imbalances and cultural practices within social systems that accord men on average, more power in society by offering them multifarious benefits over women with regard to material, economic, personal care and comfort, as well as free labour/services - not in the least, domestic and sexual services from women and girls (see the United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women, 2003). Suffice it to mention that expectations of such services are reflected in explicit ways of student life within university campuses and colleges, where studies have revealed female students' lives of sexual and labour exploitations within and outside the institutions (Chege 2006a, Muasya, 2011). Almost invariably, institutional student life –which is relatively elaborate in universities – portrays patriarchal norms of women's exploitation and male violence against women, within or outside heterosexual relationships. Ostensibly, young men from various cultural settings have learned to be aggressive, intimidating, strong willed and relentless in pursuing and exploiting women and girls' sexuality and labour. They have learned not to take "no" from women for an answer. Arguably, men who accept this kind of masculinity and play it out are likely to misinterpret a woman's communications about what they want or not want. Typically, a man will decide that the woman is acting coy or playing hard to get in a sexual situation, hence miss the opportunity to communicate. He may believe that she really means 'yes', although she may be screaming to the negative and verbalising an explicit 'no'.

Prevalent forms VAWG in tertiary institutional contexts

According to an assistant director of the North Carolina State University Women's Center, college or campus is usually a new and interesting place for fresh women and men, which encourages a natural tendency to get caught up in the excitements that harbour various forms of violence against women (see College Bound Network staff of NC). Further, according to Futures without Violence (2012), women of college age continue to be at particular risk of gender-based violence, the main ones being “sexual violence, intimate partner violence and stalking”.

Intimate partner violence entails abuse in a dating or coupled relationship whereby, such abuse may be manifested in diverse forms. These would include **coercive sex/rape and physical assault** is considered among the most devastating sexual violence against women and girls as it is characterised by emotional complexities that complicate reporting and responding.

Acquaintance rape (closely linked to date and drug rape) is the most common form of violence involving women students and a student they are familiar with. The rape often happens within or outside the college/ campus. This type of rape is hardly reported with only 17% of cases compared with 55% of reported rapes involving strangers. Acquaintance rape which includes date rape, party and gangs is considered to be more traumatizing than rape by a stranger firstly because it represents a violation of trust and secondly, victims may not get the social support they need and deserve (Bellows, 2012). Research shows that women below the age of 30 are the highest risk group for acquaintance rape with studies showing that although stranger rape is more likely to be reported, it is not the most prevalent form. The fact that more often the victim and rapist are somewhat familiar with one another complicates the decision to report for fear of victim being blamed or dismissed. Tippin (2003) exemplifies a case of acquaintance date rape which is almost universally representative similar situations anywhere in the world.

An honours student: Star athlete. Suave. Charming. Good looks. Caring. Responsible and he had asked her out. But that was when the date first began. As the night went along, Mr. Right tragically and violently became Mr. Wrong. After a romantic dinner, he took her to a local bar to dance. After two glasses of wine she began to feel dizzy and violently ill. The next thing she remembered was waking up naked the next morning in a strange bed with a splitting headache and a sense that she had had sex with someone. She had ... with Mr. Right ... but she hadn't given her consent (Tippin, 2003)

Dating violence which often entails physical battering is another complex form of VAWG that is common in tertiary institutions. According the American Bureau of Justice Statistics, young women aged 20-24 are at highest risk for dating violence which may also entail rape *per se* as well as drug-rape. Approximately 80% of young women are raped by the tertiary education age of 25 with one half of this age-group reportedly raped before attaining age of 18 years. Considering that overall, most rapes are committed by someone known to the victim (non-strangers/acquaintance) it is instructive that three quarters of sexual assaults are perpetrated by non-strangers while nearly 40% of rapists are often a friend or acquaintance and a quarter of them by (28%) by an intimate partner. This means that this kind of VAWG is preventable since the risk factors are already known.

