Responding to Campus Sexual Assault: The Role of Students and College Administrators

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\textbf{Abstract} : Sexual assault is a social problem that exists in our societies under the umbrella of secrecy on matters related to sex. The fact that it exists and it has great negative impacts on the lives of the victims necessitates the need to know more about it. Campus environment consists of sexually active individuals who are prone to sexual assault. This paper examines the magnitude of the problem with emphasis on the role of students as victims and perpetrators on one side and college administrators as the responsible individuals for its elimination on the other side. For female students it clarifies that they are the major victims of sexual assault while at the campus. Male students fall in the category of the sexual assault perpetrators to their fellow female students. The major contradiction is that all students in general do not know exactly what it entails by sexual assault and the environment that may lead to its occurrence. On the other side most of victim students do not report the incidence as they hardly expect positive measures in their favor.

For administrators, they require to have the willingness to stop the incident but also to understand what it entails by sexual assault so as to be able to combat it at the colleges and among their students. Further research has to be made for understanding the nature of magnitude and prevalence sexual assault within the colleges.

\section{Introduction}

This paper, examines the issue of sexual assault at campus. It analyses the issue by taking examples from USA, Southern Africa and East African countries. The aim is to expose what is necessary to be known for successful efforts toward elimination of the problem at the campus. The paper begins by exposing the nature and prevalence of sexual assault in the society and the response made towards condemning the issue. It further explains the magnitude of the problem at the campus and the position of the college administrators and students on perpetuation and combating sexual assault.

\section{Methodology}

The paper is based on the information obtained through a desk review of the scientific literature, and research reports on sexual assault in general and specifically its prevalence at the campus. The literature has been critically read with the aim to expose the role of college administrators and students on positive response to sexual assault. This implies that the whole analysis and discussion relies on the literature review.

\section{Prevalence of sexual assault}

Sexual assault is a public health and public safety problem with far-reaching implications. It is a social problem that requires attention due to different reasons. On establishing the White House Task Force to Protect Students from Sexual Assault, the USA President Barack Obama said:

“Sexual violence is more than just a crime against individuals. It threatens our families, it threatens our communities; ultimately, it threatens the entire country. It tears apart the fabric of our communities. And that’s why we’re here today—because we have the power to do something about it as a government, as a nation. We have the capacity to stop sexual assault, support those who have survived it, and bring perpetrators to justice.”

According to the USA Justice Department, sexual assault is “any type of sexual contact or behavior that occurs without the explicit consent of the recipient. Falling under the definition of sexual assault are sexual activities [such] as forced sexual intercourse, forcible sodomy, child molestation, incest, fondling, and attempted rape. Christopher et al (2007) clarify sexual assault as an encounter that may include forced touching of a sexual nature, oral sex, sexual intercourse, anal sex, and/or sexual penetration with a finger or object. It is of great
significance to note that as many people do not know what it entails with sexual assault, victims just take it easy that just because they were not forcibly penetrated, means they were not sexually assaulted.

South Africa recorded 43,195 incidents of rape in 2015—the highest in the world—but the figures could be an underestimate due to underreporting of sexual offences. Findings in USA reveal that a significant number of women have been sexually assaulted at the campus though the percentage figures remain debated. However, reports or stories from the victims of sexual assault are heard from time to time. On the other side, even where the victims have been reporting the incident, there have been no appropriate measures to combat the issue, be it in developed countries. The situation may be serious in poor African countries.

