FemIDEAS

feminism • intersectionality • decolonisation • equality • abolition • survivor-centred

South Africa Fieldwork Report

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UNIVERSITY OF WESTMINSTER

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Key terms used in this report

Abolition (abolitionist): The act of ending systems, practices, or institutions, in this case relating to prisons and other carceral punishments carried out for sexual and gender-based violence.

Academic university employee: A staff member at a university whose primary responsibilities include teaching, research, and scholarly activities.

Activist: Someone who actively promotes, pushes for, or engages in efforts to bring about social or political change.

Carceral: Relating to the criminal justice system, especially the prison system.

Complainant: Someone who files a formal complaint against someone else whom they accuse of, or allege has, caused harm, in this case usually relating to sexual and/or gender-based violence in a higher education institution. This complaint typically initiates an investigation. Sometimes people use "complainants" to refer to "victim-survivors," but we separate out these terms to show that not all victim-survivors file formal complaints.

Decolonisation (decolonising): The process of undoing or remedying colonialism, involving attempts to dismantle colonial power structures and reclaiming autonomy and culture by colonised peoples.

Feminist: There are various strands of feminist thought but in general the term refers to someone who supports and advocates for the equality of all genders, with a particular focus on the rights and interests of girls and women.

Higher education (HE) institutions: Organisations such as colleges and universities that provide advanced educational programs after secondary education.

Intersectional: A framework that examines how various social identities, such as race, gender, sexuality and class, interlock to shape experiences of oppression, power, and privilege.

Lived experience: Personal knowledge and insights gained through direct, first-hand involvement in a particular issue, event, or phenomenon.

Neoliberal (neoliberalisation): A political and economic approach that emphasises free-market capitalism, deregulation, and a reduction in government spending.

Non-academic university employee: A staff member at a university whose duties are administrative, operational, or support-oriented rather than academic or research-focused.

Non-binary: A gender identity that does not fit neatly within a binary (meaning two) understanding of gender which is limited to female and male.

Perpetrator/Person that harms: Both terms are used interchangeably to describe people who perpetrate sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) in all its forms. The use of both terms acknowledges the challenges of naming or labelling a person based only on their abusive behaviours and that this could present a barrier to engaging people who harm in behaviour change initiatives (Wild, 2021). In no circumstance do we condone or excuse the actions of perpetrators of SGBV and emphasise the imperative for people who harm to be held to account for their behaviours.

Punitive measures: Disciplinary consequences that focus on punishing someone for breaking an institutional policy (e.g. suspension, expulsion, firing). Although these are not the same punishments available in the criminal justice system, punitive measures in higher education processes borrow from carceral logic.

Rape culture: Pervasive attitudes in society that excuse, tolerate, and/or justify sexual or gender-based violence (SGBV) or which blame someone who has been victimised, for their own victimisation. Usually, these attitudes are the result of or intersect with, ideas that are sexist or rooted in patriarchy, a social structure in which men hold the most power.

Sensitisation: Consciousness-raising or awareness-raising that aims to make people sensitive to an issue. In this report, we see sensitisation used in the context of gender as well as SGBV, and often in the form of training.

Sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV): "A continuum of violence that includes sexual harassment; sexual assault; rape; abusive relationships; stalking; spiking; gendered bullying; and sexualised abuses of power including grooming and consensual relationships across positions of power that were harmful to one party" (Bull & Shannon, 2023, p. 4).

Transformative justice: A non-punitive (i.e. non-disciplinary-based) form of justice that centres the needs of the victim-survivor in holding individuals accountable for harm they have caused, repairing that harm, and restoring the relationship between the harmed parties as well as the wider community. Transformative justice also looks to change the conditions that make harm possible in order to prevent further harm from happening.

Transgender (trans): A term to describe someone whose gender identity is not the same as the sex they were assigned at birth.

Victim-survivor: This term refers to people who have experienced a traumatic event, particularly an act of sexual and/or gender-based violence or abuse. The terms victim and survivor are used together to recognise that people who have experienced trauma may use one, both or neither of these terms. We acknowledge here the definitional challenges associated with naming or labelling people based only on a present or past experience of violence or abuse and use this term not as a solution, but in the absence of a more appropriate term (Wild, 2020).

Introduction

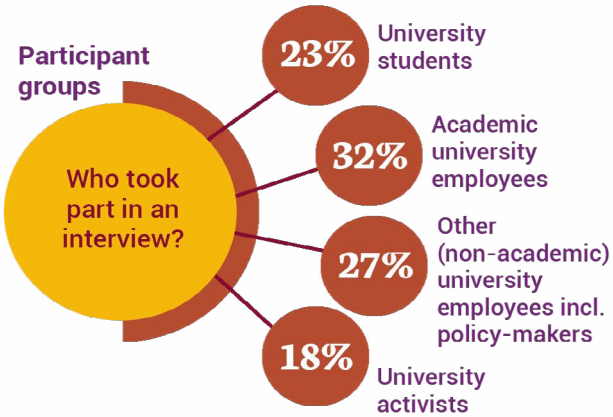
This report discusses the findings from fieldwork conducted in South Africa as part of a four-country study called FemIDEAS: Decolonising Sexual and Gender-Based Violence in Higher Education. The FemIDEAS study investigates sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) in higher education (HE) institutions so that we can better understand the issue and develop more effective measures of prevention, response and support for people who experience it. The project aims to do this in a way that is decolonial, intersectional, feminist and focused on victim-survivors (the people who experience SGBV). We are speaking to people and looking at policies and procedures in four countries: Argentina, Brazil, Nigeria, and South Africa. South Africa was the first country we visited.

We use the term SGBV throughout this paper. The relatively broad terminology and scope are necessary because it can be challenging for some participants to find the precise words to describe their experiences (Bull and Dey 2022). Following Bull & Shannon's recent (2023) report on SGBV in UK HE, we define SGBV as,

> A continuum of violence that includes sexual harassment; sexual assault; rape; abusive relationships; stalking; spiking; gendered bullying; and sexualised abuses of power including grooming and consensual relationships across positions of power that were harmful to one party (p. 4).

The study involves talking to four main groups of participants: university students, university academic staff, other non-academic university employees, and activists. Here we acknowledge that often people will 'fit' into more than one group. All four groups included people who have personally experienced SGBV (also called victim-survivors). We listen to their accounts and experiences, while also examining the structural factors that we know can contribute to SGBV. At the same time, we examine how different universities and HE institutions address SGBV.

We carried out the fieldwork in South Africa over two months. This involved collecting data by carrying out face-to-face interviews and online interviews using Zoom. We spoke to 22 people from eight different academic institutions across South Africa. Most of the people we spoke to were women (90%), and many (23%) told us they were queer, lesbian, bisexual or gay.



This report brings together learning based on what participants told us during interviews. It offers a brief 'snapshot' of what SGBV in South African HE looks like at the current moment. It also highlights possible areas for intervention and policy reform as well as examples of promising practices or policies. It is important to note that everything is shared with the victim-survivors' experiences in mind, because they are experts by their experiences.

Summary of main findings

Existing policies, procedures, and support measures: It is crucial to establish a dedicated office for SGBV complaints, operating a coordinated response in which there is a designated first point of contact, trained (student) volunteers and formalised specialist support services which are adequately resourced.

Neoliberalisation and marketisation of universities: University neoliberalisation contributes to inadequate responses to SGBV by prioritising marketability and institutional reputation over comprehensive support for victim-survivors and/or the effective implementation of policies that hold perpetrators/people who have harmed to account.

Institutional 'protection' and securitisation: There is evidence of widespread surveillance and institutional policing according to binary gender in university spaces as a measure to address SGBV. These operate in parallel to other institutional measures to achieve safety as well as the personal protective and preventative measures implemented by students themselves.

Accountability and a victim-survivor-focused response: Victim-survivors want institutions that have enabled harm, and the people who have harmed them, to be held accountable. This is coupled with a need for (institutional) support to challenge a culture of misogyny and SGBV, including by naming known perpetrators.

The politics of naming: We need to consider the complexities and the potential impacts of the public naming of people who have harmed others as well as institutions that have enabled harm to occur, especially in the context of widespread calls for institutional change and an end to the normalisation of SGBV on campus.

Transformative justice, training, and advocacy: Specialist training and advocacy programmes that are targeted at different audiences and functions occupy a key role in the implementation of a victim-survivor-focused policy and procedure for managing complaints.

Student protest and the institutional response(s): Student engagement in protest and the institutional backlash, including systemic silencing of students who speak out, was a dominant theme. The institutional response to student uprising is shaped by histories of institutional and state violence(s).

Legacies of apartheid and intersecting inequalities: SGBV in HE strongly intersects with class and racial discrimination, economic insecurity, institutional violence, police brutality, gender inequalities, transphobia and homophobia. Adequate and sustainable resourcing is required in addition to efforts to address historic racisms, the legacy of apartheid, and colonial harm - including via reparations.

