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Creating Safer Campuses: Addressing the Severity of Sexual Harassment in Universities and Enhancing Reporting Procedures for Victims

MSc Dissertation

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Abstract

Sexual harassment (SH) remains a prevalent and distressing issue within university environments, necessitating urgent attention and comprehensive intervention. This thesis delves into the multifaceted dimensions of sexual harassment, its pervasive impact, and the intricate reasons behind its underreporting. By exploring the concept of sexual harassment, its far-reaching consequences, and the complexities surrounding its reporting, this research aims to highlight the critical need for effective policies and procedures within institutions of higher education. Focusing specifically on the University of Cyprus, this study examines the current landscape of sexual harassment policies and procedures, uncovering shortcomings and areas requiring significant improvement. Subsequently, it explores existing policies and reporting procedures regarding sexual harassment in universities, highlighting key elements necessary for their effectiveness. Drawing from comprehensive analyses, this thesis then presents targeted recommendations designed to strengthen reporting mechanisms and enhance the overall handling of sexual harassment cases within institutions of higher education. This study aims to contribute substantively to the discourse on creating safer campuses and fostering a supportive environment for victims while mitigating the prevalence and impact of sexual harassment.

Keywords: sexual harassment, institutions of higher education, consequences of SH, SH underreporting, policies, procedures, victim-centered, trauma-informed, and evidence-based recommendations

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Introduction

"… Για εκείνες τις νύχτες που γύριζα μόνη, στη θέα μιας μορφής το αίμα μου να παγώνει. Για όλα τα χέρια που σφίγγουν κλειδιά, γινόμαστε όλες μαζί μια γροθιά! Δικαίωμα δεν έχεις στο σώμα μου επάνω, δε σου πέφτει λόγος πού πάω και τι κάνω. Δεν είναι αγάπη ο πόνος κι η βία, όλες απαντάμε, αν αγγίξεις μία! Κι αν δε το κατάλαβες τούτοι οι στίχοι φωνάζουν πως βρίσκομαι εδώ από τύχη, με οργή τραγουδάω, ακούστε με όλοι, Στο σπίτι αν δεν έρθω, κάψτε την πόλη…"

Όλες απαντάμε αν αγγίξεις μία: Φεμινιστικό τραγούδι πορεία, 8th of March 2022

Sexual harassment (SH) within academic institutions remains a pressing concern that undermines the fundamental ethos of safety, equality, and respect. The university campus, typically recognized as a center of learning and progress, should be a haven where students and faculty feel secure and supported in their pursuit of knowledge. Unfortunately, this fundamental ideal is compromised by the widespread and subtle occurrence of sexual harassment. Sexual harassment within university campuses continues to pose a pervasive and distressing challenge, despite the increasing recognition and efforts to address it. Campus sexual harassment (CSH) stands out from other crimes due to various factors. Unlike many crimes, the victim might have familiarity or a relationship with the offender (Busch-Armendariz et al., 2016). CSH incidents are less likely to be reported, and victims may be reluctant to seek prosecution due to reasons such as alcohol involvement, potential blame from others, and feelings of self-responsibility. Contrary to other crimes that might spark outrage in victims, SH on campuses often leads to feelings of shame and humiliation (Busch-Armendariz et al., 2016).

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Research consistently reveals a significant discrepancy between the prevalence of SH and the reported incidents within institutions of higher education (IHEs) despite legal mandates and prevention programs (Fisher et al., 2000, Orchowski et al., 2009 & Mujal et al., 2021). This discrepancy encompasses a myriad of interconnected factors that prevent survivors from coming forward. The decision to report an incident of SH is deeply influenced by the initial response a victim receives (Schwartz & DeKeserdy, 1997). The predominant feelings related to victims' uncertainty about the incident, unfamiliarity with reporting procedures, fear of retaliation from the offender, and absence of tangible evidence plays a pivotal role in discouraging individuals from pursuing formal action (Fisher et al., 2003, Sable et al., 2006 & Walsh et al., 2010). Furthermore, a distressing reality emerges wherein the vast majority of attackers are acquaintances, complicating the process of survivors sharing their experiences (Orchowski, 2009). This hesitancy to report is compounded by concerns about confidentiality, fear of not being believed, and the power dynamics between the victim and the perpetrator, particularly when the offender holds a position of authority within the academic setting (Sable et al., 2006 & Aguilar & Baek, 2020).

Institutional responses and reporting procedures also significantly influence the reporting patterns. The efficacy and sensitivity of an institution's response to such cases, the past handling of harassment accusations, and the prevailing leadership attitudes play a crucial role in shaping the victim's decision to report (Bergman et al., 2002; Knapp et al., 1997). A lack of trust in the institution's commitment to addressing such issues further contributes to underreporting (Busch-Armendariz et al.,2016). Furthermore, beneath the underreporting lie broader concerns associated with victim blaming and the perpetuation of rape myths, which not only exacerbate the survivor's trauma, but also discourage them from seeking formal assistance (Busch-Armendariz et al., 2016).

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Universities have recognized the gravity of sexual harassment and gender-based issues, resulting in the establishment of policies (Biglia et al., 2017). However, these policies often lack clarity and practicality in implementation, differing from SH outside higher education (Streng, 2015). At the University of Cyprus (UCY), while a sexual harassment policy exists (Επίτροπος Διοικήσεως και Προστασίας Ανθρωπίνων Δικαιωμάτων – Φορέας Ισότητας και Καταπολέμησης των Διακρίσεων, 2020), as mandated by law, it lacks visibility. During my five-year tenure as a female student at the UCY, I was unaware of the sexual harassment policy and the reporting procedures, until I began this research, since there was no prior information provided regarding this issue.

Policies and procedures should serve as guidelines, emphasizing zero tolerance of SH and providing support mechanisms for victims (McMahon, 2008 & Vladitiu et al., 2013). Detailed sections outlining SH reporting, investigation, and support options are crucial components to aid victims and signal the institution's commitment (Streng & Kamimura, 2015). Proper initial responses, competent staff training, and prioritizing student safety are also considered critical (Australia Universities, 2018). Establishing a standalone SH policy with comprehensive definitions, also, encourages reporting and supports victims (White House Task Force, 2014 & Fisher et al., 2000). Addressing SH reporting barriers requires multifaceted approaches, encompassing policy enhancements, strong and extensive support mechanisms, and proactive involvement from university stakeholders (Abbey et al., 2014 & U.S. Department of Education, 2014). It is critical for reporting to make policies widely accessible through many means, to raise awareness, and to ensure confidentiality (Karjane et al., 1999 & Mandelli & Cantoni, 2010).

This thesis aims to explore the complex aspects of SH within the university environment, with an emphasis on the University of Cyprus. By exploring the intricacies of what constitutes SH, the reasons behind its prevalence, the repercussions faced by victims, and the

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complexities surrounding underreporting, this study aims to shed light on this critical issue plaguing higher education institutions. Additionally, this thesis will delve into the profound and adverse consequences endured by survivors of SH, including psychological distress, academic setbacks, and professional impediments (Bondestam & Lundqvist, 2020, Henning et al. 2017 & Rosenthal et al., 2016). These consequences not only impact individuals but also undermine the cohesion of academic communities. Thus, understanding the gravity of this issue is essential in catalyzing collective action for change.

Examining the many factors that contribute to underreporting makes it evident that IHEs need to completely restructure their policies and procedures due to the complex institutional, social, and structural aspects of SH. To ensure the safety and well-being of students and foster supportive learning environments, universities must reassess their existing frameworks on sexual harassment and misconduct. This research aims to dive into the complicated landscape of underreported SH within universities, thoroughly exploring its multifaceted nature, underlying causes, and implications. By shedding light on the complexities surrounding underreporting, this research aims to offer actionable insights and policy recommendations that can serve as a catalyst for transforming university campuses into safer, more inclusive spaces for all. The aim is to adopt trauma-informed and victim-centered policies and procedures and foster a culture of support and accountability within academic institutions.

What is sexual harassment?

Sexual harassment (SH) is widely acknowledged as a violation of human rights. Governments and independent organizations across the world are increasingly realizing how crucial it is to take action to address and prevent SH (Heywood, 2022). The World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations (UN), the US Centers for Disease Control (CDC), and the Council of Australian Governments (COAG), for example, have endorsed

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frameworks that aim to improve support services and justice outcomes for victims and survivors of SH, as well as initiatives that aim to stop such violence before it starts by promoting gender equality, respect, and inclusion (Our Watch, 2021a). This objective demands a concerted effort from all parts of society.

Originally used to characterize women's experiences with unwelcome workplace sexual attention, the term "sexual harassment" now refers to a wide range of inappropriate behaviours and situations that can occur in a variety of places, including educational institutions (Wood et al., 2021). Sexual violence (SV) refers to a wide range of undesirable behaviours (including sexual harassment, assault, and/or rape) that can occur in a number of relational situations and settings (Heywood, 2022). Sexual violence is defined by the World Health Organization (WHO) (2002, p.149) as follows: "…*any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or acts to traffic, or otherwise directed, against a person's sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim...*".