The problem is also significant at the Universities in East Africa. In Tanzania for example sexual assault has been addressed in the students’ by-laws. The universities students’ by-laws recognize the threat of sexual assaults in their stipulations. At the University of Dar es Salaam (UDSM) for example, it is stipulated in part II, article XX of the students by-laws (2007) that sexual harassment of whatever kind is a disciplinary offence. Generally, efforts have been done to combat the situation among students in learning environment in Tanzania. The prevention of sexual assault in Tanzania is also rooted in TUSEME programme. This programme has been in place for addressing a number of social problems facing young people in schools, such as poor learning outcomes and sexual and reproductive health problems. It has been involved in empowering girls to speak out about their problems and taking appropriate actions to address them, including, for example, reporting to appropriate authorities on matters related to sexual harassment (Mhando et al. 2015)

However, one has to clearly understand the situation of sexual assault and campus life. This will give room to the best approach for ending it at the campus. Inhere, the issue of sexual assault is dealt with by explaining the way it is a real social problem at the campus. This is in terms of the way the campus environment encourages its occurrence and the fact that it touches both students and college administrators. To a great extent students are considered as either victims (for female students), or perpetrators (for male students) of sexual assault. While administrators do aim at having their colleges the safe places for studies, they sometimes fail to play their role towards combating the situation.

4. Sexual assault and campus life

In consideration of sexual assault and campus life, there are two objects to bear in mind. These are women students and college administrators. Under normal circumstances, it is expected that every campus must be a place where all students can pursue their dreams without fear (Rand, 2015). Moreover, administrators want their campus to be safe havens for students as they pursue their education and mature intellectually and socially.

Nature of sexual assault: Women student Victim and assailant relationship.

It is true that sexual assault really takes place in most of the colleges’ campus. It is so important that we get to know the scenario of sexual assault in order that we really come with best ways to combat it. To a great extent, victims of sexual assault do know the assailant. This is contrary to widespread stranger rape myths. In the vast majority of these crimes between 80 and 90 percent victim and assailant know each other. It should also be known that closeness or friendship to one another may facilitate the incident. In fact the more intimate the relationship, the more likely for the rape to be completed rather than attempted. Another dilemma is that not all victims of sexual assault really recognize it as an assault. According to Fisher et el, (2000), half of all student victims do not label the incident “rape” This is particularly true when no weapon was used, no sign of physical injury is evident, and alcohol was involved – factors commonly associated with campus acquaintance rape. Given the extent of non-stranger rape on campus, it is no surprise that the majority of victimized do not define their experience as a rape. This signifies that colleges are places where completed rape is done but not reported. Among the factors that encourage sexual assault at the campus is party culture. The vulnerability of young, inexperienced college students is another factor.

5. Problems with reporting and responding to sexual assault

Whether the victims know the assailant or not, reporting the incident is not guaranteed from the victim. The victim may be willing to report the incident or not, regardless of whether she knows the assailant or not. Upon reporting the incident, this may not go so smoothly at the campus. This is evidenced by the situation whereby victims face confusion over how to report, confusion over acceptable standards of conduct and definitions of rape and sexual assault, and a
fear of punishment for activities preceding some assaults such as underage drinking. As a result, most colleges and universities lack accurate information about the real number of sexual assaults that occur on campus. Many victims do not understand that just because they were not forcibly penetrated does not mean they were not sexually assaulted (Myers, 2015).

Consequently, more than half of sexual assaults go unreported. This is due to a number of reasons including false understanding about sexual assault, lack of courage to report the incidence, need to keep the issue private, and lack of trust to the personnel involved. Victims often want to keep their experience private. Others fear reprisal. A good number think police will be biased. Some are ashamed and blame themselves. Or they think what happened isn’t important enough to report. This implies that there is a lot to be done for sexual assault victims to be able to report the incident.

As regards sexual assault at the campus, non-reporting of sexual assault is perpetuated by both college administrators and victim students themselves. While administrators may not provide a good environment for reporting sexual assault, some students on the other hand do ignore reporting the incident. Thus, one may make a false generalization about the occurrence status of sexual assault at the campus in case he relies on the number of reports made over the issue. The fact is that not all incidents of sexual assaults are reported at the campus. There are roughly 147 cases of rape reported every day in South Africa, but the majority go unreported. Reasons for non-reporting the incidence have got to do with either the college administrators or the students themselves.