These themes are discussed in detail below. In the next section, we discuss the methodology of this research. This section covers the methods used, our trauma-informed and participant-led approach, informed consent, anonymisation protocols, recruitment strategy and challenges.

Methodology

The study's methodology involved conducting one-on-one interviews with four different participant groups: (i) university students, (ii) university academic staff, (iii) other non-academic university employees and (iv) activists. All four groups included people who have personally experienced SGBV (also called victim-survivors). Interviews were held via Zoom or face-to-face. The interviews were trauma-informed and participant-led, ensuring that the approach was sensitive to the participants' needs, and allowed them to guide the discussion on their terms.

Being trauma-informed means recognising the impact of trauma on individuals and creating a supportive environment that prioritises their safety and wellbeing. It also aims to minimise the potentially negative effects of taking part in the study. A participant-led approach means that participants have complete choice and control over their involvement and the direction of the conversation, and that they do not have to answer anything they don't wish to.

Participants were fully informed about what taking part would involve and signed a consent form to indicate their understanding and agreement. This report contains quotes provided to us during the interviews. To protect the privacy and anonymity of the participants, we have assigned them a number. Our participants come from different religious, cultural, and/or indigenous backgrounds, and their names are reflections of those identities; in order to preserve both their cultural integrity and anonymity, we decided to use numbers instead of pseudonyms for all participants. This is so that participants are safe and so that what they told us cannot be traced to them or their university.

Recruitment

Participants were recruited using various methods, including reaching out to established academic and activist networks, broad outreach using Twitter/X, a dedicated project website, and direct communications via our project partners. Recruiting participants for the study was challenging. The reach was limited in terms of demographics and university locations, and the fear of institutional backlash made some participants hesitant to take part. Concerns about potential repercussions for sharing abuse experiences also made people reluctant to be involved.

Interviews were emotionally challenging, and sometimes it was hard to find positive messages. Social media recruitment brought added complications with "imposter participants" (Ridge et al., 2023; Roehl & Harland, 2022) falsely claiming to be victims-survivors so they could access the study. This threatened the study's accuracy and made it harder for genuine participants to join. Rigorous screening processes were implemented to address these issues and maintain the study's integrity.

Now that we have discussed how we carried out our fieldwork, the next section gives some background information about South African universities and HE institutions. We offer an overview of the current HE sector, a discussion of the history of HE and its links to apartheid, and then an examination of SGBV in South African HE.

Background Information: South African Higher Education

There are 26 public universities, 96 registered private HE institutions, and 31 provisionally registered private HE institutions in South Africa (Tankou epse Nukunah et al., 2019). Doctoral qualifications are offered at 23 public universities and five private universities (Leitch et al., 2022).

The South African HE sector underwent significant restructuring between 2000 and 2005 which involved the merging and incorporation of various institutions, resulting in fewer but generally larger institutions (Leitch et al., 2022, p. 6). In keeping with global trends, South Africa has also seen a growth of private HE institutions, which are typically understood to be of poorer quality (Tankou epse Nukunah et al., 2019).

The South African HE environment faces various challenges including:

- continuing racial inequalities in access to education
- poor throughput rates
- dwindling funding
- uneven quality standards in teaching and learning
- difficulties moving between institutions due to qualification structures
- misalignment of programmes offered
- difficulties responding to a dynamic market with diverse needs
- poor research output
- a shortage of staff
- an inability to handle the upsurge in demand for HE (Tankou epse Nukunah et al., 2019, p. 287; see also CHE, 2016).

The 2015 and 2016 student movements, 'Rhodes must fall' and 'fees must fall' highlighted the material consequences of some of these issues against the colonial backdrop of South Africa's HE system (Albertus, 2019; Murris, 2016; Ndelu et al., 2017). SGBV also occurred within these student movements, which prompted further student activism in response to intra-community violence and university retaliation against victim-survivors who spoke out (Maluleke & Moyer, 2020; Maluleke, 2022).

Student protests 2015/16: 'Rhodes Must Fall' and 'Fees Must Fall'

In 2015 and 2016 student protests spread across South African HE institutions (Jansen, 2020; Murris, 2016; Ndelu et al., 2017). The 'Rhodes Must Fall' and 'Fees Must Fall' student protests were significant movements that forced key social issues into mainstream public discourse. 'Rhodes Must Fall' focused on decolonising education and removing symbols of colonialism, such as the statue of Cecil Rhodes at the University of Cape Town. 'Fees Must Fall' aimed to address the financial barriers to higher education by demanding lower tuition fees and ultimately, free education for all. These protests highlighted broader issues of racial inequality, economic disparity, and the need for transformation within South Africa's higher education system.

The history of the South African HE system

The abolition of apartheid and democratisation of South Africa in 1994 catalysed significant sociopolitical change, including in HE. Apartheid education legislation was repealed with the introduction of the South African Schools Act (SASA) 1996 (Ndimande, 2012). The white colonial project of apartheid was predicated on a system of racial discrimination and inequalities which saw the black majority population denied equal educational access or resources. This was achieved and sustained via two key pieces of legislation, which fundamentally shaped the trajectory of the HE landscape in South Africa, and continues to impact HE long after the regime ended in 1994 (Badat & Sayed, 2014).

These pieces of legislation were the Group Areas Act (1950) and the Bantu Education Act (1952). The former determined where non-white people lived and worked, while the latter meant that non-white people received a substandard education, ensuring that social and economic inequalities persisted (Christie & Collins, 1982; Mabin, 1992). The legislation explicitly set out the age and level of educational access available to South African people according to racial groupings. HE was accessible to whites only. Since HE is a means for people to improve their social or economic standing, the legislation ultimately institutionalised racial inequalities beyond HE (Albertus, 2019). This legislation was accompanied by significant disparities in the funding that was made available to educational institutions, with schools for non-white children being chronically underfunded and under-resourced. The levels of educational attainment of teaching staff in non-white populated schools were also significantly lower in comparison to their white counterparts (Albertus, 2019).

SGBV in South African HE Institutions

South African HE institutions have been developing policies to address SGBV since the late 1980s to protect students and staff and bring about institutional and cultural change. In 2020 South Africa's National Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) developed a policy framework to guide post-school education and training institutions to address SGBV in 2020 (Brink et al., 2022; DHET, 2020). However, successful implementation of this policy framework relies on addressing a pervasive patriarchal rape culture, which undermines policies introduced to safeguard students and faculty from SGBV. While there is a growing awareness of SGBV in South African HE institutions, with many South African universities now in possession of some form of SGBV policy, there continues to be a lack of policy implementation. The provision of victim-survivor-focused systems to prevent and respond to SGBV at HE institutions also remains patchy.

Consequently, SGBV remains a key challenge, and women and gender- and/or sexuality-minoritised students continue to experience especially high rates of SGBV. Further, the under-reporting of this type of violence makes it difficult to determine the true prevalence of the different forms of SGBV within South African HE institutions. Due to under-reporting, and consequently low numbers of officially reported incidents of SGBV, there is a risk that HE institutions may underplay the severity of SGBV within their institution.

This section provides important context for South African HE, including recent neoliberalisation, historic racial legislative injustices, and the prevalence of and responses to SGBV in HE institutions. In the next section, we explore some of our main findings. We begin this section by examining existing policies, procedures, and support mechanisms.

Main findings

Existing policies, procedures, and support measures

There is no standard response to SGBV in South African HE institutions. In some universities, participants speak about the existence of dedicated offices for responding to SGBV. These offices or resources are not present in all universities, and the broader response to SGBV remains inconsistent across the HE sector. Racial disparities manifest in differences in resourcing and funding; dedicated SGBV offices are mainly found in well-resourced, historically white universities, while historically black universities continue to be under-resourced. In some universities, students and staff report to campus security, 'campus protection services', or a 'transformation office,' while in others, the process of handling SGBV complaints is outsourced to external corporations, such as Deloitte.

Additionally, many participants said their institutions have processes 'on paper' for addressing harm. However, people who have been through these processes said the response was not focused on their needs and did not provide clear accountability (further explored in a later section). While some universities had good frameworks in place, they were often not adequately or fully implemented.

When designated SGBV offices are present in South African HE institutions, they serve as a central resource for victim-survivors:

> [T]he whole idea was to create… a one-stop-shop where you had everybody, whether it was staff or students going to the same office. The office was set apart from the machinery of the university, we reported directly to the vice chancellor who is our highest office bearer, and we would have support. In the first instance, you would come in, you would speak to somebody about whatever it was and we decided we were also going to provide support and hold, and do whatever we could for people, even if they didn't want to take a disciplinary forward. Maybe they just wanted to be separated from the class of somebody else, etc. etc. so, we would navigate that. (SA011, academic)

These offices have disciplinary committees and investigation panels that look into SGBV complaints. In addition to investigating reports from known victims-survivors, these offices also handle anonymous and third-party complaints (i.e. complaints that come from people who are not the victim-survivor, but who witnessed the event or have knowledge of it).