Another major risk for college women is the menace of **Sexual misconduct**. This comprises non-consensual sexual contact, innuendos, gang harassment and rape, exposure of sexual organs, and verbal sexual abuse among others that often occur outside intimate relationships. Sexual misconduct is perpetrated mainly by individuals or groups of men who may be acquaintances or strangers.

Stalking and trailing is yet another form of VAWG which is characterised by uninvited following or tracking a woman in a manner that threatens her and elicits anxiety, and fear. While it is correct to recognize that men may be victims of the three violences mentioned above, especially intimate partner violence, or stalking, this paper upholds the view from many research evidence that overall, women encounter much higher risks in terms of frequency and intensity and consequently are exposed to greater health-related consequences than do men.

Sexual misconduct comprises non-consensual sexual contact and verbalised/written messages often occurring outside intimate relationships. In addition, this misconduct may entail forms of sexual harassment such as exposure of sexual organs, explicit verbal and sexual abuse in public places such as student common rooms, classrooms, buses. The perpetrators include individuals or groups of men who may be acquaintances or strangers. For example, groups of male students may gang up on the wayside to communally examine and loudly 'grade' women's breasts, legs or hips and making derogatory comments that effectively create anxiety and fear among the women. Studies also reveal that lone male students also stalk or way-lay lone females and sexually assault them as exemplified in a memory study by Chege (2006b) in which diary entries show Kenyan female University students documenting memories of sexual violations that left them feeling vulnerable, exposed and helpless. One of the diary entries read:

Dear Diary... I was a first year in my second semester in Campus. I was going to pick my notes from a course-mate I had given during class time. It was around 7.30pm and I had gone to the boys' hostel. This was not late since people are allowed to go visiting up to 10.00pm. I was going to the 3rd floor. Up the stairs it seemed a bit dark since some bulbs were not working. On approaching the 3rd floor, a *jamaa* (a guy) started going down the floor but he seemed to come right straight to me. I thought he was drunk; maybe he had missed his way. I paved way for him but, as I was doing that he got hold of my breasts and squeezed them, then planted his lips on my lips. I couldn't scream since his mouth was on mine. Finally he let me go and said he wished he had gone all the way... He said I wish "*ningekumanga*" that is he wished he *had sex with me*. I stood there confused whether to proceed or go back; since I was now afraid of my friend also. I run back down stairs and went to my room. I felt so stupid and fooled since I could not defend myself. I have met this guy even after this incidence and he always comes close to me and reminds me of that day on the stairs. This incidence made me defer from going to visit friends in boys' hostel (memories in student's diary - pseudonym Carol).

Campus rape is the rape that entails a student being coerced to having sex either within or outside college premises. Hence, this term refers to not only the place where these violations have been committed but also in relation to where the victim is based. A female student may be raped in her halls of residence, on her way out of the campus or waylaid on her way back to campus.

Campus Death which is more prevalent on female more than male students is of often linked with dating and sexual violence. This extreme form of violence against women in tertiary institutions, though not as common as other gender-based violence, remains a thread to female students. As in the case of intimate/date rape, murder/death on or off is associated to strangers only on rare occasions. Reports of such deaths are akin to this one of a 21-year old Kenyan university student who was raped and murdered in a bizarre incident in her apartment. The first year purchasing and supplies student's body was found hidden under her bed two days after she was murdered (Ombati, 2012). This murder of a university student happened in her out-of-campus dwelling by an acquaintance who was later

arrested. Instances of female students ending up murdered after accepting a ride on the way to their halls of residence from a night out or being abducted and murdered after their companions are attacked by unknown assailants are also commonplace.