Sexual harassment is a broad term, including many types of unwelcome verbal and physical sexual attention. Sexual assault falls under this term and is defined as "*any sexual contact with another person's body without the person's consent, including sexual penetration and sexual touching*" (Cantor et al., 2015).

There are overlapping definitions of sexual harassment (SH) in the public, legal, political, and psychological fields (Klein & Martin, 2019). According to the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (n.d.) the legal definition of SH is as follows: "*Unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favours, and other verbal or physical conduct or electronic communication of a sexual nature constitute sexual harassment; this conduct explicitly or implicitly affects an individual's employment, unreasonably interferences with an individual's*

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performance, or creates an intimidating, hostile, or offensive work or academic environment.".

Furthermore, the U.S. Department of Education's Office (1997) on Civil Rights distinguishes two forms of SH in academic institutions: "quid pro quo" and "hostile environment SH". "Quid pro quo SH" refers to the exchange of sexual favors for some sort of educational benefit or involvement (e.g., a professor would urge a student to have sex in return for a better score) (Klein & Martin, 2019). The term "hostile environment SH" refers to sexual behaviour that makes it difficult for a student to engage in and benefit from educational activities (e.g., sending unsolicited sexual photos to a classmate's or a student) (Klein & Martin, 2019) or it can describe an educational environment that is disrupted by severe or persistent offensive behavior (Hill & Silva, 2005). In simpler terms, SH can, also, encompass behaviors like making remarks about someone's body, engaging in sexual comments or jokes, and persistently pursuing someone for a date even after they have declined. This behavior can take place both online and in person (Cantor et al., 2015).

Regarding the psychological definitions of SH, there are three main dimensions as measured by the Sexual Experiences Questionnaire (SEQ); which is the most widely used assessment tool for evaluating SH experiences (Fitzgerald, Gelfand, & Drasgow, 1995). These dimensions of SH are gender harassment, unwanted sexual attention, and sexual coercion (see Appendix 1). Firstly, gender harassment is defined as actions that "*convey insulting, hostile, and degrading attitudes toward women*" which entail sexual remarks, gestures, gender-related bullying, hazing, threats, and intimidation (Fitzgerald et al., 1995, p. 430). Unwanted sexual attention, on the other hand, refers to actions that are "*offensive, unwanted, and unreciprocated*," such as unwanted touching, sexual looking, dating pressure, or discussions about the target's sex life. (Fitzgerald et al., 1995, p. 431). These two dimensions comprise the wide range of verbal and nonverbal behaviors that are referred to by law as hostile

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environment SH. Finally, sexual coercion that involves "*sexual cooperation in return for job-related considerations*" (such as improved grades, career prospects, or academic advancement) is legally characterized as quid pro quo SH (Fitzgerald et al., 1995, p. 430).

Why is sexual harassment a problem we should care about in universities?

As it is commonly accepted, academic environments are not immune to the incidence of sexual harassment among young adults (Heywood et al., 2022). Prior studies have shown that numerous university students have been sexually assaulted or subjected to sexual harassment, particularly on campus or in settings connected to universities (e.g., events) (AHRC, 2017, NUS, 2016). Whether or not SH occurs particularly in a university context, it has been shown that victimization experiences negatively affect students' well-being, academic performance, and their ability to continue their university education (Jordan et al., 2014, Mengo & Black, 2016, Molstad et al., 2021). Additionally, due to the gendered nature of SH, in which there is an over-representation of women, people with a different sexuality and gender diverse people as victims and survivors, we should acknowledge that these exact students are more likely to have their university studies interrupted or terminated as a result (Heywood et al., 2022). Thus, to guarantee equal access to higher education, there is a need for appropriate and trauma-informed processes for addressing SH and proactive initiatives to prevent it within the academic community.

It is important to look at the data to understand the seriousness and extent of the problem, that is sexual harassment. Based on the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) research with data for the years 1995 to 2013, young women between the ages of 18 and 24 account for the majority of SH victims (Sinozich & Langton, 2014). In addition to this, the 2015 AAU survey revealed that 47.7% of students reported being victims of SH, with 61.9% of female undergraduates

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reporting such experiences (Cantor et al., 2015). In accordance with several studies, one in four to one in three college women report having been the victim of an incident that fulfills the legal definition of rape or attempted rape (Abbey et al., 2006; Humphrey & White, 2000; Wilcox, Jordan, & Pritchard, 2006). That is equivalent to 350 rapes each year in a university with 10,000 female students. Moreover, an extensive analysis of research studies examining large, representative samples of undergraduate women in the US indicated that around 20–25% experience SH during their college years (Muehlenhard, et al., 2017). In Australia, one in every five women and one in every twenty men, over the age of 15, are victims of sexual violence, with one in every two women and one in every four men suffering sexual harassment (ABS, 2017). Moreover, 50% to 90% of female undergraduate students face SH at universities (Cantor et al., 2015, Hill & Silva, 2005, Yoon et al., 2010) and may suffer harassment from a range of perpetrators, including classmates, as well as IHE professors and staff (Cortina et al., 1998, Rosenthal, et al., 2016). Data indicate that around 22% of college women have encountered dating violence, and nearly 20% have either experienced completed or attempted sexual assault since starting college (Voth Schrag 2017). Additionally, a National Survey in 2016 in Australia revealed that SH was frequent, with one in five students stating that they were victims of SH in a university or social context; and with women being nearly twice as likely to report such an incident as men were. Generally, women are far more likely than men to have been victims of SH. Unfortunately, there is a limited amount of research that examines specific groups at a potentially higher risk of encountering SH due to their marginalized status. These groups may include lesbians, bisexual women, students who identify as gay (LGB), transgender or gender-diverse individuals (non-binary, genderqueer, etc.), individuals with disabilities, non-white racial backgrounds, and those with prior experiences of sexual violence (Bondestam & Lundqvist, 2020). Students that are females or belong to a gender or a sexual minority are all more likely to face peer and faculty/staff

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harassment (Wood et al., 2021). Furthermore, time spent at the institution increases the probability of peer and faculty/staff harassment, the level of peer victimization, and the extent of faculty/staff harassment among graduate students (Wood et al., 2021).

It is evident that SH occurs on college and university campuses, as shown by both social phenomena and research. For instance, hundreds of students have reported their experiences with SH in academia using the hashtag #MeTooPhD (an extension of the #MeToo movement) (Hardy, 2018). It is crucial to recognize the importance of "connecting the dots" between various types of violence, including shared risk and protective factors (Wilkins, Tsao, Hertz, Davis, & Klevens, 2014). Survivors of any incident of SH have a higher risk of facing impediments related to their academic performance. As a result, they are less likely to complete college, finding successful employment, and earn a living wage (Jordan, Combs, & Smith, 2014). Furthermore, individuals may face both mental and physical health issues as a result of such incidents (Pina & Gannon, 2012; Willness, Steel, & Lee, 2007).

Furthermore, a recurrent research discovery is that a relatively low proportion of SH incidents are reported to law enforcement. The National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) study, which examined female students and nonstudents aged 18 to 24, also discovered that students (20%) were less likely to report than nonstudents (32%) (Sinozich & Langton, 2014). There is a context explaining why college women tend to not formally report. Research shows that victims often feel discouraged from reporting because of potential personal costs (Campbell, 2008). These costs can include having to go to court multiple times, facing humiliating cross-examinations, and the risk of charges if their honesty is questioned during the investigation (Campbell, 2008). It is important to note that among the victims who did report their SH experience to the police, only one-quarter did so within the first 24 hours (Campbell, 2008). Numerous factors influence the victim's decision to report their SH. According to the study of Rennison in 2002, the closer the relationship between the victim and the perpetrator, the less

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likely the police will be informed about the rape or SH. Conversely, when victims were physically injured during the SH, there was a higher rate of reporting to the police: 41% compared to 22% for victims without injuries (Rennison, 2002). Moreover, victims are more inclined to report when force was employed, when the perpetrator was not known to them, when they physically resisted, or when weapons were involved (Rennison, 2002). Another research that looked at college women's propensity to disclose SH, discovered that they were more likely to report on a survey than to the police, or to a friend than to a campus committee. The study also revealed that victims were less likely to report to anyone when they experienced a greater degree of self-blame (Orchowski et al., 2009). If victims choose not to report or interact with the criminal justice system, often because of concerns about mistreatment or being held responsible, they are unable to access necessary support services or pursue justice. Only a tiny fraction of SH cases goes through the entire criminal justice system, leading to prosecution, conviction, and imprisonment (Lonsway & Archambault, 2012) (see Appendix 2).