Beyond investigations, disciplinary processes for cases of staff-to-student and student-to-student SGBV are the same, but the composition of the disciplinary panels differs based on whether staff or students are involved. Disciplinary panels tend to include students and/or staff, depending on who files the complaint, a chair, and a gender expert (someone who has knowledge of gender-related issues) who attends as a witness. Participants who were involved in creating and participating in these disciplinary hearings spoke of the importance of aligning SGBV policy with employment law in South Africa with regard to cases involving staff. Participants also spoke about the need to address both student and staff SGBV cases under the same institutional SGBV-specific policy to avoid multiple complicated processes.

Some offices have attempted to make these often-difficult disciplinary panel processes more attuned to the needs and interests of victim-survivors:

> We decided to change entirely from an adversarial to an inquisitorial system. We changed a lot of the key flashpoints for survivors, no direct cross-examination, not sitting in the same room. We would have a committee asking questions based on an investigation report. (SA011, academic)

> But you know there's kind of checks, in the sense that the people who are respondents can't ask questions directly to complainants. They have to put the questions to the panel, and then the panel decides if they're fair and reasonable. And then the panel puts them. You kind of have separate rooms. (SA013, academic)

At one university, a participant described the safeguarding measures enacted during an investigation into an SGBV complaint. It is important to note that these safeguarding measures were specific to this institution and are not found throughout the sector. Nevertheless, they are an example of good practice worth examining:

> [The institution] sent an investigator to come to the offices for a certain period between a certain time, and the entire organisation was alerted that they could speak to her and make a time to go and see her, or even just go in and see if she was available, and to share anything that they wanted to around the issue, and that was all anonymous, that it was completely safe, and that nothing would ever come back to them. (SA024, other university employee)

While these measures were put in place to protect complainants and witnesses, parallel measures were put in place to limit the alleged perpetrator's access to campus during the investigation:

> He was suspended over the time of the investigation. So he had initially a two-week suspension…after the two weeks, it was immediately apparent that the confidentiality had been breached by the CEO …. And as soon as she [the head of the office] became aware of that they extended his suspension. (SA024, other university employee)

Some universities also have policies that address or prohibit staff and student relationships:

> So, we have a policy at the university that […] [i]f you end up being romantically involved or have a sexual relationship with a student you are supervising, you have to declare that and your head has to reassign that student because that is a conflict of interest. So, that was the conflict-of-interest precautionary measure. Then we went further than that and we said beyond conflict of interest, i.e., marking somebody who you are having a romantic or sexual relationship with is also this abuse of power problem. So, then we said, okay, nobody; no staff member can have a relationship, a romantic or sexual relationship with a student or an undergraduate student, so, that is the policy at the moment. (SA011, academic)

Data shows that an intersectional, victim-survivor-focused policy as part of a broader coordinated response to SGBV in HE is vital. There is a culture of silencing victim-survivors in South Africa, and this extends to how HE institutions frame the issue. SGBV is widespread to the point where people—and HE institutions—easily believe it occurs, but they do not then treat it with the compassion and urgency it requires, instead often attempting to prevent victim-survivors from speaking out or making disclosures of SGBV. In this context, participants spoke about the need for HE processes that

believe and act on victim-survivor testimonies. This also represents a core aspect of a victim-survivor-focused approach:

> You've told us, we've heard you, we believe you. That was the approach. So, the true nature of complainant-centredness, it was always 'we believe you.' (SA06, activist)

> [The university] didn't understand [putting the] onus on the perpetrator. You know, so they often felt that, yes, by believing [the victim] we were victimising those who were accused. (SA07, activist)

Another university employee elaborated on why believing victim-survivors was crucial to limiting re-traumatisation. They also explained that this belief does not translate to automatically punishing the person who harmed the victim-survivor:

> [T]he idea was to create a survivor-centred process. I think a challenging part of it is helping people understand that it is about a centred process that does not favour an outcome for the survivor but takes a survivor through a process that doesn't traumatise, or minimise trauma and eliminates re-traumatisation, in how the process is conducted. (SA03, other university employee)

Several participants also spoke about the introduction of pastoral and specialist therapeutic or psychological support. This support was framed as part of a comprehensive, multimodal, coordinated institutional response that extends beyond punitive measures (i.e. punishing someone for breaking a policy, which could look like suspending a student or firing a staff member) to address the issue. In a few universities, the SGBV office included counsellors who provided pastoral support, investigators to look into complaints brought to the office, and then student volunteers who served as the first point of contact and as student advocates. In some universities, students were trained to receive potential complaints, and they could bring potential complainants to the office, where the head of the office would take over. Student volunteers also did advocacy and training work whenever this was needed, and they were supported if they were 'triggered' during this work.

> We would try to get [the complainant] in that relationship or trust, to ask the person to come and talk to us. The pull for doing that was that we could face the complainant [and tell them], 'You have as much support, psychosocial support as you want, and we will help you with any type of remedy or way forward you feel you would like'. We can help with mediation, we can help with prosecution, we can help with anything. Generally speaking, they did come forward. (SA011, academic)

As these accounts indicate, the handling of complaints should be conducted in a trauma-informed manner which prioritises physical and emotional safety, trust, and transparency regarding the process. It should incorporate holistic care and understanding, centre victim-survivor's choice and control, and promote healing. In contrast, when responses are not trauma-informed, they may re-traumatise victim-survivors and risk disengagement from the process, thereby making it difficult to provide adequate support or intervention. The promotion of healing, which is central to a trauma-informed approach, requires collaboration and mutuality, indicated here in the participants' accounts of relationship building and partnering with victim-survivors, especially in relation to decision-making.

Our data strongly corroborates the value of establishing dedicated, autonomous offices which have responsibility for managing complaints and policy implementation. However, these offices must be resourced appropriately and sustainably:

> It's the beast of like the system that we're all working in, it just drains you and then [...] eventually it like puts you up against

> each other […]. We're fighting for funding. We're fighting for space, we're fighting. (SA023, other university employee)

This participant, as well as others, described how their work in a dedicated gender office was often reliant on short-term, restricted purpose or programmatic grant funding which severely threatened their ability to achieve longer-term outcomes. It also meant the employees of these officers faced the additional pressures of needing to continuously apply for grants, which in turn detracted from their ability to do the work of supporting victim-survivors and broader policy implementation. This burden of 'chasing' funding is exacerbated when understood against the backdrop of the increasingly neoliberalised university which routinely prioritises financial gain above the interests of its student or staff population (see section below for further discussion of this issue).

Data further showed that feminist victim-survivor-led responses must be built into the institutional policy and infrastructure rather than solely relying on the efforts of certain proactive individuals in key roles to push for change. These feminist figures tended to incorporate advocacy and solidarity into the complaints processes, including in terms of how investigations and disciplinary panels were conducted. We see from participant accounts that these women made a significant impact on the victim-survivors navigating these processes. At the same time, this over-reliance on individual change-makers meant that they frequently experienced significant 'burnout' (physical, emotional or mental exhaustion) and high levels of stress, especially because they were often working without the support of management and/or without the resources necessary to meet the requirements of their role(s).

Lastly, the functioning of SGBV offices differed significantly based on the politics of their leadership. Participants involved in complaints processes spoke about their distress when managers of SGBV offices prioritised bureaucracy and their own concerns over the care and interests of those accessing their services:

> So, I often feel like in meetings I have to remind people that management is not our friend. Management is there to make this work impossible. Right, I mean this is a tick box exercise and in the very recent history of this institutional initiative, we have seen that when people become too good, everything has really gone to shambles… there's kind of naivety or a kind of technocratic approach. Like I think everything comes down to the person's personality, who is at the top and how they kind of view the role. Which is a product of limited resources, like everything becomes this one person and not a broader base. (SA021, academic)

Now that we have established what existing policies, procedures, and support are available in select South African HE institutions, we next look at the role of neoliberalism in the HE sector and how this impacts SGBV cases.