Efforts done at the campus on combating sexual assault

Although sexual assault is not so well reported, some efforts have been done by different colleges to address it. At the campus, sexual assault has received attention in different ways. Messages from advocacy organizations really tell the magnitude of the problem to the individual victims that can help inform the faculty, staff and student. In America, among the more salient offerings are these messages from students on two different videos posted to cultureofrespect.org: “Your Standards for sex should be higher than ‘not a felony.’ ” and “Rape and assault aren’t just one-offs; it’s not like a broken arm or a bad day. They can stay with you, in the back of your mind, forever.”

6. College women and sexual assault

A discussion about sexual assault at the campus has much to do with women students as major objects of the discussion. Much research has been published about the sexual assault experiences of college women, a group often characterized as being at high risk for sexual victimization. It has been found that institutions of higher education are by no means crime free; women students face a high risk for sexual assault (Karjaneet et al, 2005). Just under 3 percent of all college women become victims of rape (either completed or attempted) in a given 9-month academic year in USA. Researchers have consistently reported that a sizable percentage of women are sexually assaulted during their college years, with, on average, at least 50% of their sexual assaults involving the use of alcohol or other drugs by the perpetrator, victim, or both (Abbey, 2002; Fisher et al., 2000; Testa & Collins, 2000).

Colleges are not the safe havens where a woman can be guaranteed refuge. The truth is that College women are at higher risk for sexual assault than their non-college-bound peers.

Side effects of sexual assault on women at the campus

Specifically at the campus, any sexual assault has serious, long-term effects on women students. Some survivors carry on, only having their pain surface later in sexual dysfunction or fear. Others hide in their rooms, stop attending class, flunk out of school and develop posttraumatic stress disorder.

What may go wrong in paying attention to Sexual Assault at campus?

Students at the campus are supposed to be among the major participants in efforts to reduce or end sexual assault at the campus. Their little knowledge on sexual assault and lack of willingness to report the issue, are among the impediments on efforts to end the problem. Failure to recognize and report the crime not only may result in underestimating the extent of the problem, but also may affect whether victims seek medical care and other professional help. Thus, a special concern of the need for undertaking training on SA at colleges is among others to encourage victims
to come forward, as a means to end the practice. Victims also suffer when the people they tell don’t believe them, be it their fellow students or administrators.

7. The position of College administrators and students in handling sexual assault

Low level of reporting incidents of sexual assault at the campus is propagated by both college administrators and students.

Problems with colleges’ administration

Several factors make sexual assault particularly problematic on college campuses. Although administrators want their campuses to symbolize an environment where students can pursue their education and gain intellectual and social maturity, they may not do well as regards playing their role in combating sexual assault.

At the colleges, the environment for reporting the incident may not be made conducive for the sake of maintaining the colleges’ reputations. Clear behavioral definitions including definitions of consent and scenarios with non strangers can help victims decide whether what happened to them should be reported to campus or law enforcement authorities. This strategy, used at colleges with promising practices, directly challenges stranger assault.

The silence of college administrators on the frequent occurrence of sexual assault at the campus do sometimes break into students’ protest. Even when students protest against a culture of patriarchy and sexual assault that exists not only at universities but throughout the country, the college administrators do not seem to be on their side. This happened in South Africa at Rhodes University, by May 2016 when a tension was heightened due to a list of 11 alleged rapists who had received no punishment from the university was posted anonymously on Facebook.

Individual members in the administration and institutions at large are the barriers to reporting the situation. The small proportion of sexual assault victims who report the offense to authorities attests to the existence of multiple reporting barriers (Spohn and Holleran, 2001). These are like campus policies on drug and alcohol use that tend to inhibit reporting. For instance, requiring victims to participate in adjudication discourages reporting. On the other hand, Victim Blaming by overemphasizing the victim’s responsibility to avoid sexual assault without balancing message stressing the perpetrator’s responsibility for committing a crime is another problem.

