

# Policy on gender-based violence at higher education institutions pending

The Department of High Education and Training will soon adopt its first ever framework policy addressing gender-based violence at universities and colleges in an effort to curb the scourge.



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The move was announced last night by Deputy Minister Buti Manamela during an address at the Afriman Rising Dialogue at the Tshwane University of Technology Ga-Rankuwa campus.

The framework policy, he said, provides a set of standards and guidelines for universities and colleges in the public sector to take civil action against perpetrators of gender based violence on campus, whether the perpetrators are students, lecturers or staff.

Recent studies cited by the Deputy Minister during the address painted a grim picture of reckless sexual behaviour and gender-based violence that needed to be rooted urgently in the sector.

“There are too many cases of violence against women, both reported and the vast majority unreported. It makes me angry that young women in our society are no longer safe. They have to look behind their shoulder at all times for fear of rape,

robbery or death; and sometimes from familiar faces masquerading as brothers, uncles or fathers.”

A research study conducted by the Higher Education Aids Programme recently found that about seven million people are living with HIV in the country. Rated the most at risk for new infections were 15 - 24 year-olds, the study found.

“Although there has been a decline in new infections, the base number of 290,000 new infections a year is still too high. We are still seeing about 1.1 million new symptomatic STIs per year. About 32% of students had been pregnant or had made someone pregnant, with 75% of these pregnancies being unplanned.

“We have about 14% of our university students who engage in transactional sex. The figure will be higher if we include TVET [technical vocational education and training] college students. Students are also at risk of alcohol and drug abuse, with 68% of TVET college students abusing alcohol on a regular basis.”

The research, Manamela said, also indicates that 10% of reported cases of rape across the country were from university students, excluding those from TVET colleges.

“A further 62% of students surveyed felt that female students would be sexually harassed on campus. About 28% of males and 27% of females (aged 15 - 19) believed that a girl did not have the right to refuse sex with her boyfriend.

“An alarming 55% of male students think that sexual violence does not include forcing sex with someone you know,” he said.

Manamela said he was not revealing the statistics to shock students but to face them with reality and take action.

“The reality is that girls and women are dying at the hands of men and men are silent.”

The policy, he said, would not only deter gender based violence, but also ensure that victims are supported and linked to care and support.

“We know that the vulnerability and susceptibility to HIV is also heightened for victims of violence and thus post care and support, including access to post exposure prophylaxis, amongst other services, is critical.

“We have decided to make action against gender based violence a central issue in our student support work in all campuses. Young female students face myriad harassment and discrimination issues.”

The Deputy Minister said a new generation of men is needed to act against gender based violence.

“This army of good men must stand up and be fine examples for the boy child and teach him that girls do not need to lose their power for him to assert his masculinity.”