Neoliberalisation and marketisation of universities

University policies and procedures do not exist in a vacuum, and according to participant accounts, neoliberalism has impacted how South African HE institutions respond to SGBV. In line with findings from universities in the Global North, evidence indicated how South African universities – particularly historically white institutions – thought about the impact of disclosing SGBV in market terms. In practice, this looks like universities protecting themselves as opposed to protecting victim-survivors:

> If there's like survivors coming and saying this is what's happening to us they're not actually paying attention to that. It's almost like we can help you, [but] we make sure that our reputation is sound. […]. So it's more about protecting the university and less about actually addressing the issue and maybe they are more practical than we are in terms of understanding that it is what it is, like these things happen. (SA09, academic/activist)

Some universities framed the disclosure of SGBV as something that might lead to a financial deficit through reputational loss. In turn, this leads to a culture in which SGBV is viewed as something to be kept quiet or covered up. This ultimately led to routine institutional inaction and the prioritisation of institutional interests over those of the victim-survivors (for a discussion of what this looks like in the Global North, see Shannon, 2021). Such an approach serves to protect the institution's reputation and those in power, which produces what Phipps (2018) has termed the "institutional airbrushing" of incidents of SGBV:

> [T]hey need to employ people who are sensitive to the matter and people who really think about the victim before the image […] and the reputation of the university. Because the challenge that we face going to university is that we're dealing with proctors and lawyers who don't care and who are angry [and want to] get rid of us instead of focusing on [the issue] at hand. (SA019, student)

> But in the historically white universities its very much that whole liberal, 'we are progressive and so we are aware of all these issues' and we create all these spaces for everyone to be heard and, yes, we make sure that you follow all the processes. But actually […] young women don't feel like those processes are there for them. They feel like those processes are there to make the university look good. (SA09, other university employee)

Neoliberalisation in HE, in general, has created individualistic, competitive structures. Although the South African HE sector has not experienced neoliberalisation to the same extent as universities in the Global North, we can see its influence in how the university understands SGBV in terms of reputational or financial loss (read Phipps, 2018 for more). It is also a key feature in the creation of an environment in which institutional violence(s) are often left unchecked when occurring against the backdrop of a violent state in which police violence and abuse flourish and there are widespread crackdowns of protest and worker movements.

Participant accounts suggest that addressing SGBV is not something increasingly neoliberalised HE institutions regard as a 'worthy' cause in market terms. Consequently, there are often fewer financial resources and university personnel allocated to long-term projects or dedicated offices established to address SGBV within the institution. Rather, employees of these offices refer to a culture of short-term funding in a competitive environment, as speakers in the section prior also discussed.

Some employees in dedicated offices instead describe how they are expected to routinely apply for small 'pots' of time-limited or project-specific funding, often from Global North institutions or international grant

funders which stipulate specific conditions or eligibility requirements to obtain financial backing. This functions to create a hostile funding environment in which workers are continuously 'fighting' for financial resources, including for their own roles, producing high levels of stress and uncertainty. This funding structure perpetuates an imperialist narrative that maintains the precarity of Global South institutions and their dependence on the Global North institutions and organisations which in turn limits their ability to address SGBV within their university spaces:

> [I]n the global south and the subaltern […] we live in this neo-colonial pretentious 'decolonial' space so many of us are in positions of power in things that we're really just f*cking puppets. [W]hen I got into this job I was very excited to see the amount of funding we had for gender advocacy. […] [But] so much, so much of my job is just funding applications, lot of funding applications. Oh my God and then [grant funders will] change the theme and will be like gender and climate change and none of us have those two […]. What the f*ck global north? […] ugh it's the like curtseying for the global north institutions. (SA023, other university employee)

Now that we have discussed the economic background of South African HE, in the next section, we examine the role of securitisation in response to SGBV.

Institutional 'protection' and securitisation

In the name of 'safety,' universities have introduced several measures to protect students against SGBV on campus. These include CCTV cameras and private security guards. But participants' accounts note that university actors – including the private security firms hired by the institution – are often the aggressors, compromising the safety and wellbeing of students:

> I think [institutions] became more securitised after Fees Must Fall and Rhodes Must Fall because of all the incidents. There were buildings that were burned and stuff like that but it is private security and private security is notorious for harassing women. The ones we used during 2015/2016, there were many complaints against them about harassment, so, they are not our allies… (SA02, academic)

> [There's] an attempt to kind of make [the university] a safe space but then also there's so much that doesn't feel safe even within those kinds of protective walls, not to mention that that also then creates that kind of division with literally the kind of communities that are right across the street. So, again, it is kind of like whose safety and what safety? I mean, yes, if you think about even sexual assaults that happen on campus, those are happening in residence, those are happening in offices. (SA012, student)

Moreover, the notion that students can take measures to protect themselves within campus spaces is highly problematised when perpetrators and those that harm are regularly left to act with impunity and in plain sight, as we examine in greater detail in the following section on accountability:

> [I]t is very hard to take precautionary measures when it is not about avoiding

> dark alleys […]; that's not the nature of the harm. The harm is people that you know, it may be your boyfriend even, in a certain situation, or it could be a lecturer. So, this makes it much harder to take 'precautionary measures' or to get people to guard against 'risky behaviour.' (SA011, academic)

> I mean all of us had to bump into our perpetrators on campus. We, I think, had to be the protection for each other. We are the ones who had to be there when the others were triggered, we'd be the ones to carry each other. Whenever we'd bump into their perpetrators on campus, we'd be the one texting them, 'don't walk on this path', or, 'take that other route,' or, 'friend, where are you? Are you in your room? Okay, cool, just stay there,' or whatever. It was up to us to do that. (SA020, student)

These accounts starkly evidence how students – typically young women – use their collective experiences to galvanise and support one another in an environment in which they cannot obtain physical security against the threat of SGBV. We know women and minoritised genders act every day to keep themselves safe as they move through the world to protect themselves. This attempt at keeping themselves and their communities safe also extends to university spaces.

Some people are safer in university spaces than others; we see how students who experience racial, class, economic, sexuality and/or gender inequalities can be subject to increased rates of violence both within and outside certain institutional spaces. Those students who exist at the intersection of several interlocking identity factors face even higher levels of risk or exclusion. This violence includes heightened policing and securitisation, particularly for university members involved in protests:

> Then came to Johannesburg because... 'it's better, it's less racist,' and then got here, became involved in the student movement then as well and then it just became incredibly homophobic. I remember I was arrested with a few of my friends, yes like we look back now and we laugh. I was arrested in my first week, literally my first week. The first Friday after I'd registered, I was in a police van and I went to the police station and I was suspended the next week. Our suspension letters arrived the next week. I didn't care, just didn't care because again we don't even have the money. (SA023, other university employee)

This section analysed how some universities respond to SGBV by increasing security measures on campuses, which ultimately target minoritised members of the campus community, which in some cases mirrors societal discrimination at a broader, societal level. Next, we examine issues of accountability, and how some universities are implementing a victim-survivor-focused response to SGBV.

Accountability and a victim-survivor-focused response

Although some institutions have processes in place 'on paper', a consistent theme across participant narratives was HE institutions' routine failure to implement these processes to provide real accountability for SGBV. This section analyses what participants mean by 'accountability' and how that is (not) achieved in institutions. It also explores examples of positive victim-survivor-focused practices currently being implemented.

Several participants spoke of the need for accountability concerning SGBV in universities, to be enacted at multiple levels. They expressed wanting to hold both the person who harmed them, as well as their institution, accountable. This would require the person who harmed them to accept personal responsibility for the harm caused, as well as the institution acknowledging its primary role in fostering a culture that enables SGBV to occur. Moreover, it would necessitate that the institution accept responsibility for failing to respond appropriately and/or in a timely manner where necessary.

Participants understood this dual response as a key mechanism for instigating meaningful change within the university but also for validating victim-survivors' lived experiences and thereby creating an environment in which survivors feel 'seen' and 'heard'. For participants, institutional accountability means taking actions against the people who harmed them, coupled with implementing measures to ensure the safety and well-being of victim-survivors.

While some institutions, as mentioned earlier, are evidently trying to improve their complaints processes, this is not occurring across the board. Identifying areas for improvement in terms of policy and procedure, some participants spoke about the imperative of safeguarding and protecting the well-being of victim-survivors at all stages of the complaint procedure. Crucially, this includes taking proactive, visible steps towards addressing the behaviours of the person who has harmed and in so doing, conveying a clear message that SGBV is not tolerated within the institution and that victim-survivors are believed.