Regarding the cases that are being reported, the research of the Association of American Universities (AAU) showed that 61.9% of female undergraduates at 27 IHEs reported being sexually harassed by a student or IHE staff since enrolling (Cantor et al., 2015). Harassment by peers is more prevalent than harassment by instructors or staff (Hill & Silva, 2005, Hoewing & Rumburg, 2005, Rosenthal et al., 2016). In 2016 Rosenthal et al., reported that 57.7% of female graduate students in their sample had experienced peer-perpetrated sexual harassment whereas 38% of the female graduate students had encountered faculty/staff-perpetrated sexual harassment. Verbal comments and jokes, as well as nonverbal gestures, are some of the most typical forms of SH encountered by students at IHEs (Clodfelter et al., 2010, Hill & Silva, 2005).

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According to available data, young adults are most likely to be both victims/survivors and perpetrators of SH. For instance, young women between the ages of 18 and 24 were among those most likely to report experiencing SH over the course of the previous year (Heywood et al., 2022). In addition, based on criminal justice data the majority of SH victims and/or survivors are targeted by a known male offender (such as a boyfriend, date, friend, or acquaintance) and most of such incidents happen in private places, with public settings being less common (Australian Institute of Health & Welfare, 2020). While this is the case, sexual harassment also often takes place in businesses and institutions, including workplaces, educational institutions, and public areas (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2018).

Campus sexual harassment (CSH) is distinct from other types of crime for several reasons. Firstly, in contrast to many other crimes, it is possible that the victim knows or had a relationship with the attacker (Busch-Armendariz et al., 2016). CSH is not likely to be recorded, in contrast to many other crimes. Additionally, the victim might not want the offender to be prosecuted for a variety of reasons. Especially in the cases that involved alcohol, CSH victims may get blame from others for their own victimization and may have feelings of self-responsibility. In contrast to other crimes where the victim may be outraged, the social impact of sexual harassment on a campus can cause the victim to feel shame and humiliation (Busch-Armendariz et al., 2016). Moreover, because of shared social networks and the close physical proximity of the victim and offender in the campus environment, they frequently come across each other again after the victimization (Busch-Armendariz et al., 2016).

Consequences of Sexual Harassment

Although the exact definition of SH still appears to be up for debate, research indicates that the outcomes are unquestionably harmful. Sexual harassment is, unfortunately, an increasing

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problem among students of institutions of higher education (IHEs), and has substantial negative consequences for individuals and learning communities (Wood et. Al, 2021). Numerous students at academic institutions experience SH, which has a negative impact on their mental health, physical health, and academic performance (Wood et. Al, 2021). Some of the negative consequences of sexual harassment can involve depression, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), internalized shame, irritation, anger, stress, discomfort, feelings of powerlessness and degradation and distractions to academic experiences (Avina & O'Donahue, 2002, Shinsako et al., 2001, Street et al., 2007, Bondestam & Lundqvist, 2020). Victims of SH can have negative academic consequences, such as decreased academic satisfaction, engagement, and performance (Cortina et al., 1998, Huerta et al., 2006, Rosenthal et al., 2016). Their educational experience may be further disrupted by their protection attempts, such as dropping classes, replacing advisors, switching majors, skipping class, and dropping out of university (Huerta et al., 2006, Hill & Silva, 2005). Additionally, SH reduces well-being through raising negative emotions, and is likely to cause eating disorders, drug and alcohol abuse, burnout, and long-term anxiety (Atwater et al, 2019).

There are immediate and long-term effects regarding sexual harassment. The immediate effects of SH could be shock, disorientation, fear, and agitation (Herman, 1992). The long-term ones could include posttraumatic stress disorder, depression, acute fear and anxiety, generalized anxiety, and suicidality (Campbell et al., 2009 & Jordan et al., 2010). In addition to negatively changed self-schemas, disordered eating, chronic pain, anxiety, depression, and posttraumatic stress disorder, the psychological and bodily aftereffects of SH have also been linked to impairment in social, occupational, and family dimensions (Amar & Gennaro, 2005; Kaura & Lohman, 2007). Moreover, it can lead to unwanted pregnancies, and sexually transmitted diseases (Philpart et al. 2009). Sexual harassment has also been associated with impaired career opportunities and academic functioning (Henning et al. 2017). According to

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Jordan, Combs, and Smith (2014), SH is linked to a decline in academic performance, which includes fewer attendance in class and, eventually, lower graduation rates (Potter, Howard, Murphy, & Moynihan, 2018). To give an example, in a four-year longitudinal study on college women who had been physically harassed by a partner, it was found that women who reported greater psychological distress were likely to drop out of university (Smith, White, & Holland, 2003). In another research, victims of intimate relationship or dating violence reported feeling abandoned by the institution they attended because they believed their claims of abuse were not believed (Amar & Gennaro, 2005). It was hypothesized that victims' claims of violence, as well as accompanying changes in routines and behaviours, might contribute to lower class attendance and, eventually, university failure (Amar & Gennaro, 2005). In similar vein, girls who experienced SH by people in positions of power at universities, reported lower school attendance, decreased quality, and quantity of work, and declining grades (van Roosmalen & McDaniel, 1998). Moreover, an analysis of data from 74 case records within a campus-based program addressing relationship and sexual harassment revealed that students subjected to physical, verbal and/or sexual harassment experienced notable declines in their grade point averages (Mengo & Black, 2016). Those who encountered sexual victimization were more inclined to discontinue their studies compared to those who faced physical or verbal victimization (Mengo & Black, 2016).

Furthermore, there was considerable evidence in a 2014 study done by Jordan, Combs, and Smith showing the occurrence of SH in a woman's life, before or throughout university, had an apparent impact on her academic performance. Although the literature on SH has not specifically addressed grades, it implies that a woman who has suffered the aftereffects of a rape may experience cognitive impairment, making it difficult for her to focus, organize a set of facts, or recall specifics during class, which will affect her GPA in comparison to her peers (Jordan, Combs, & Smith, 2014). Additionally, depression or anxiety might drain a woman's

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energy to commit to academic work or limit her ability to connect with other students because of social anxiety, humiliation, or embarrassment (Jordan, Combs, & Smith, 2014). Similarly, studies examining the pathways by which SH affects academic functioning show that SH's negative effect on psychological symptoms, lower academic satisfaction, and physical health symptoms cause disengagement from the academic environment and, as a result, a decline in performance (Huerta et al., 2006). As previously mentioned, victimized women are more prone to substance abuse as a coping mechanism, which may also negatively affect academic performance.

Negative effects on victims might, also, have an impact on their personal lives and even romantic relationships, since the incident does not only concern those who were harassed, but also extends to supervisors, compliance officers, colleagues, and their trusted individuals (Atwater et al, 2019). In addition to that, being sexually harassed might reduce the employees' productivity, encourage work withdrawal behaviours and turnover intentions (Atwater et al, 2019). As an outcome, the adverse effects of sexual harassment go beyond individuals to affect universities, organizations and the society as a whole.

Unveiling the Significance of University Environments in Addressing Sexual Harassment

Various research from diverse academic settings suggests that certain university cultures and environments may be more or less favourable to fostering abusive behavior among students (Heywood, et al., 2022). For instance, numerous studies have pointed out the importance of "pro-abuse peer support" (DeKeseredy et al., 2017, DeKeseredy & Schwartz, 2013) and its direct link to the increased frequency of SH on university campuses. "Pro-abuse peer support" describes the guidance and counsel from peers that impacts individuals to engage in sexual, physical, or psychological abuse towards others (DeKeseredy et al., 2017). Higher

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rates of SH and less effective staff responses to sexual harassment are typically observed in educational cultures where there is a higher prevalence of sexism and hostility toward women or settings that adhere to the "rape myths" (Suarez & Gadalla, 2010; Trottier et al., 2021, Holland et al., 2020). The notion of "rape myths" refers to attitudes and misconceptions that minimize or justify sexual violence or that hold victims/survivors responsible for their own victimization (McMahon & Farmer, 2011, Powell & Webster, 2018). Regional peer environments within educational contexts can also contribute to an understanding of how rates of SH victimization might vary between university settings, including social or sporting clubs, and student dorms (Crosset, 2015, Young et al., 2017, Stotzer & MacCartney, 2016). Additionally, it has been demonstrated that these peer norms have an influence on bystander intervention, decreasing the likelihood that other students who are present or are witnessing SH or a potential SH incident will act to stop it (McMahon, 2010).

Universities are not only places of education and career preparation, but also critical cultural and social pillars in the lives of numerous young adults, acting as the foundation for often life-long friendships and professional networks (Heywood, et al., 2022). Institutions of higher education have, also, a vital part to play in both the development and provision of future possibilities for their students. In addition to primary and secondary education, work environments, media, sports, religious, and other organizations, universities are key institutions that actively shape the society. They are environments in which attitudes and practices that normalize or tolerate SH can be criticized as a mean to prevent future harm (Our Watch, 2021a).

