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Sexual and Gender Based Violence in Sri Lankan Universities: A Narrative Analysis

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Abstract:

This research intended to explore the major issue of Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV) in the Sri Lankan university system. Sexual and Gender-Based Violence refers to any harmful act perpetrated against a person's will and based on socially ascribed gender differences. It is a violation of human rights rooted in unequal power relationships, gender inequality, and harmful norms. Although SGBV issues exist among both staff and students in Sri Lankan Universities, many incidents remain unreported, allowing perpetrators to continue harassment and gain advantage from victims' silence. Therefore, the main objective of this study is to reveal how SGBV can be addressed and prevented from recurring within the University system. The primary researcher, drawing on her experience within the university system, her interest towards the maintenance of Gender Equity and Equality in the social context, and her involvement with the Centre for Gender Equity and Equality (CGEE), adopted a qualitative research approach using narrative analysis. This method was employed to examine the recurring scenarios related to SGBV across different universities in Sri Lanka, with a focus on identifying common patterns. Personal interviews, participant' observation and the archival documents have been constituted as the data collection instruments. The findings highlight that both the staff and the students are affected by SGBV. Despite the existence of CGEEs in all state universities, many centres are not sufficiently active in conducting regular awareness programmes for staff and students. Junior academics often refrain from reporting incidents due to fear of damaging relationships with senior academics and concerns with their career development. Similarly, some academic staff abuse their power by harassing students and engaging in discriminatory academic practices. Senior students are also involved in ragging and harassment towards the junior students. A few reported cases also turn back as harassment for them during the inquiry. Therefore, the victims are reluctant to support the University in this process. As a result, victims may withdraw from academic life, drop out, or experience severe psychological distress. Though there are enforcement of

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laws, those have not been strictly followed by the Universities. The perpetrators always make use of this opportunity as an advantage for them. Therefore, the study emphasizes the responsible officers should be vigilant and unbiased in these situations and the need for stronger enforcement of existing laws and for CGEEs to take timely, transparent, and effective action to prevent and eliminate SGBV in Sri Lankan Universities.

Keywords: *Centre for Gender Equity and Equality, Ragging, Sexual and Gender Based Violence, Sri Lankan Universities*

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