> The main issue is that we can't breathe. We want these men gone so you need to come back to us as the university management and say that okay, we have excluded them or we have suspended them pending investigation. […] We were saying take the stance of you believe the survivor. It shouldn't be on the survivor to prove exactly that this person is innocent or not. (SA025, activist)

This account points to a general lack of institutional understanding regarding what a 'victim-survivor-focused' approach means in practice, and what measures are needed for it to be implemented successfully and in a manner that meets the interests of the people at the heart of such an approach. Participants also understood institutional failure to implement proper accountability measures as going hand-in-hand with systemic and institutional attempts to 'protect' the alleged perpetrator:

> [T]here was this like privileging of this perpetrator which happened to be a man, aren't we surprised, and insistent that his degree was on the line and that the university somehow had to protect him. So that type of sympathy firstly with students like so much depends on this person getting their degree, of course that type of sympathy wasn't afforded the actual victim. Even in terms of student staff relations […] there was just like a protection of perpetrators across the board and it didn't matter what strata or what level of the university hierarchy you were in. (SA018, student)

Our data suggests that this tendency to err on the side of protecting perpetrators incorporates intersections of race and class, which in turn shapes the extent of the protection afforded. As such, the institutional tendency to protect people who harm was seemingly heightened when that

person was a member of staff, or was otherwise privileged in terms of their race, gender, and/or class:

> I think they're happy for you to do this work [activism] as long as you don't ruffle someone in their job. Especially, if it's like student versus student, I think they're fine but the moment it comes to staff and senior staff, I think they get scared a little bit. You know, they want you to tread more carefully. (SA021, academic)

> The justice system works differently for different people and that's just it. It works differently for different- even if you're a rapist, if you're a rapist who has money and a rapist who's just a dodgy rapist or whatever, a street rapist, you don't get treated the same, we know that. So we need consistency, a consistent, lenient, not even lenient, a consistent justice system. It must be consistent throughout cases. People mustn't be treated differently because of your class status or your race because race plays a big deal, race and class play a big deal. (SA025, activist)

These quotes indicate how the 'protection' of people who harm is shaped by the intersections of class and race, with the professional status of the perpetrator functioning as an indicator of the level of sanction versus protection assigned to the case. Further, gender norms and structural inequalities influence what behaviours are tolerated on campus, and who is seen as 'worthy' of 'protection.' In other words, SGBV behaviour(s) enacted by someone from a 'privileged' group might be seen as 'acceptable', but when someone from a marginalised, minoritised, or 'less privileged' group enacts that same behaviour, it becomes 'unacceptable.' This can then lead to institutions not holding certain more 'privileged' individuals who harm accountable while over-policing or sanctioning marginalised or minoritised people who harm.

This data therefore indicates that South African HE institutions need a cohesive, fully intersectional approach that acknowledges how patriarchy, racism, classism, and other forms of oppression interconnect with one another and with SGBV. Individual policies in isolation will not adequately address what data suggests is an overarching culture of 'protecting' people who harm across HE institutions.

The perceived 'protection' of people who harm leads us to an examination of the implementation of university and institutional policies. University policies are administrative processes, not criminal justice processes. This means university processes have different (i.e. lower) levels of evidence required to find someone in breach of a policy and have limited (i.e. non-criminal) sanctions available when someone does breach a policy. In other words, universities and HE institutions may be able to suspend or expel a student found responsible for SGBV, but they cannot send that person to prison. Although these institutional processes are not criminal justice processes, in practice they often replicate legal and criminal justice language. This continued use of criminal justice language makes it difficult to speak about accountability—beyond finding someone in breach of a policy and receiving sanctions:

> [T]he university stood apart from the [university office responsible for SGBV] firstly and tended to privilege perpetrators. There was this constant trying to protect people who are accused of perpetrating acts of gender-based violence, and it tended to hide behind like, the legalities of prosecuting perpetrators […] [the institution] just refused to come outright and say, 'Okay, we will not tolerate this terrible behaviour on campus.' (SA018, student)

Further, participants expressed that staff and students who occupied privileged race and/or class status often evaded the existing measures for holding people who harm to account, as institutions were highly reluctant to investigate them. Practices such as these imply that perpetrators of SGBV are more 'valuable' or 'deserving' of protection than

victim-survivors, thereby reinforcing dominant discourses concerning which bodies are 'worthy' of protection and which are not. This notion contributes to the systematic and institutional silencing of victim-survivors and may deter them from reporting to their HE institutions in the first place.

In this section, we discussed the patchy implementation of responses that are truly victim-survivor-focused in South African HE institutions and the difficulties of achieving 'accountability' in institutional processes. In the next section, we discuss the role of naming people who harm in the pursuit of justice.

The politics of naming

When we refer to 'naming', we are describing the act of publicly disclosing the name or identifying details of someone who has perpetrated or is alleged to have perpetrated SGBV, as well as the name of the HE institution that has allowed or enabled SGBV to occur, and/or that responded inappropriately to reports of SGBV. Naming is often done by individuals who have experienced SGBV themselves as part of speaking out about their own experiences; activists and allies also engage in naming, usually in support of victim-survivors when speaking out. Naming can occur through various means, including social media platforms, lists populated online, dedicated websites, internal university networks, or even word of mouth. It also includes calls from some university staff and activists for HE institutions in South Africa to hold people who harm accountable by publicly naming them following upheld findings in disciplinary procedures. In this section, we explore how naming is connected to accountability, consider how victim-survivors are already engaging in this practice, and examine the potential implications of creating a register of SGBV perpetrators in HE.

We know from our data that in the absence of effective accountability measures in many HE institutions, students, activists, and victim-survivors are calling for the public disclosure or naming of people who harmed or are naming said people themselves. It is important to recognise that people are already publicly naming people who harm because there is a lack of formalised accountability processes that enable them to obtain the redress they seek. For example, many participants have already taken to naming perpetrators online, using 'lists', such as the RU Reference List. They have also used 'whisper' networks or informal, covert systems of communication to warn others about potential risks as well as to obtain some form of accountability in a system that does not have the official channels to deliver it:

> [T]here's a huge history… of people sending anonymous emails. Or even putting kind of allegations in a letter and

sticking it under a door kind of thing. So I think that the social media is kind of a continuation and application of strategies that were kind of already in circulation. So anonymous kind of complaints show up a lot. And the social media stuff is kind of a new variation on a theme that I think is already pretty established (SA013, academic).

They've been circulating lists where lecturers, professors are on those lists. And nothing has happened…… But there's a reason that student went to Facebook instead of the university, institutions that are there to support young women and also the police. It speaks to both (SA09, academic/activist).

Speaking out about experiences of SGBV and/or publicly naming institutions or alleged perpetrators can also be a significant step for some victim-survivors in their pursuit of accountability and healing. The act of speaking out or naming can give voice to people who are silenced in mainstream narratives (Dey, 2020; dos Santos Bruss, 2019; Subramanian & Sharma, 2022), and challenge unequal power dynamics in the coverage of SGBV cases (Banda-Chitsamatanga & Ntlama, 2020). It is important to note here that accountability and healing look very different for different people with experiences of SGBV, and all are valid.

A student movement at University of Rhodes in 2016 published a list of 11 names under the title, 'RU Reference List'. No further information was given alongside this list. According to the people involved, no description was required as through 'whisper' networks, these men were known to have perpetrated SGBV:

No one said anything about this is a list of rapists, they just put out a list. Through that list women reacted to say […] these are people who actually do this and that was fascinating about the whole process was that nobody said anything but everyone knew […] So it just shows that these men were doing this to a whole lot of people. So the protest was a way of us finally saying that enough is enough. (SA020, student)

Seddon (2016) argues that the RU Reference List spoke to larger cultural issues that went beyond the men who were named. These issues included the university not taking SGBV reports seriously, not suspending or removing from campus people who were still under active investigation, and enabling a "culture of entitlement and impunity that is the reality on campus" (Seddon, 2016, n.p.). The RU Reference List came up in almost every interview we conducted, and this quote from a SA025, an activist, speaks to the exact issues of institutional accountability identified by Seddon:

When the university management caught wind…there's posters going up…they sent security to tear down those posters, without engaging…Then we realised, I think it was a week later, actually we need to mobilise…we had to amplify and put pressure. They weren't actually trying to meet with us. That's what triggered RU Reference List.

We were talking on the group chat and said, Guys, what are we going to do? We can't just let it fumble or disappear. We have to continue what we've begun. Then we met on the Sunday…We aired out our grievances, what are we going to do. But then as part of a healing process, in that healing process we decided, Guys, actually we talk about the rapist but I think also it's very good for us to also maybe create a bond between us and some sort of breaking of the barriers. If we're saying that we're confronting the system, who is the system? It's the perpetrators. Who are the perpetrators? We need to name them. We need to put a face to the things that we're talking about….Then we were like actually- that's when we started pouring out, I was raped by this person, my friend was raped by this person, starting telling each other

> who are the rapists. Let's identify the ones that we know….. Then we wrote down the names. That's how it was birthed really, RU Reference List. We decided there and then that actually, I mean what are we going to do with this list? (SA025, activist)

For some participants, naming people who harm publicly is regarded as a mechanism to potentially increase people's – usually women's – safety and potentially prevent others from being harmed by known perpetrators of SGBV. Naming could also reduce, to some extent, the risk of people who harm moving between or within institutions or job roles with impunity and no professional consequence (Banda-Chitsamatanga & Ntlama, 2020; Geldenhuys & Lambrechts, 2023; Quirk & Pillay, 2023).