Institutions of higher education ought to continue to acknowledge the reality of SH in the lives of their students and recognize the possible academic and mental health consequences of victimization, by addressing SH through intervention and prevention strategies, policies, and procedures (Wood et al., 2021). Universities could unconsciously convey to their

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students, messages about appropriate racial, sexual, or gender standards (Wood et al., 2021). Sexual harassment may be addressed in violence prevention programs at IHEs by the continuing incorporation of harassment prevention methods, such as bystander intervention, into existing initiatives (Wood et al., 2021). Additionally, focusing on sexism and gender bias as the root causes of harassment might serve as a basis for proactive initiatives (Brinkman et al., 2015). A recent report on SH in academia presents four proposals for culture change in order to eliminate sexual harassment: 1. incorporate diversity and inclusion values into policy and procedure, 2. modify power dynamics to diffuse advisor relationship dependencies, 3. support SH survivors through services and reporting that reduces retaliation risk, and 4. enhance transparency and accountability (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2018).

Universities are key institutional settings for reacting to and preventing sexual harassment. This is also related to the overrepresentation of university students in the age profile of the majority of sexual harassment victims, offenders, and survivors (Heywood, 2022). As a result, it is necessary to take immediate action to lower the risk of SH and to offer appropriate responses when it does occur (Heywood, 2022). Universities and institutions of higher education must conduct sexual harassment investigations and address any ensuing sex discrimination (Block, 2012). If institutions do not react appropriately, the victims' trauma symptoms might worsen (Smith & Freyd, 2013). This kind of abuse frequently involves indirect institutional involvement that surrounds acts of individually perpetrated violence. However, larger institutions frequently instil in their members a similar level of dependence and trust as that observed in interpersonal relationships (Cardador et al., 2011, Somers, 2010 & Tremblay, 2010). Similar to trusting relationships, institutional settings, like universities, are also expected to be safe (Platt, et al., 2009, Tremblay, 2010). The institution's failure and betrayal of victims of SH only serve to exacerbate what is already a traumatic experience for

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the majority of women and compound their trauma symptoms (Busch-Armendariz et al.,2016). Additionally, this betrayal involves not just the SH incident itself but also the events prior to the harassment or those following it (Smith & Freyd, 2013). Institutional betrayal can occur as a single incident or be systemic, stemming from various institutional actions like not preventing abuse, making abuse seem normal, complex reporting procedures, insufficient responses, covering up or spreading misinformation, and penalizing victims and whistleblowers. Often, these actions prioritize preserving the institution's image over addressing student safety concerns (Busch-Armendariz et al.,2016).

To better address SH incidents, institutional action must be increased and expanded. While several studies and initiatives concentrate on how to deal with reported SH (Campbell & Raja, 2005), emphasis should also be given to the events that precede SH (Smith & Freyd, 2013). In fact, betrayals taking place before the SH, such as establishing an environment favourable to sexual harassment, are more typically reported than inadequate responses following the SH (Smith & Freyd, 2013). This could even be more damaging to victims since it conveys the impression that the institution could have done something to avoid the situation.

Why is Sexual Harassment underreported in Universities?

Studies consistently point out that sexual harassment crimes are dramatically underreported (Fisher et al., 2000 & Orchowski et al., 2009). Even with federal-level legal safeguards mandating institutions of higher education to report and address incidents of SH, along with the implementation of programs to prevent such occurrences on campus, the prevalence of SH in college settings indicates that it continues to be a significant issue (Mujal, et al 2021). Firstly, it is crucial to emphasize that the initial response a victim receives significantly

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influences whether the victim seeks further assistance or blames themselves for the SH (Schwartz & DeKeserdy, 1997).

Furthermore, 95% of college SH victims either refrained from reporting their assault or shared their experience exclusively with friends or family. Nevertheless, the majority of college SH victims choose not to remain silent, as almost 70% of individuals who experience SH confide in someone, be it friends, family members, or intimates (Fisher et al., 2003 & Orchowski et al., 2009). These figures indicate that victims want to communicate their stories but are avoiding official authorities. Several factors contribute to the underreporting of such cases, which will be addressed further in this part of the study.

Amongst others, some of the most critical reasons that SH incidents in universities are underreported include the victim's doubt that a crime has been committed, in addition to their lack of awareness of the reporting process, their fear of the offender taking revenge, the absence of tangible evidence, and fear of encountering hostile treatment from the reporting committee (Fisher et al., 2003, Sable et al., 2006, Walsh et al., 2010). Another aspect contributing to underreporting is that the great majority of attackers are acquaintances, making it difficult for women who have been harassed to disclose their experiences (Orchowski, 2009). Survivors of sexual harassment might lack clarity on the appropriate channels for reporting SH to campus officials (Streng & Kamimura, 2015). Furthermore, when it comes to reporting, issues of confidentiality and the fear of not being believed rank highly among the fears that both male and female college students have (Sable et al., 2006). Women, for instance, frequently feel re-victimized and fear they will not be believed when officials inquire about the use of drugs or alcohol or whether the victim had a prior relationship with the offender (Cohn et al., 2012). Despite the widespread occurrence of SH in academic environments, research suggests that reporting rates within academia are typically low, possibly due to concerns about retaliation. This fear is particularly pronounced

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when the perpetrator holds a prominent position as a scientist/academic (Clery, 2015). These instances highlight the impact of power disparities between the perpetrator and their victims (Aguilar & Baek, 2020). Undergraduate students tend to report incidents of SH less frequently if the perpetrator is a faculty member rather than a fellow student (Shepela & Levesque, 1998). Additionally, their overall reporting of sexual harassment is lower in comparison to graduate students (e.g., master, or PhD students) (Thakur & Paul, 2017). Reporting rates are also impacted by a procedure that frequently requires university personnel to share students' SH details, even when they prefer to preserve confidentiality and despite minimal evidence that mandatory reporting benefits students (Holland et al., 2018). Mandatory reporting has, also, been debated as conflicting with professional ethics codes and practices, such as those outlined by the American Psychological Association (Newins, 2019). To elaborate, the principles of fidelity, responsibility, and integrity place a strong emphasis on "honest communication" and "promise keeping" (Fisher, 2017, pp. 26 –27). As per the principle of respecting individuals' rights and dignity, "*Psychologists respect the dignity and worth of all people, and rights of individuals to privacy, confidentiality, and self-determination*" (APA, 2016, "General Principles," para. 6). According to Holland and colleagues (2018), many faculty members "*strive to build trusting relationships with students while safeguarding their privacy*" (p. 263). However, if a faculty member has information of a SH occurrence, that employee must disclose it to university authorities, regardless of the survivor's desires (Ali, 2011 & Lhamon, 2014). To preserve trust and respect for students' autonomy, students must be aware that reporting to campus authorities will be necessary prior to revealing the incident to a faculty member (Newins, 2019). If compelled disclosure takes place without the survivor's agreement, the survivor's autonomy is harmed and their opinion of the trustworthiness of the responsible faculty member (and maybe the institution as a whole) may suffer as a result (Newins, 2019). When compelled disclosure is necessary

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throughout research protocols, participants should be made aware of this policy as well as the conditions that would require disclosure (Newins, 2019).

Reporting practices are also heavily influenced by the leadership's viewpoints, the university's past handling of accusations of sexual harassment, and the results of such reports (Bergman et al., 2002 & Knapp et al., 1997). Within an educational environment where SH is tolerated, leaders might hold dismissive attitudes that undermine both formal and informal reporting procedures (Aguilar & Baek, 2020). This perceived lack of concern has been proven to discourage victims and bystanders from reporting incidents of sexual harassment (Clarke, 2014). On the contrary, research reveals that having a well-defined zero-tolerance policy leads to an increase in reporting (Jacobson & Eaton 2018).

Moreover, the differences in underreporting tendencies observed across disciplines imply variations in disciplinary norms (Aguilar & Baek, 2020). The finding that only half of the respondents in STEM fields opted to report their incidents indicates potential barriers to reporting. This might reflect a discouraging reporting process, as highlighted by the #MeTooSTEM movement and earlier research (Clark-Parsons, 2018 & Wadman, 2019). Given that women are underrepresented in STEM fields and have been for decades, representation most certainly has an impact (Armstrong & Jovanovic, 2015 & Noonan, 2017). Low female representation, along with a higher prevalence of sexual harassment, could therefore result in a tough atmosphere for women in STEM (Aguilar & Baek, 2020).