Overall, on-campus violence against women students in tertiary institutions is evidently a challenge that has continued to thrive over time. This is possibly because **first**, few-if any- such institutions have not put in place strategies for continued guidance and support of male and female students as they construct masculinities and femininities as well as negotiate power relations across the gender divide. **Secondly**, navigating and negotiating intimate relationships while at the same time making sense of the instant social freedoms that students encounter in the colleges and campuses –most of them for the first time is clearly a major challenge that results in violence related incidences often directed at women by men. **Thirdly**, data-bases of how VAWG is prevented and countered is evidently lacking in institutional web-sites particularly in African and Asian contexts. **Fourthly**, the fact that university campuses and colleges are relatively free spaces requires appropriate life skills that responsive to the needs of women as well as men who need to occupy those spaces and be safe. This would be in addition to the measures that some of the institutions have put in place that include, policies on GBV, restriction of visiting time between the genders, guidance and counselling units among others.

In echoing the UN Human Rights chief, Navi Pillay during the 17th session of the UN Human Rights Council, tertiary institutions have obligation to explicitly engage as active drivers in the current holistic struggle to eradicate violence against women everywhere –all the time. According to the UN Human Rights (2011), there are three levels of prevention, namely, **primary level**, which entails the measures taken to prevent violence from happening in the first place. Secondly is the **secondary level**, which corresponds to the immediate response after violence has occurred and whose purpose is to limit consequences of the violence; and **tertiary level**, or the longer-term care and support for those who have suffered violence. From practice, most tertiary institutions have found it easy and convenient to put in place policies and reporting mechanisms for addressing violence against women after it has occurred. Further, most of the institutions' support/counselling centres are mandated to address the after-effects of violence against women –rather than being pro-actively preventive. However, preventive measures of a holistic nature have yet to receive adequate attention that would boost the confidence of women in the context of looming threats of violence against them while enrolled at tertiary institutions. Hence, this paper presents the following highlights of ideas aimed at generating dialogue/discourse on primary level preventive measures that are appropriate for responding to the safety and security needs of women in tertiary institutions.

Prevention of VAWG in colleges/campuses: discussion on way forward

Because the prevalence of violence against women is so high for any state to deal with comprehensively, the UN Human Rights chief, Navi Pillay (2011) argued that preventing violence from happening in the first place must be central to any strategy to eliminate violence against women. She pointed out that in some contexts up to 60 per cent of women experience physical violence at least once in their lifetime – which may have been prevented.

In order to enhance success in developing a holistic and comprehensive preventive strategy in the context of tertiary institutions, it is imperative to interrogate closely the factors that have, over the years, been identified as catalysts of VAWG and which have hampered the empowerment of both the women and the men in the context of VAWG. The role of all stakeholders needs to be clearly spelt with clear mandates for accountability.

Discussion points

1. *Enhance institutional documentation to include a life-skills student handbook outlining examples of VAWG to which they are at risk of being victims/perpetrators as either women or male students and the consequences thereof.* Ensuring that students are clear about the ideal institutional culture and how it responds to VAWG would help portray a sense of “institutional care”
2. *Creation of Education and awareness clubs for male and female students aimed at joint transforming social norms regarding violence against women and girls.* In many instances, women students and their male peers and acquaintances operate from different platforms for which they lack ownership.
3. *Institutionalise research partnerships with relevant NGOs and government departments to jointly document evidence and transform it to inform responsive action towards the various forms of VAWG.*
4. *Package relevant life-skills education focusing on risk-management behaviour to prevent specific forms of violence against women such as date-rape drug and alcohol abuse.* The issue of drinking responsibly to avoid spiked beverages should be part of orientation of students, not in the least education on drug abuse and violence
5. *Psycho-social skills education regarding levels, types of trust, assertiveness, self-defence and systematic reporting of VAWG*
6. *Strengthen institutional policy-related interventions that directly challenge social norms known to perpetuate violence against women and girls.* Many of the policies that address GBV focus on response rather than prevention of violence and are rarely inclusive of student inputs.
7. *Link institutional policy explicitly with the relevant legal provision and provide institutional support in accessing justice systems in redressing VAWG*
8. *Institutionalising programmes such as campus policing and other relevant strategies that would empower women to be communally responsive in avoiding risky situations and prioritise personal safety.* Institutions should give visibility to practical skills training for both physical as well as risk-analysis, physical and emotional readiness that is guided by critical awareness of situations

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