In this context, some participants called for formal registers or databases documenting the names of SGBV perpetrators working within and across South African HE. These registers would have names of those with upheld findings following an institutionally implemented disciplinary process. The calls from victims-survivors and activists underscore a strong desire for a system that proactively seeks to prevent people who harm from acting with impunity, as well as limit their ability to move freely through the university sector. To this end, some participants spoke about how a public record of people known to perpetrate SGBV in HE, could act as a deterrent and provide some sense of restitution or restoration, while also potentially reducing the risk posed by named individuals:

> [H]ow do you avoid passing the perp, right? The 'pass the perp' syndrome. The only way is to name them. And to put that out in the open. I mean we should have a bloody national university database of perpetrators that have been found guilty. […] I think it's in the interests of the university. I think it's in the interests of the broader academic community as well. (SA07, activist)

> For instance, you know, if you look at... Basic education here, so like high schools and primary schools, right? So they've adopted the— What's it? Sexual offender's registry. Right? […] If you've been found guilty, you know, of a sexual offence, you know, then you are put in that register so— Which means that […] you can't move from here to there, you know […] And that is necessary because you can imagine that, you know, when people are moving— Because there are a lot of incidences [of…] A sexual harassment incident being reported and then the person— Their institution facilitates their move to another institution… That is a big problem. (SA015, academic)

However, the implementation of such a public record or register raises complex issues about privacy, surveillance, legal rights, and the potential for misuse. Wider research on this issue shows that such registers embody a carceral response, potentially targeting people from the most marginalised communities (Levine & Meiners, 2020); for more information, see the (2024) North-South Feminist Dialogue report, *Silencing Sexual and Gender-based Violence in Academia and The Politics of Naming*. The notion of establishing a register is, therefore not one that was unproblematically endorsed, and the challenges and material consequences of naming people, featured in some participants' discussions:

> We want a register that is available for everybody and it's tricky because people can change, and people can move on and then they are forever tainted. And you've got to balance that against what about the [person who was] raped? Can they move on? Are they're not forever tainted, silently which is perhaps worse? (SA06, other university employee)

Literature from outside of the HE context highlights the challenges associated with implementing such registers after they have been enacted. For example, sex offender

registers serve as formal, carceral mechanisms for naming people who have been convicted of various sexual offences. These registers are typically national lists and are part of the state's criminal justice system. Depending on the country, sex offender registers vary in their level of public accessibility and include a range of measures designed to monitor and restrict the movements of those listed. These include restrictions on their behaviour, where they can live, and what kind of jobs they can have (Geldenhuys & Lambrechts, 2023; Levine & Meiners, 2020). In countries like the USA, these registers are publicly available, whereas in Nigeria they are partially accessible. In contrast, the National Register of Sex Offenders (NSRO) in South Africa is not publicly available, similar to practices in Brazil, Argentina, and the UK.

However, it is crucial not to conflate criminal justice sex offender registers, as mentioned above, with HE or other institutional responses. The online informal lists created by activists and victim-survivors in HE settings, such as the previously discussed RU Reference List, do not have any formal or legal status and are usually 'grassroots', 'bottom-up' initiatives organised by people with lived experience of SGBV or their allies and other activists. Further, these lists and registers are separate entities; the call for registers, as participants envisage them in this study, would be institutionally managed (i.e., handled by the universities) and not state-run, therefore avoiding criminal justice consequences.

Some South African academics have also argued for universities to publicly name people who have been found responsible for SGBV after an institutional disciplinary hearing (North-South Feminist Dialogue, 2024; Quirk & Pillay, 2023). They argue that since universities have more power and resources, naming should be their responsibility and not the responsibility of individual victims-survivors or activists. Such naming would mention those that have perpetrated SGBV only under specific conditions. For example, not in the context of unsubstantiated allegations and not during an ongoing investigation, but only after a finding of responsibility has been made. It would also include a brief description of the misconduct that would not identify people who do not want to be involved (e.g., victim-survivors, witnesses) (Quirk & Pillay, 2023). This would enable the creation of better institutional cultures and community accountability (for more information, see the North-South Feminist Dialogue (2024) report).

When participants spoke about naming perpetrators on a register, they wanted this to happen for various reasons. Most did not want to name for the sake of naming; others did not want to name for punitive reasons (such as part of a criminal justice response, like the National Register of Sex Offenders), but rather wanted to name to hold those individuals to account. Some, however, did want a register as part of a set of measures to discipline or 'punish' those that harmed them, and this variation in motive for naming among the people we spoke to, must be acknowledged.

In the absence of institutional accountability, naming is suggested by some participants as a viable alternative. For many victim-survivors, and those responsible for institutional policymaking, the need to take a public stand against those that perpetrate SGBV and to confront and challenge an institutional culture that enables SGBV is crucial for tackling this issue in a meaningful and victim-survivor-focused manner.

This section has explored the politics of naming perpetrators and examined the challenges and opportunities of registers or databases which document the names of people who have been found to perpetrate SGBV in HE. In the next section, we discuss training and sensitisation.

Transformative justice, training, and advocacy

Discussions of accountability lead us to consider what alternative forms of justice some institutions are considering, which go beyond the naming of people who harm or the implementation of institutionally managed registers of said people. In this section, we begin by discussing how some participants are considering non-punitive forms of justice, particularly transformative justice, before examining what training and advocacy measures exist at some HE institutions.

Transformative justice is a form of justice that is not punishment-based, but rather focused on accountability, changing behaviour, and changing the conditions that enable harm. In this context, it centres the needs of victim-survivors and asks what they need the person who harmed them to do to repair the harm they have caused. Transformative justice is focused on repairing relationships that have suffered because of the harm caused, which includes the relationship between the victim-survivor and person who harmed them as well as the relationships in the larger community such as the university or other HE institution. It is also concerned with changing the conditions that allow harm to happen in the first place. One student explained their concerns regarding punitive responses to address SGBV, and in so doing, began to explore what a non-carceral or non-punitive response might entail:

> [S]o a lot of people didn't want to jeopardise the wellbeing of their perpetrators and this is like a bit of a tension within myself because I mean I don't necessarily believe in punitive measures but at the same time it just strikes me as unjust somehow that the majority of women continue to have so much compassion for men who violate and abuse them. So I'm not really sure how that dynamics could be reconfigured but I definitely think that [the] university should look into that and to say that people ultimately must be held accountable for their actions. (SA018, student)

Transformative justice offers opportunities to respond to the concerns voiced by the student above so that the tensions she refers to are attended to in a way that foregrounds the needs of those who have been harmed by SGBV. To this end, transformative justice must be victim-survivor-led and requires that the person causing the harm to acknowledge their actions. Moreover, institutions must work collaboratively with the victim-survivor to understand what addressing the harms could look like at individual, community and/or institutional levels. These measures are more holistic and go beyond the implementation of training or sensitisation activities directed towards individuals who have themselves harmed. Our data suggests that these types of transformative justice responses do not currently exist in the HE institutions where we interviewed participants, but that they may offer possible solutions.

While training alone does not constitute a transformative justice approach, it remains an important mechanism, especially when part of a broader set of institutionally implemented measures to address SGBV in HE. Data showed that training and advocacy were taking place within several institutions, but these operated in different ways, with varying degrees of efficacy and/or impact.

Participants discussed the need for and the implementation of specialist training, particularly for those who respond to incidents of SGBV and those managing complaints and disciplinary procedures. The trainings must address a range of key topics, including trauma, gender-related issues, bystander interventions and 'allyship', trauma-informed and victim-survivor-centred investigations, and SGBV awareness raising (including what constitutes SGBV):

> [I]n instances where someone has become a victim of violence on campus, you know how to deal with it and, I guess, the procedures that need to take place

> after that. You are also given gender sensitisation training […]. And essentially they teach you how to become an ally and, yes, they educate you and debunk a lot of myths that you may have. So it's available for everyone. This year we've actually trained members of staff as well. So the support staff and the cleaners have also undergone, their training so that the office is not just available for students or to support students, it's also available for members of staff. (SA010, activist)

The need to offer opportunities for comprehensive awareness raising among the student population was also clear in our data. Some participants who worked in dedicated SGBV offices provided examples of how they tried to maximise their office's reach and impact:

> [W]e would try to as much as possible, to get invited to lectures. We called it 'ambush', basically not telling the students, because the minute you advertise, […] a session on sexual harassment, nobody comes. So, we would just try to 'ambush' people in their regular [lectures]; if it's an engineering lecture, you go and ambush them about the gender office, so, we would do that as well. (SA011, academic)

However, participants highlighted that addressing SGBV on campus required multiple and varied mechanisms to engage the student and staff population, using a range of approaches. These would need to challenge individual, societal and institutional factors which create the conditions that enable and exacerbate the perpetration of SGBV:

> I think to address gender-based violence and harm [it] needs a multipronged [approach]. It needs to be infused into curriculum, it needs to be part of policy frameworks, it needs to be part of posters on walls, it needs to be part of who's elected to positions, it needs to be a holistic way of ensuring that rape culture does not thrive on campus. And to come up with programmes and interventions I think it needs the involvement of students as well as staff and it needs to be resourced and so it needs that political will that can also release the finances to let these things happen. (SA06, other university employee)