There are certain considerations when it comes to reporting SH incidents in a university. Studies show that in SH cases, both investigators and victims are concerned with matters of credibility (Busch-Armendariz et al., 2016). A sense of shame and guilt for what happened to them is frequently present among victims (Busch-Armendariz et al., 2016). Victims frequently lose trust with police when they hide case details that they fear would harm their

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credibility. For instance, in order to look more convincing, a victim may not disclose drinking or using drugs (Schwartz, 2010). Also, a delayed report of SH may damage the victim's credibility. Thus, another important consideration would be the one of alcohol and drugs. Non-stranger incidents of SH involving drug and alcohol usage are the most prevalent at IHEs (Busch-Armendariz et al., 2016). Despite the fact that alcohol never causes or justifies sexual harassment, research indicates that it can increase the risk (Busch-Armendariz et al., 2016). Women were too intoxicated to consent in 72% of SH cases on college campuses (Mohler-Kuo et al., 2004). Incidents of campus SH related to alcohol often go unreported because of concerns about facing disciplinary actions, memory gaps, and self-blame (University of Buffalo Research Institute on Addictions, 2014).

Beneath the underreporting of SH harassment incidents lie two broader concerns: victim blaming and rape myth beliefs. Both behaviours have the potential to re-victimize the survivor. The adverse incidents that occur after the harassment are referred to as the "second rape" or secondary victimization (Campbell et al., 1999). The secondary SH can be committed by friends or family members, and/or community systems to which victims report following the incident (Busch-Armendariz et al., 2016). In a study examining community responses, survivors noted that the most prevalent secondary assault behaviours included personnel telling them that "their accounts were not credible or that their cases were not sufficiently serious to pursue" (Campbell et al., 1999). Such reactions seemed to worsen the individual's psychological distress and post-traumatic symptoms (Campbell et al., 1999). Secondary victimization can be defined by either victim-blaming or the perpetuation of rape myths. Victims face blame when they are held accountable for their SH. This blame can be explicit or subtle (Busch-Armendariz et al., 2016). Victims frequently mention being questioned about their choices related to alcohol consumption, bars, or neighbourhoods they visited (Busch-Armendariz et al., 2016). While this case information may be crucial to the

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investigation, it is the investigator's professional responsibility to develop the competencies and abilities necessary to ask these questions to traumatized individuals (Busch-Armendariz et al., 2016).

Regarding rape myths, they are defined as *"attitudes and generally false beliefs about rape that are widely and persistently held, and that serve to deny and justify male sexual aggression against women."* (Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994). They collectively serve to accuse victims, exonerate perpetrators, downplay the seriousness of rape, and reinforce a culture that tolerates sexual harassment (Busch-Armendariz et al., 2016). The notion that women lie about rape, enjoy rape, or ask to be raped are some examples of common rape myths (Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994). See Appendix 3 for common rape myths (McMahon & Farmer, 2011). According to research, men are more inclined to endorse rape myths than women, and hostility towards women is an antecedent of the belief in rape myths (Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994). Therefore, to avoid prejudice based on rape myths, victim blaming, and secondary victimization, it is crucial to employ careful and empathetic questioning of the victim during the inquiry (McMahon & Farmer, 2011).

Furthermore, and on top of the secondary victimization and self-blame of the victim there are studies, such as the one of Busch-Armendariz and his colleagues in 2016, that reveal that many offenders receive lenient consequences. Only 10-25% of students found "responsible" for SH were expelled, with more common penalties including suspension, counselling, alcohol treatment, community service, social probation, and academic penalties. In some documented cases, victims leave school due to SH trauma, while the perpetrator graduates (Smith & Freyd, 2014).

Additionally understanding consent constitutes another consideration for underreporting of SH. An informed, voluntary, and shared agreement to engage in sexual activity is known as

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sexual consent (Busch-Armendariz et al., 2016). It can be withdrawn at any time, and consent for one act does not indicate continuous, future consent. Consent is required for every new action and partner. Verbal consent is preferable to nonverbal cues, as silence or a lack of resistance does not imply consent. In cases involving force, coercion, intimidation, threats, or duress, consent is not relevant. [1] Muehlenhard and colleagues (2016) examined how university students communicate and understand sexual consent, especially concerning instances of campus SH. This review provides context for unwanted sexual experiences and offers a brief overview of sexual harassment prevalence within campus environments. It highlights particular aspects of university life, such as party culture and alcohol consumption, that may complicate negotiations around consent (Anyadike-Danes et al., 2023). They define three kinds of sexual consent: an internal state of willingness (non-observable), an explicit agreement (verbal or written statement), and conduct understood as willingness by another (implied or inferred) (Muehlenhard et al., 2016). Furthermore, there are many different ways to conceptualize sexual consent, and individual differences (such as gendered expectations) that may have an impact on this (Muehlenhard et al., 2016). This, along with the university environment, may have a direct impact on communication and interpretation. In addition, Beres (2014) emphasized that participants' definition of sexual consent differed from their understanding of expressing their willingness to have sex, emphasizing the need of explicit language in SH prevention education and research.

For these and many other reasons universities should reassess their policies and reporting procedures on sexual harassment and misconduct to guarantee the safety and well-being of female students and minorities and maintain supportive learning environments for all students (Streng & Kamimura, 2015).

[1] People who are unable of giving their consent are either younger than the legal consent age, mentally or physically incapacitated, or under the influence of drugs or alcohol (Texas Penal Code, 2013)

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Policies and Procedures regarding Sexual Harassment in Universities

Policies and procedures help to achieve the common goal of reducing SH and violence on university campuses. Policies often serve as guidelines for action, whereas procedures typically define the steps needed to put policies into practice (Busch-Armendariz et al., 2016). Universities are becoming increasingly aware of the seriousness of sexual harassment and gender-based harassment, recognizing the need for effective prevention and management strategies in these situations (Rodriguez-Rodriguez & Heras-González, 2020). Consequently, numerous public universities have established dedicated policies and procedures to address this issue in recent years (Biglia et al. 2017). Policies and procedures should first take into account all potential scenarios and provide solutions to issues by utilizing the resources present in a certain setting. What is important to consider is that patriarchal structures of power are deeply embedded in universities (Schubert et al., 2015), which is something that it is also seen at the University of Cyprus. The majority of the university officials who serve as the reporting committee for SH incidents are often older men occupying higher positions within the hierarchy. Consequently, this creates multiple obstacles when assessing universities regarding this issue, such as the scarcity of reported incidents or complaints, often stemming from challenges in recognizing situations as harassment (Valls et al., 2016).

While these policies have good intentions of supporting victims and holding perpetrators accountable, they are often complex, unclear, and not effectively put into practice (Streng & , 2015). Sexual harassment in higher education differs from SH outside of higher education, with the key difference being levels of reporting, and hence requires different tools and approaches to handle (Streng, 2015). Therefore, it is advisable for universities to adopt policies aimed at encouraging more SH survivors to report incidents to campus authorities (Streng, 2015). Moreover, a sexual harassment policy is important because it provides an

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outline for what students can expect from their university after such an incident (McMahon, 2008). A sexual harassment or misconduct policy conveys that a university will not tolerate incidents of sexual violence and aims to shield its students from the adverse health, psychological and academic consequences associated with such acts (Vladitiu et al., 2013). In addition to being a crucial component of ensuring that students know where and how they can report if they are sexually harassed, university SH policies are a significant step in the effort to reduce and prevent sexual violence (Streng, 2015).

The policy ought to encompass sections explaining the processes for reporting, investigation, grievance/adjudication, prevention/education, and ultimately enumerate options for student support (such as counseling or health services) (Streng & Kamimura, 2015). These sections are crucial components of a policy, as they detail what support a student reporting SH can anticipate from their university. They also signify the institution's commitment to combatting sexual violence on its campus (Streng & Kamimura, 2015). Procedures outlining reporting, investigation, grievance, and/or adjudication criteria give clarity for reporting students, allowing them to follow the process without enduring further emotional distress as a result of confusion or perceptions of mishandling of their case (Streng & Kamimura, 2015). The policies and procedures should not only be easily navigable for survivors but also facilitate seamless connections to both on and off-campus resources, particularly counseling services.

Understanding Sexual Harassment Policies and Procedures: University of Cyprus Context

At the University of Cyprus (UCY), there exists a legally mandated policy regarding sexual harassment, accessible to the public through the institution's website (Επίτροπος Διοικήσεως και Προστασίας Ανθρωπίνων Δικαιωμάτων – Φορέας Ισότητας και Καταπολέμησης των Διακρίσεων, 2020). However, during my five years as a female student at the UCY, I was

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unaware of these policies until I undertook this research endeavor. Information about these policies was not readily available initially, yet through my efforts in exploring the university's website, I encountered some difficulties in navigation. Additionally, there is an opportunity for improvement in providing more precise procedures that outline the steps a student could take to safely disclose or report instances of campus sexual harassment. This lack of clarity raises concerns about the support available to students and the effectiveness of the system in addressing such crucial issues. Additionally, the composition of the reporting committee at UCY, primarily comprising department presidents and academic members, poses challenges. The committee members, lacking specialized training and expertise in managing such sensitive incidents, present a significant concern as well. Moreover, reporting procedures at the University of Cyprus mandate to be done by name. This requirement may stem from various reasons, a couple of them could be the following. Firstly, the committee is cautious about false allegations, and secondly, they are concerned about the potential impact on the reputation of colleagues if a student reports an academic. This concern could be heightened due to the fact that the majority of committee members hold prominent positions as professors within the university's hierarchy. Therefore, this reporting system may discourage victims from coming forward due to fears of repercussions.