Moreover, colleges perpetuate the myth of stranger rape by reporting outsider crimes and neglecting those committed by students. They re-categorize “rape” as “nonconsensual sex,” treat it as an infraction rather than a crime, question the victim’s account, and frame assaults as regrettable sex or drunken mistakes. And they sometimes try to hide the truth, to protect the school’s reputation. (Virginia, 2015)

Problems with students

Among others, problems with students do originate from their false understanding on sexual assault, lack of courage to report the incident, need to keep the issue private, lack of trust to the personnel involved, and failure to see sympathy by personnel handling the matter.

False understanding on sexual assault

Some students never report the incidence partly because the definition of sexual assault is often unclear to them. Victims just take it easy that just because they were not forcibly penetrated, means they were not sexually assaulted.

Lack of courage to report the incidence

Many victims don’t realize they’ve been assaulted until long after the incident partly because they are in shock that someone took advantage of them.

Need to keep the issue private to them for avoiding victim publicity

Many victims are reluctant to file charges with off-campus law enforcement. They fear having to relive the incident. A trauma response, which may involve high levels of psychological distress, some of it triggered by shame and self blame, inhibits reporting. The desire to avoid the perceived and real stigma of having been victimized also inhibits reporting.

Lack of trust to the personnel involved

Victim students may lack faith in police officers who question their account, and they dread the slow-moving court system. Even when they do file charges, they may be discouraged because “he said-she said” accounts are difficult to prove. So it often falls to colleges to address rape with personnel who are rarely trained in such matters. Even campus security can be poorly trained.
Failure to show sympathy by personnel handling the matter:
The circumstances after assault, may lead the victims to drop the whole thing rather than seeking for legal assistance. The victim may tell her friends but they may not believe her; in case she goes to the campus adviser he may not believer her, or he does, but asks her if she was drunk, or whether she'd had sex before, or if she was looking to hook up that night. Or he urges her to file charges with the police. Or he wants to call her parents. She is embarrassed, afraid, intimidated and exhausted. All these lead to dropping the whole thing. According to Sarah Hong (co-coordinator at the Sexual Assault Prevention and Awareness Center at the University of Michigan)

It therefore requires an intervention toward ending campus sexual assault. Although there are different factors for the prevalence of campus sexual assault, in developing countries, it has been considered a serious issue to an extent of being called an epidemic of sexual assault on campuses. In their colleges faculty and staff are eager to do the right thing, shine a light on this problem and protect their students. The government at large is willing to let this problem end.

What should be done for combating sexual assault?
Due to the above reasons for non-reporting, the following can be done as solutions:

Need to show a positive concern to the victim.

The most important thing for people to know is how to practice consent and what to do during disclosure. A lot of students may think it is really awkward to ask for consent. People also find it difficult to direct others to the right resources, so they need to be educated. Increased reporting can reflect students’ trust that their institution is equipped and willing to address the issue.

Providing education to the community
The existing scenario is that sexual assault takes place at the campus; the personnel expected to handle the issue do not provide a conducive environment for reporting; and victim students are not so willing either to expose or report the incidence. Under such circumstances there is need of providing knowledge on sexual assault to both administrators and college students at large. Students have to be exposed on types of sexual assault (with “types” defined by how the assault was achieved, such as the use of physical force or incapacitation of the victim due to drugs or alcohol), as well as the context, consequences, and reporting of distinct types of sexual assault.

Conclusion
As a conclusion, sexual assault is a social problem that affects students’ life at the campus and therefore it interferes their academic life in general. There might be lack of peace of mind to the victims and those who get to know or think that they may face the same problem sometimes at their campus life. Efforts should be made for elimination of chances for the incidents. This has to be done by educating both college administrators and students on what it means by sexual assault and what role they have to play toward combating the situation. Therefore, possessing right knowledge on sexual assault may be a major solution for its prevalence at the campus.

References