Advocacy work was also present in some institutions, which focused on ensuring that faculty and students were aware of the policies in place, how to access them, and what types of issues the policies had been established to address. In several cases, institutional policymakers identified a need for this type of advocacy in order to improve the University's response to SGBV:

> [It] is a gap that is going to need advocacy work with staff, with management, with student leaders, with residences… […] And how to make the policy accessible, how to make it very, very clear: if you have been raped this is what is available to you. How do we make sure that you cannot not know what should happen? And this is what rape is, and this is what harassment is, you know, so there's so much education that needs to happen. (SA06, other university employee)

Gender-specific training was implemented in some institutions as a mechanism for addressing SGBV following a disciplinary hearing. In these instances, gender sensitisation (a form of consciousness-raising or awareness-raising that aims to make people sensitive to an issue) training functions as part of a broader exercise in institutional culture change, but is implemented at the individual level to elicit behaviour change on the part of the person who caused the harm:

> [T]here's now a gender-sensitivity training which we can kind of use as a sanction coming out of a disciplinary hearing, which is like a concerted kind of

> developed course and they [also do the training] in residences and all the rest of it. (SA013, academic)

Together these participant accounts substantiate findings in other studies that indicate that training and advocacy programs aimed at addressing SGBV in universities can help to create cultural change by educating attendees on key gender-related issues (McCall et al., 2020). They can function to build critical consciousness and go some way to debunking harmful myths concerning SGBV, or destabilising violence-supportive norms among student populations, as the participants above allude to. Training specifically for staff members can also enhance their ability to respond to disclosures effectively (Jones et al., 2021), while creating an environment where the whole university community is concerned with addressing SGBV.

Aside from its role in student mobilisation and protest (discussed in the next section), social media also occupies a key role in the implementation of awareness-raising activities among the student population. A key area of awareness-raising over social media involved addressing an embedded 'rape culture' across campuses (Bashonga & Khuzwayo, 2017; Gouws, 2018; Orth et al., 2021) which in turn sparked online disclosures from victim-survivors:

> [P]eople are sharing their stories on social media and so therefore there's like this level of support, and solidarity or maybe even feminist consciousness, like 'oh I wasn't aware that I'd been raped.' (SA09, other university employee)

In this section, we have examined possibilities and limitations concerning transformative justice for SGBV in universities, as well as SGBV training and advocacy work in implementation in some HE institutions. In the next section, we discuss student protests and institutional responses to these.

Student protest and the institutional response(s)

While some universities are beginning to address SGBV through the establishment of dedicated offices or the implementation of training and advocacy work, there is still some way to go. This is specifically in relation to changing institutional cultures concerning SGBV, and as regards the provision of support that is victim-survivor focused.

Student protest is a key driver for institutional change, even when HE institutions attempt to shut this down. This section looks at student protests concerning SGBV and the institutional responses at some universities. Responses often took the form of increased securitisation, as previously discussed, and heightened police violence on campus. Data showed these practices were frequently enabled or permitted by universities without due regard for their duty of care to students.

There is a strong history of student protest in South African universities. Student mobilisations highlight a deep dissatisfaction with university policies on SGBV as well as other issues such as student fees, which students perceive as outdated and ineffective in practice. Concerning SGBV specifically, the ongoing power of patriarchy and rape culture in universities is seen as symptomatic of broader societal issues (Bashonga & Khuzwayo, 2017). As such, our data reveal that these protests are broadly intersectional, highlighting a range of systemic racial, gender and class inequalities. The scope of these systemic problems underscores the need for a comprehensive policy framework that can address these issues (Muswede, 2017).

There is also a dominant discourse concerning the need to ensure SGBV is not depoliticised or severed from its activist roots when operating in the context of the neoliberal university space:

> Ideally gender-based violence needs to be politicised because as soon as it becomes mainstreamed [in] universities [that] operate in a neo-liberal ethos, […]

> where it is about what is economically efficient and viable, […] it becomes tick boxing exercises and so then it loses its power and then it will just become silenced again. And so there always needs to be a political project of activism. (SA06, other university employee)

Student protests around SGBV in universities saw the increased and routine securitisation of university campuses in response to student mobilisation. The dominant institutional rationale for this securitisation centred on the need to ensure safety across university spaces and to protect against student activists (Sempijja & Letlhogile, 2021). HE institutions typically enacted increased securitisation by installing violent private security firms and inviting state police forces onto campus. These state police forces used brutality, rubber bullets and tear gas against students in an environment in which they should have been protected:

> [W]hen I think about the student movements and bringing the police onto campus, who is that protecting? It wasn't protecting the students who got rubber bullets in their backs. It was protecting the property of the university. (SA012, student)

> And there was one point that year when, yes, like [the university] called in police. They brought in like those big giant things. I can't remember if that was when they were also doing the water cannons. But the priest at some point, like the police were chasing the students around and then the priest got between the students and, […] the students were all then taken into the Catholic church […]. And he just stood in front of the police van and they shot him […] he'd also got shot somewhere in the face with like a rubber bullet so there's blood dripping down his face and he's wearing his white robe and he's just like standing there… (SA012, student)

Set against the political history and that of HE in South Africa, the institutional responses documented in this study can be understood as the product of a colonial state which continues to inflict structural violence upon poorer, working-class black South Africans. Data indicates the extent to which institutions routinely sanctioned or enabled police violence, as well as violence perpetrated by private security firms hired by the institution(s). When students opposed the institution itself by protesting its violence in (not) handling SGBV, they were problematised as unruly (Xaba, 2017). This enabled HE institutions to dismiss out of hand the issues students were protesting, which in turn allowed SGBV perpetrators to avoid accountability.

> [W]e had horrible, horrible police action; people being arrested, people being badly manhandled. (SA06, other university employee)

> They clearly are aware of what we're capable of. So then they first shoot at us in the morning. Then later on, around one in the afternoon, now it's 'your comments have been erased.' We need to raise bail money. We need lawyers. It comes out the university has taken out a court against three [...] Me, a random second year student. Like I'm so random. (SA025, activist)

While most campus protests began peacefully, the institutional response was frequently violent and heavy handed, employing both university and state apparatuses:

> [T]here was disciplinary hearings, there was intimidations. It was police brutality. It was expulsions. One of our comrades [name] was expelled for life. It was court cases. One of our comrades was arrested for just standing there […] (SA019, student)

> We [student activists] were negotiating with terrorists. (SA04, activist)

Institutional retaliation against protest participants also took more insidious forms, playing out within the academic space. Academics penalised students active in the movement, or who were known to be speaking out, by giving them lower grades than the assignments merited or otherwise limiting students' capacity to move through the university system to attain their qualifications. This had the most significant and harmful impact on black and working-class students, who were frequently managing financial insecurities or had attained university places through scholarships or grants, and could not afford to discontinue, be suspended, or be made to fail their degrees:

> Sometimes you know [we] would collide with deans and academics, and you'll find that you're getting low marks in your courses but you've actually been doing well and you'd see that okay, this was marked very strictly compared to my colleague. (SA019, student)

> [S]tudents have been expelled. And they say it's 'academic exclusions' but I actually think from what the students and the activists were saying is that some of these academic exclusions, are exclusions because they spoke out against rape. And so many are scared to speak because [they could be] academically excluded but, you know, you can't say much if you're academically excluded. Because it looks like you just didn't perform, you know, for that year. And so many students really have said, and they were saying this in relation to Fees Must Fall, Rhodes Must Fall and RU Reference List, like there've been exclusions and some of these exclusions have been because we protested, we spoke out (SA016, other university employee).

> I was arrested in my first week, literally my first week. The first Friday after I'd registered I was in a police van and I went to the police station and I was suspended the next week. Our suspension letters arrived the next week. I didn't care, just didn't care because again we don't even have the money. Like you know it's one thing to […] to tell me not to come to school – I already have a student card and also I don't even know how I'm going to pay for this degree anyway, so it's neither here nor there, we're just like passing time. (SA023, other university employee)

These quotes point to the systematic institutional silencing of students for taking part in protests and speaking out against SGBV. Institutional retaliation against student protest creates an extremely hostile environment in which victim-survivors feel unable to make disclosures or seek help. In this context, victim-survivors fear that they will not be believed, or that they will be penalised in their academic work for speaking out. Both could impact students' ability to complete their degrees as well as their longer-term social mobility.

The use of social media as a mechanism to circumnavigate the institutional silencing of students who speak out is strongly evident in our data. Participants also discussed how it is a powerful tool to galvanise and mobilise students with similar experiences:

> [Social media] was very important because the main platform that we used to organise. It's also very difficult to talk to people face to face sometimes. […] It was a perfect time for this movement to be happening and also to see the power of social media and for it to be utilised in that time […]. With regards to the university, I think they were just unprepared. They didn't expect it. I mean it's youth led, we are young people. I don't think they ever imagined social media being a place of mobilising and a place where political consciousness is birthed or knowledge being created and shared. (SA025, activist)

In this sense, social media became a platform not only to facilitate public disclosures of SGBV, but also a space for collective support, sharing common experiences, and expressing widespread dissatisfaction with the university response that continues to uphold a patriarchal, unequal gendered system (Bashonga & Khuzwayo, 2017).