These observations suggest an opportunity to refine the reporting process in institutions of higher education, exemplified by the University of Cyprus. It appears that the existing reporting process might benefit from a more victim-centered and trauma-informed approach. This could involve better addressing the experiences and trauma of individuals affected by sexual harassment. These insights pave the way for targeted recommendations aimed at enhancing the reporting mechanisms within such institutions.

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Targeted recommendations to enhance sexual harassment reporting in institutions of higher education

Sexual harassment has the potential to impact various facets of an individual's life, including social, interpersonal, psychological, physical, and financial aspects (Australia Universities, 2018). Symptoms may vary, occurring at different times, and there is no specific appearance, behavior, or emotional state that defines how a person who has experienced such incidents might appear, act, or feel. Sexual harassment policies must consider various obstacles to reporting to be more effective. To reduce these obstacles, adjustments are necessary to enhance the effectiveness of college SH policies.

First and foremost, the initial reaction a person receives when disclosing their SH experience plays a crucial role in their healing process. This response should affirm the individual's experiences and emotions through compassion, empathy, and support (Australia Universities, 2018). We should bear in mind that when a student shares or submits a formal report to a university official, it may be the first time they have told anybody about their experience. Consequently, the student may be encouraged to more clearly identify their needs, seek out extra help, and decide whether to submit a formal report if they receive a response that validates them through compassion and support.

My first suggestion on increasing SH reporting concerns the suitability of the individuals who are the first point of contact and the ones who receive the reports, whether this has to do with their background or the training they receive. Considering the profound and complex impact of sexual harassment on an individual's well-being, it is crucial for university staff members involved to possess the necessary skills to respond to a student's disclosure or formal report with respect and sensitivity (Australia Universities, 2018). The majority of university professionals with a student-facing job, preferably all student-facing staff and student leaders, should have these competencies. It is crucial for universities to prioritize training for

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professionals handling harassment cases within the educational community. While most protocols include training courses, not all universities implement them. Personnel acting as the central point of contact should receive training on responding to trauma (Australia Universities, 2018). In addition, universities could provide courses that enable professionals from a variety of disciplines to receive more specialized training that is focused on their fields (Rodriguez-Rodriguez& Heras-González, 2020). These training sessions could either be outsourced or conducted internally. There is a multitude of options available, and the educational institution should promote and endorse them at different levels (Rodriguez-Rodriguez& Heras-González, 2020). Providing choices such as in-person, hybrid, or virtual classes is an appealing option. These trainings can vary and serve as additional education for academics at all levels, focusing on recognizing and preventing instances of sexual harassment, gender violence and gender discrimination (Rodriguez-Rodriguez& Heras-González, 2020 & Australia, 2018). See Appendix 5 for how to re-learn and enhance interview techniques that are more trauma informed and victim oriented (Strand, n.d.).

Additionally, the primary concern when a student shares their experience of sexual harassment, whether through disclosure or a formal report, is to prioritize their safety and well-being (Campbell, et al., 1999). The university ought to offer aid and support to the students, encompassing various measures such as providing access to information regarding emergency health services and counseling (Busch-Armendariz et al., 2016), ensuring comprehensive understanding of available options, facilitating the process of making a formal report to the university (Busch-Armendariz et al., 2016), referring students to both internal and external support services, and maintaining consistent, timely communication regarding the procedure and its resolution (Australia Universities, 2018). University interventions must be tailored to minimize causing additional harm or consequences on the reporting student,

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such as limiting the number of times they have to recall their experience and without imposing major changes to their schedule (Australia Universities, 2018).

It is also crucial to acknowledge that sexual harassment at universities, as a form of violence against women, differs significantly from other student misconduct like plagiarism or damaging university property. That is why universities must adopt a standalone policy to address sexual harassment (Jacobson & Eaton 2018, Australia, 2018). Establishing a distinct policy concerning sexual harassment that encompasses all recognized behaviors falling within this category is crucial, since over 40% of individuals who have experienced rape do not classify the behavior that was perpetrated on them as a crime (Fisher et al., 2000 & Fisher et al., 2003). A strong introduction within a policy is essential, not just to address that a university will not accept SH, but also to discuss why they will not tolerate it (White House Task Force, 2014). Research findings encourage the use of more comprehensive and descriptive definitions since many victims of sexual harassment choose to attribute their experiences to their own behavior rather than the criminal behavior of the other person, which keeps them from reporting their experiences to campus authorities (Fisher et al., 2000 & Orchowski et al., 2009). As a result, if victims can recognize themselves as victims of a crime and anonymously identify the seriousness of their experience, they may be more inclined to seek help or report the incident to campus authorities (Krivoshey et al., 2013).

Given the aforementioned points, the following suggestions revolve around the content of the SH policy. The policy must include a declaration from university leadership denouncing sexual harassment as unacceptable, affirm that these actions are considered misconduct, and explicitly prioritize the safety and wellbeing of those disclosing or reporting such incidents (Australia Universities, 2018). It should provide clear definitions of sexual harassment and explanations of consent in line with relevant criminal legislation. Additionally, the policy must explicitly state that individuals who experience SH have the option to report to law

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enforcement, clearly outline the university's formal reporting procedures and misconduct protocols and emphasize that the university's investigation process does not substitute for criminal proceedings (Australia Universities, 2018). Furthermore, it should detail potential sanctions that might be imposed on students if the university finds misconduct has occurred (Australia Universities, 2018). The policy should use inclusive language, be easily accessible to the public, and readily available for reference. Lastly, the policy should also cover technology-facilitated sexual harassment, including abuse that is based on images or videos. More precisely, the employment of ICTs is evidence. With the development of information technology in the middle of 2020, harassment is evolving into new forms and means of execution (Padovani and Pavan, 2016). Universities need to anticipate and integrate these digital actions into their protocols, as they have become an integral part of our everyday lives (Rodriguez-Rodriguez& Heras-González, 2020).

What is more, research indicates that counseling can have a substantial positive impact on the well-being of survivors of SH post-attack (Westmarland & Alderson, 2013). The university cannot link its resources to students who are survivors of SH if it is unaware of their existence. Hence, it is crucial for universities to enhance reporting of SH. Concerning the University of Cyprus, referring the victims to the university's Mental Health Centre immediately after the report would be highly advantageous. It is noteworthy that the services provided by the Mental Health Centre are cost-free, making it a valuable addition to ensure victim-oriented and trauma-informed procedures.

It is also important to consider that when it comes to the creation or adjustment of such policies, it is critical to include the perspectives of students, particularly those student groups who are known to experience SH at a higher rate than other groups. Having meaningful conversations with students can enhance their involvement with university policies and procedures, potentially encouraging them to formally report incidents to the university

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(Australia Universities, 2018). Groups who may be more vulnerable to harassment within the university community should be included in the evaluation in addition to those who have used the established methods. Forming task groups with all parties involved may spark discussion, which improves the way the issue is handled by taking into account suggestions made by groups that may be more vulnerable to sexual harassment (Rodriguez-Rodriguez& Heras-González, 2020). Representatives of workers and students, who are in charge of defending the interests of these groups, might also provide insightful commentary. These groups should engage in active work through regular meetings, proposal presentations, and access to reported event details while ensuring anonymity. Periodic surveys of the university community can gauge perceptions of how harassment situations are managed and if the policies and procedures are indeed protecting the victim (Rodriguez-Rodriguez& Heras-González, 2020).

Another critical recommendation would be to make the SH policy more accessible. Best practices extend to how easily students can access the policy, procedure, and other important information. This includes various strategies such as prominently displaying information on the university's homepage and easily navigable webpages, distributing materials in student common areas or lounges, disseminating through leaflets and newsletters, making it available in club/society rooms, including in course/unit outlines, providing information on the back of student cards, utilizing mobile phone apps, and leveraging social media platforms (Australia Universities, 2018). Like various other institutions, universities should employ social networks to portray an image and generate credibility and enthusiasm for their values and endeavors as a means of dissemination and raising awareness (Mandelli & Cantoni, 2010). Raising awareness about universities' policies and reporting regulations has proven to increase reporting rates (McMahon, 2008). Universities should rely on various communication channels (e.g., websites, social networks, instant messaging apps) beyond

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traditional means (e.g., archive documents and physical support locations for victims). Additionally, online resources should be available. Apart from the immediate response, online communication can initially be anonymous, potentially making victims or witnesses more comfortable using it (Rodriguez-Rodriguez& Heras-González, 2020).

