

Fieldwork phase 3

FemIDEAS aims to develop new approaches for addressing and preventing Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) in Higher Education (HE) by bringing together insights from victim-survivors, activists, academics, and policymakers. We focus on changing institutional cultures in HE so that SGBV is challenged and victim-survivors are heard and supported. Brazil is the 3rd country in the study and fieldwork was conducted both remotely and in person in São Paulo, Florianópolis, and Rio. To do this safely and ethically, we collaborated with our project partners and specialist support providers based in Brazil.



18

Interviews



10

Universities

Support provided to participants

- Support pack with info on free, confidential, local and online support organisations.
- Post-interview debrief & 'check-in' via WhatsApp and email.
- Access to specialist online counselling from provider in Brasil.



About the interviews

Fieldwork dates
March - July 24

Interviews

- Online, via Zoom
- In-person (São Paulo, Rio, Florianópolis)

Recruitment methods

- Direct communications via project partners and existing networks.
- Email, WhatsApp & X
- Project website

Participant groups

Who took part in an interview?

67%

Academic university employees

17%

University students

17%

Activists

Gender:
89% women
11% non-binary

Emerging themes in the data**

Policy: There is a lack of SGBV policy in many universities. When policy does exist, implementation is patchy. There is limited support for individuals working for change.

Institutional Silencing: Universities often take extensive measures to protect perpetrators while silencing those who speak out. There is a tendency for faculty to protect colleagues who are accused of abuse.

Backlash: Victim-survivors who speak out against SGBV face institutional retaliation, which can manifest in lower grades, loss of scholarships, or other punitive measures

Intergenerational Abuse: SGBV often persists across generations in academic institutions due to inaction against abusive staff who continue to abuse while remaining employed.

Intersectional Violence: SGBV in universities must be understood via an intersectional lens. Black, trans, and queer students/faculty are targeted and unsupported by institutions.

Race and Colonisation: Race shapes the university experience and curricula are overwhelmingly white and there is resistance to decolonisation. Myths of racial democracy obscures the reality that university structures continue to uphold colonial power dynamics.

Language: There is a lack of suitable language to capture the extent of SGBV in HE. Existing discourse is shaped by colonialism, fails to address everyday violence, is binarised, and lacks an understanding of race.

Accountability mechanisms: Some universities offer perpetrator behaviour change initiatives but the impact remains unknown and implementation is fragmented.

Activism: There is a lack of an organised feminist movements in HE. Previous movements have led to bans on student organising on many campuses. Race activism continues with Black and Indigenous feminists often leading the work on SGBV.

Solidarity: Survivors have formed communities of solidarity against institutional backlash. Some are developing new ways to address SGBV and to talk about it, such as in terms of its career impacts to highlight how women are pushed out of academia.

Challenges

Risk of retaliation: Concerns regarding potential consequences for participants with lived experience or those supporting them were present throughout.

Recruitments: Due to the size of Brazil, it was difficult to capture voices from across the country, especially from regions such as Amazonia, despite also using online methods.

Lack of representation: Indigenous voices were notably underrepresented in the research.

Language: Limited language skills of the researchers impacted study scope and accessibility.

Notes:

** Themes subject to change as analysis continues

For more info email:

femideas@westminster.ac.uk

Visit: www.femideas.com