Gender Based Violence in Higher Educational Institutions: Perspectives from University of Peradeniya (UoP) - Sri Lanka

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The UN Declaration on Elimination of Violence against Women (1993: 1) defines Gender Based Violence (GBV) as "any act that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation or liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life". Lately, GBV has become a serious threat in higher educational institutions. The objectives of this study are to examine the nature, negative consequences and root causes of GBV in the University of Peradeniya (UoP). The data was collected through a literature survey, 47 case studies and personal interviews with selected 45 students and 11 staff members. The study found that both students and staff faced various types of GBV, which make immense negative impact on their academic lives. The root causes behind them are gendered socialization, unequal power relations, gender identities, gender performance and doing gender within the patriarchal structure of the UoP. Since more women and junior men keep quiet, the existing unequal relations, identities, gendered subjectivities, cultural norms and values are constructed or reinforced by the university community consciously or unconsciously. Combating GBV may require stepping out of the comfort zones, re-thinking some of the most fundamental socio-cultural beliefs, traditions and practices rooted in ourselves, questioning the very foundation of understanding of ourselves and our social relations, and most importantly changing our perceptions that may be gender discriminating by developing a university culture where equality, equity and human rights are protected, promoted and fulfilled.

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