This section discussed student protests against SGBV and how some HE institutions violently responded with increased securitisation, police brutality, and unfairly penalising students in their academic work. It also examined the role of social media in facilitating collective action and disclosures of SGBV. In the final section, we look at how the legacy of apartheid continues to impact South African HE, especially with regards to responding to SGBV.

Legacies of apartheid and intersecting inequalities

As discussed in the previous section, not all people in university spaces are equally targeted for institutional retaliation or securitisation. Black and working-class students and employees in our sample were much more vulnerable to retaliation and brutality by security firms and police on campus. This targeting requires us to reckon with the ongoing effects of apartheid in South African HE.

The legacies of apartheid and deeply institutionalised racism in South Africa have a significant bearing on the present-day racialised power, class relations and gender dynamics in operation within HE settings:

> The university is and I mean without you know overly being dramatic it's an institution like a f*cking prison. If you are a black person who does not fit into a system unfortunately you go either in a mental institution because definitely the system has made you mentally unstable with everything that was stolen away from you including your entire identity, either that institution or you're in, you're in a prison. Either way you have to fit or you're in a factory. Either way you'd need to be a part of this thing that is a churning machine for people to sit somewhere in Europe and write beautiful books and yes so my experience was that it was traumatic but also it's traumatic for everybody who has to exist within the system and there's no emancipation from it. (SA023, other university employee)

> I think the top three [HE institutions] in Africa are from South Africa. [They] are colonial universities which were not meant for black people, so it's hard for us black people to make it here. Because even English, which is used as the medium of learning and teaching, it's not our first language. It's not our home language. […] It's my first time seeing a

> white lecturer, it's my first time seeing a white person sitting next door to me. And based on colonialism, based on apartheid, we are still…When I see a white person, I see […] 'Boss', we see boss. We see someone […] who has at some time abused our grandmothers, so we are still adapting. (SA04, activist)

In a highly racialised, gendered form of retaliation for her involvement in protests, a black student activist was not only excluded, but also taken to court by her university:

> I got excluded and that's it. The rest is history really with going in and out of court. (SA025, activist)

Histories of apartheid intersect with gender inequalities to fundamentally shape how victim-survivors experience SGBV, and how HE institutions respond to it in ways that inform processes of help-seeking, access to redress and even the extent to which the violence is acknowledged. Participants have mentioned that sexual violence is perceived in campuses in limiting ways:

> I think something happened within the period of the employment and trying to do Masters where I couldn't stomach white feminism […]. I just…, I was severely disgusted by white feminists at the time and what the Silent Protest had been and just how sexual violence was always black. (SA023, other university employee)

> It looks good on paper and it looks good for the public image of the university, to say that we are action to this but actually they're not. They're very selective. Because most universities has some students whose parents are politicians, who come from neighbouring countries, they have money, puts money first. So if you are a random who raped someone and you're from a township, most likely you are going to get suspended because you're not bringing any money, you're funding is paid through scholarships or the national financial aid scheme. Your parent is not some politician. Also it's very classist how they deal with cases. (SA019, student)

Histories of racism and colonial rule also have a substantive impact on how victim-survivors are constructed and protected within the confines of the university space, and the rules and regulations governing them to allegedly ensure safety. In other words, certain bodies are viewed as more or less 'valuable' and thus worthy of protection, despite the construction of universities as spaces of 'inclusion' and black aspiration:

> I do believe that part of that is white privilege and that somehow a white woman getting raped means more than say a young black woman, you know? (SA06, other university employee)

> [U]niversities are spaces that have for a very long time in the South African context been sort of framed as like spaces of inclusion and that black people must aspire to [go to] universities, parents work so hard to get young people or their children to go to universities, like it's an accomplishment. Because you go to university, because for so long we were workers and workers that were not trained. (SA09, other university employee)

A history of mobilising against a white colonising state has also meant that activists unified against the diverse impacts of apartheid, with issues of gender constructed as ancillary to the primary realities of racism as black people living under white oppression (for information about SGBV within anti-apartheid and anti-fee student movements, see Maluleke & Moyer, 2020; Maluleke, 2022):

> [A] lot of the decolonisation struggles on this continent have meant that men and women fight together against racism, against colonisation and that has its benefits but also its trickinesses, you know. (SA06, other university employee)

> [Y]oung women were saying that this is what happened to our mothers and grandmothers who were fighting in the anti-apartheid movement and were told, “Oh we'll deal with gender later." You know, now we're fighting for racial issues and now we're fighting for our independence. (SA09, other university employee)

Ultimately, while education has been a significant part of South Africa's post-apartheid transformation agenda, the dominant themes emerging from our data show that universities continue to employ ongoing colonial logics in their response(s) to SGBV. There are two key realities that epitomise this: firstly, the institutional framing of SGBV and the ways in which violence against some bodies is completely invisibilised within this frame, and secondly, the manner in which HE institutions violently respond to acts of speaking out against violence, by using the full force of both the institution and the state.

The final section discusses next steps for moving forward. We also include a list of free resources should anyone need specialist, professional support following their engagement with this report.

Looking forward and next steps

From December 2024, the FemIDEAS team will begin an iterative process of co-developing a set of evidence-based, victim-survivor focused recommendations for policy, practice, and academia, based on the learning from the data analysis discussed in this report.

Co-development of evidence-based recommendations: methodology

The recommendations we put forward will be co-designed, reviewed, and refined in collaboration with our key stakeholders and partners involved in efforts to address SGBV in South African Higher Education. Importantly, this includes interview participants who would like to be a part of this process. We will also consult with members of the study's Expert Advisory Group along with our Lived Experience Group to ensure that our recommendation gathering process are accessible, inclusive and victim-survivor-centred. The incorporation of the contributions of all these cohorts is essential to the meaningful co-development of recommendations that are intersectional and reflective of the needs and interests of the individuals, communities, and institutions featured in this work.

To do this, we will be hosting a series of engagement and consultation activities as part of the recommendation development process. During these activities we will share the learning and findings from the South Africa fieldwork and invite people to share their views about the kinds of recommendations we could make. Everything we share during these activities will be in an anonymised format and we will ensure that no person can be identified via the information that we share. These engagement and consultation activities will take different forms in order to ensure that the co-design process is as accessible and as broad reaching as possible. The key stages of the process are shown in the diagram below.

We will bring together the contributions from everyone who participates in these activities, to formulate a set of evidence-based recommendations which we hope to publish and share in early 2025. If, after reading this report, you would like to contribute to this process, please feel free to get in touch with the team using the contact details shown below – we welcome all thoughts or reflections.

Structured Meeting Series

- Hosted online (Zoom)
- Meetings organised according to participant group
- Invited attendees including key SA stakeholders and partners from policy, practice, research and activism
- Non-waged attendees will be compensated for their time

Online Feedback Form

- Short online form written in an accessible format
- Open to anyone who took part in the South African fieldwork via a secure link
- Option to anonymise responses if preferred
- Everyone who completes the form will be entered into a draw to gift voucher

Informal Feedback

- WhatsApp messages and voice notes via the project mobile phone
- Email via the project inbox
- Messages via project website

Recommendations for policy, practice, activism, and academia
Target publication date: Early 2025

FemIDEAS project contact details

Email: femideas@westminster.ac.uk

Website: www.femideas.com

Twitter/X: @fem_ideas

Address: University of Westminster
School of Social Sciences & School of Media and Communication
WS403, 32/38 Wells Street
London
W1T 3UW
England

Available free resources

Organisation	Phone number (+27)	Website / online access
Gender-based violence command centre	0800 428 428	
GRIP Rape and domestic violence intervention	Emergency helpline: 083 310 1321	Online contact
Rape Crisis South Africa Counselling & support, incl. for criminal justice system involvement	24-hour helpline: 021 447 9762 (English) 021 361 9085 (isiXhosa) 021 633 9229 (Afrikaans) WhatsApp: 083 222 5164	www.rapecrisis.org.za Email help: communications@rapecrisis.org.za
RiSE against domestic violence Counselling/therapy, legal advice, victim support, case work	WhatsApp: 081 589 4308	www.riseagainstdomesticvio-lence.co.za
Tears Crisis intervention, advocacy, counselling, group work for those impacted by domestic abuse, sexual assault	Free SMS helpline: (*134*7355#) 010 590 5920	Email help: info@tears.co.za
Triangle project Mental health, medical, and counselling support for lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer+ (LGBTQ+), gender diverse and intersex people	Counselling helpline: 021 712 6699 (1pm – 9pm)	Email to book counselling: health2@triangle.org.za

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