Another suggestion is for universities to assign a sole contact person or unit responsible for receiving all formal reports of SH (Australia Universities, 2018). This designated individual, such as a Deputy Vice-Chancellor, or a specific unit within the university (like a safer community unit), can streamline response procedures, ensuring consistency, and effectiveness. They will also facilitate accurate documentation of incident data and ensure that formal reports receive the highest level of expertise in handling (Australia Universities, 2018). Reporting patterns can also be tracked over time to see if problems are being adequately resolved, such case resolution timeframes. In practice, the procedure for reporting should include an appointed contact person, such as a victim advocate, who is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week (Krivoshey et al., 2013). This is crucial because most instances of SH occur from midnight to 6 in the morning (Fisher et al., 2000). Additionally, providing a reporting option that operates 24 hours a day during these vulnerable hours could enhance the chances of a victim seeking immediate medical care and support (Krivoshey et al., 2013).

The next recommendation pertains to confidentiality. It is crucial for the safety of a victim that SH policies explicitly outline the boundaries of confidentiality and anonymity (Krivoshey et al., 2013). Providing confidential reporting alternatives can help alleviate the fear that numerous victims experience regarding potential revenge by their perpetrator (Fisher et al., 2003). This addresses another obstacle often encountered by victims. Hence, safeguarding the confidentiality and privacy of a student who discloses or formally reports sexual harassment is essential. However, in some cases, a university's ability to protect a student's confidentiality and privacy is limited (Australia Universities, 2018). For instance,

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key university personnel may require information regarding what happened in order to protect the student's safety, the safety of the larger university community, and to give appropriate support to the reporting student (Australia Universities, 2018).

The next recommendation for addressing SH reporting barriers refers to third-party reporting options, anonymity, and confidentiality (Karjane et al., 1999). Third-party reporting permits witnesses or individuals who know the victim to report the crime committed on campus. Anonymous reporting allows the victim, the witnesses, or the victim's acquaintances to report a crime. This alternative promotes the reporting of a SH in cases where the presence of the statement "all measures to ensure a victim's confidentiality" in certain policies does not effectively reassure the victim about the safety of her/him/their identity (Krivoshey et al., 2013). When reporting to authorities, it is critical to consider the victim's fear of revenge from the attacker. In a study, fear was indicated as the key reason for not reporting the attack by more than 30% of victims (Fisher et al., 2003). This fear is justified because the perpetrator is frequently known to the victim. Particularly, in 96% of SH cases, the attacker is an acquaintance, classmate, partner, friend, or other known connection to the victim (Busch-Armendariz et al., 2016 & Fisher et al., 2000). Thus, advocating for and highlighting victim confidentiality in a policy can help to overcome such a significant barrier (Karjane et al., 1999).

Sexual harassment is a traumatic event, and research on neurobiology and trauma reveals that victims may exhibit various normal emotional and behavioral responses (Campbell, 2012). Officers should be aware of these responses to better handle cases and support victims. For instance, fragmented memories are common and should not be seen as dishonesty, but as an expected outcome of the trauma, and memories may take time to fully surface (Campbell, 2012). Another important factor is the close proximity of living and learning environments for college students, which can lead to the unpredictability of encountering the perpetrator. In

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certain cases, the school may issue a no-contact order to protect the complainant. The institution should provide reasonable adjustments, such as housing, class, job, and activity changes, to prevent contact between the victim and the alleged perpetrator (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). Universities should also provide victims with details about available resources, such as victim advocacy, housing support, academic aid, healthcare, mental health services, and legal help (Abbey et a., 2014). See Appendix 4 for hands-on suggestions on increasing sexual harassment reports (Busch-Armendariz, Sulley & Hill, 2016).

Conclusion

In conclusion, the issue of sexual harassment within university settings is a multifaceted problem that demands urgent attention and comprehensive action. Through this work, I wished to raise awareness regarding the seriousness of this widespread problem, including its definition, prevalence, and severe outcomes. As it has been repeatedly emphasized, universities play a pivotal role in shaping the academic, professional, and personal lives of students, making it imperative to foster safe and inclusive environments. Despite the prevalence of sexual harassment within these institutions, SH underreporting remains a significant challenge due to various barriers, including fear of retaliation, lack of trust in reporting mechanisms, and societal stigma. Additionally, existing policies and procedures aiming at addressing sexual harassment are essential, but often fall short in effectively supporting victims and encouraging reporting. Hence, there's a pressing need for enhanced measures that prioritize victim support, confidentiality, and transparency while holding perpetrators accountable. Recommendations outlined in this thesis underscore the importance of multifaceted approaches involving education, awareness campaigns, improved reporting systems, and institutional accountability. Strengthening resources for victims, providing

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comprehensive training, and fostering a culture of respect and zero tolerance for sexual harassment are crucial steps toward creating safer campuses.

Ultimately, addressing the severity of SH in universities requires a collective effort involving administrators, faculty, staff, students, and policymakers. By implementing these recommendations and prioritizing the safety and well-being of all individuals within university settings, we can strive towards creating environments that are truly safe and conducive to learning and personal growth. Not addressing sexual harassment adequately leads to increased SH victims, impacting individuals and the wider community. It represents a failure in the institution's educational goals and purpose (Edwards, Shea & Barboza Barela, 2018).

The aim is to develop evidence-based approaches for responding to and effectively addressing sexual harassment and victimization on university campuses (Perkins & Warner, 2017). The significance of this objective is profound: victims of such acts require not only their legally entitled assistance and services, but also comprehensive support that effectively meets their current needs while preparing them for the future (Perkins & Warner, 2017). By implementing victim-centered, trauma-informed, and evidence-based practices and policies, the campus can foster a healthier and safer environment for everyone to gain knowledge and thrive (Bondestam & Lundqvist, 2020). Additionally, areas for future research include exploring the inconsistency in defining sexual harassment, the absence of inclusivity in shaping policies, procedures and initiatives, and the influence of campus culture on policy implementation (Perkins & Warner, 2017).

Finally, the imperative to create safer campuses by addressing the severity of sexual harassment in universities and enhancing reporting procedures for victims cannot be overstated. The comprehensive analysis undertaken throughout this study underscores the

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urgency for concerted actions at multiple levels. Universities must reevaluate existing policies and procedures, fostering victim-centered, trauma-informed, and inclusive approaches that prioritize safety, support, and accountability. It is crucial to cultivate a campus environment where every member feels secure, respected, and empowered to report instances of harassment without fear or hesitation. Moreover, ongoing efforts should aim to break down systemic barriers, raise awareness, and implement proactive measures that cultivate a culture of prevention and empowerment. By embracing these strategies, educational institutions can actualize their commitment to creating safer, more equitable environments that support learning, growth, and the well-being of all individuals within their academic communities.

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Επίτροπος Διοικήσεως και Προστασίας Ανθρωπίνων Δικαιωμάτων – Φορέας Ισότητας και Καταπολέμησης των Διακρίσεων. (2020). ΚΩΔΙΚΕΣ ΔΕΟΝΤΟΛΟΓΙΑΣ ΚΑΙ ΠΟΛΙΤΙΚΕΣ. 7.12 Πολιτική και Κώδικας της πρακτικής για την καταπολέμηση της παρενόχλησης και της σεξουαλικής παρενόχλησης στο Πανεπιστήμιο Κύπρου. https://websites.ucy.ac.cy/legislation/volumea/7.12.html

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Appendices

Appendix 1 (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2018)

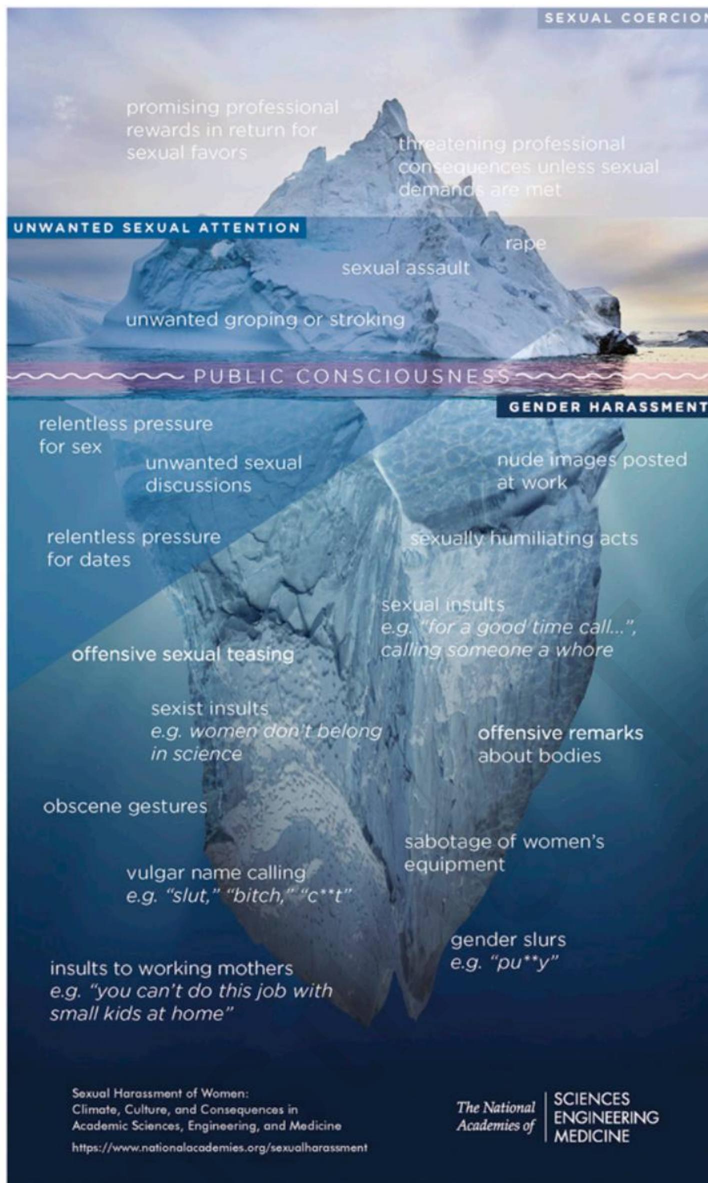
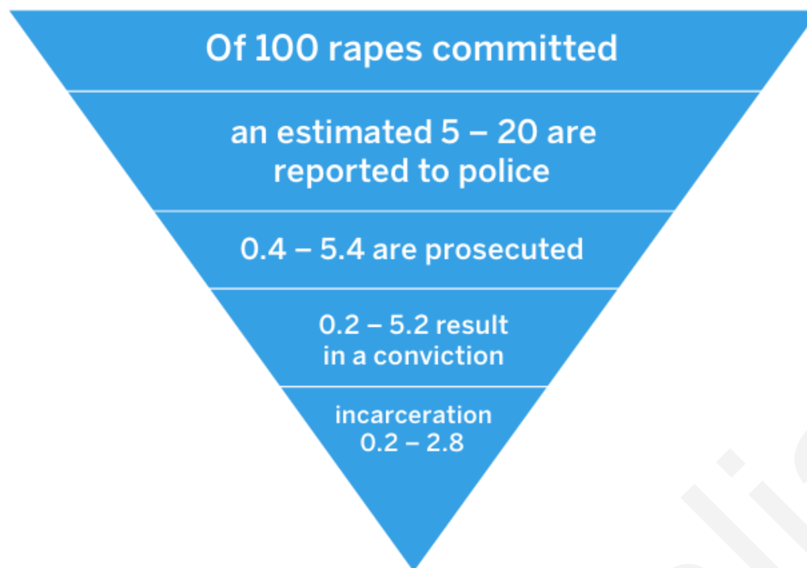


Fig. 1. Image from the National Academies report, illustrating how unwanted sexual touching, assault, and coercion represent only the "tip of the iceberg" of sexual harassment. Much more common is gender harassment—verbal and visual acts of gendered insult. Gender harassment lies below the water line, as it seldom breaks through to public awareness. Image credit: Reprinted with permission from ref. 1.

Appendix 2: Case Attrition of Sexual Assault Cases (Lonsway & Archambault, 2012)



Appendix 3: Common Rape Myths (McMahon & Farmer, 2011)

If a girl is raped while drunk, she is at least somewhat responsible for letting things get out of control.
If a girl acts like a slut, eventually she is going to get into trouble.
Guys don't usually intend to force sex on a girl, but sometimes they get too sexually carried away.
If a guy is drunk, he might rape someone unintentionally.
If a girl doesn't physically resist rape, even if protesting verbally, it can't be considered rape.
If the accused rapist doesn't have a weapon, you can't really call it rape.
A lot of times, girls who say they were raped agreed to have sex and then regret it.
Rape accusations are often used as a way of getting back at a guy.
If both people are drunk, it can't be rape.
If a girl initiates kissing or hooking up, she should not be surprised if a guy assumes she wants to have sex.

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Appendix 4: How to Increase Number of Sexual Assault Reports (Busch-Armendariz, Sulley & Hill, 2016)

Reasons for Not Reporting [44 45 46]	Strategies to Increase Reports
Victim not sure the act was sexual assault	• Teaching campus community definitions of sexual assault and consent. • Conducting campus education campaigns.
Victim worried about being believed	• All reports of sexual assault should be assumed to be valid and investigated thoroughly — just like any other reports of crime. • Don't ask doubting or blaming questions. • Understand that trauma can affect victim's memory and emotions. • Use Forensic Experiential Trauma Interview (FETI) techniques.
Police cannot or will not be able to help Victim reached out for informal help	• Ensure campus community allegations are taken seriously. • Create an empathetic policing model that reflects the philosophical values of the law enforcement agency through training, policy development and performance measurement. • Teach officers about "typical" campus sexual assault. • Make police campus services visible and accessible. • Work to unlearn rape myths. • Understand campus hook-up culture and do not blame victim for being sexually active. • Alcohol is usually involved, but do not blame victim-for drinking, focus on assault rather than alcohol use, even if under-age use. • Inform victim of their options — criminal, civil, and student conduct process. • Inform victim of accommodations that can be made on campus to limit potential contact with the alleged offender, for example, with housing or class changes or no-contact directives. • Have presence at *Take Back the Night* marches or other events to show police support of campus initiatives to address sexual assault. • Develop relationships with sororities and other high risk communities. • All sexual assault reports should lead to a written report and an investigation to the fullest extent possible. • Only "unfound" a case after a complete and meaningful investigation.
Victim embarrassment	• Be sensitive to embarrassing topics for the victim, such as detailing body parts and sexual acts. • Interview privately. • Maintain confidentiality as much as possible. • Praise victims for their courage in coming forward. • Have female officers present for female victims when possible.
Afraid to be "outed" as LGBT	• Be aware that sexual assaults can occur regardless of sexual orientation. • Teach officers to be accepting of all sexual identities. • Teach officers about special needs and circumstances of LGBT populations. • Ask victims which personal pronouns they prefer if you are unsure.
Secondary victimization by system	• Attempt to avoid repeated questioning by multiple officers. • Hold skepticism at bay. • Conduct Forensic Experiential Trauma Interviews (FETI). • Honor the victim's right to a non-report sexual assault forensic examination (NR-SAFE) which gives them time to decide whether to make a police report, while collecting valuable evidence.

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Appendix 5: Re-Learning Interview Techniques (Strand, n.d.)

What you might have initially learned about interviewing victims	What we now know about interviewing traumatized persons
Goal: neutral fact finder	Goal: neutral fact finder
Your physical presentation should be aloof, emotionally neutral, and stone-faced.	Instead, express empathy, acknowledge the trauma and pain, show concern, which will increase rapport and assist with the investigation.
Interviewers seek information in a chronological order.	Instead ask, "tell me about your experience," let victims lead the interview and recount the trauma in the way experi-enced, which might not be in chronological order.
Focus on who, what, when, where, why.	Avoid "why" questions; initially focus on the five senses, what did you hear, smell, taste, feel, and see? Later can ask about the other facts of the case.
Interview pre-frontal cortex of brain, place of cognition and reason.	Instead, interview from the lower, more primitive brain structure.
If someone is inconsistent or vague, it probably means they are lying.	Instead, inconsistencies and vagueness may be a result of the trauma. Stress and trauma interrupt the memory processes.
One-dimensional focus (e.g., just the cold, hard facts).	Three-dimensional experience (e.g., victim's thoughts, feelings, and sensory information).
When the person's body language is one of little to no eye contact, shifting in chair, and some stammering and lots of ah-filled pauses, it means they are lying.	This body language can indicate trauma.
Inconsistencies and vague memories often derail a case.	Inconsistencies and vagueness can become the facts of the case that lend support to the case as they can be a sign of trauma.
"She/He" cases lead nowhere.	Forensic Experiential Trauma Interviews can challenge dead ends, while uncovering deeper and better information that can reveal the truth.
A focus on who, what, where, and when will reveals the facts of the case.	Instead, with appropriate interviewing skills (e.g., focus on thought processes and experience) enhances the victim's recall making for stronger cases.
Focus on Cognitive Evidence "Just the Facts".	Focus on psychophysiological evidence.
Interrogation	Interview, conversation
Action-oriented with rapid-fire questions.	Slow-paced, using lots of patience.
Interview right away.	Interview later after 1-2 sleep cycles.

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