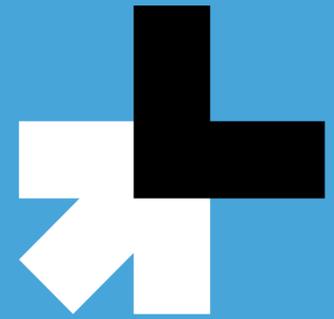


**Proven
Solution**

Ending Gender-Based Violence



HeForShe

University of the Witwatersrand

Reducing gender-based harm on campus



Global Context

Gender-based harm (GBH) on university campuses is a global issue. In the United States, one in five women at colleges report that they have been survivors of sexual assault and in the United Kingdom, studies have found that almost two thirds of students have experienced sexual violence. In South Africa, there has been no comprehensive study to establish the level of gender-based harm in the higher education sector.

In the university context, there is the added complexity of the nature of GBH. It can be student-to-student, student and staff member, or staff to staff. This requires a complex and nuanced response to the issue on campus. At present there is no framework governing policies and procedures to address GBH on South African campuses. The University of the Witwatersrand has therefore endeavored to establish policies which are victim-centric, support structures such as the Gender Equity Office and the Sexual Harassment Advisory Committee, and ensure that the campus is a safe space for all genders through ongoing student and staff engagement.

“Our comprehensive response to GBH on our campus has created an enabling environment for women on our campus to feel safe and succeed. It has not been an easy journey but it means that we now have the policies and procedures to address GBH on campus.”

**Adam Habib, former Vice-Chancellor,
Wits University**



Our comprehensive response to GBH on our campus has created an enabling environment for women on our campus to feel safe and succeed.

**Adam Habib, former Vice-Chancellor,
Wits University**

Key Stages of Implementation

1

Step 1 Analyze the current landscape

It is important to analyze the landscape through engaging with stakeholders and critically examining policies and processes so that one can identify gaps and areas for improvement. Through engaging with staff and students who have experienced GBH or have been involved in the processes of addressing it on campus, they can provide unique insights on what has worked and not worked in the past.

New policies and procedures were developed and formalized, following campus-wide multidisciplinary consultative approaches.

Following a series of high-profile incidents of GBH between academic staff members and students, Wits University instituted an inquiry into whether our policies and procedures created an environment that deterred women from reporting matters of GBH. A member of the university staff, who was both an attorney and a gender activist, led this inquiry. The various policies in place were found to be disjointed and over-legalistic. New policies and procedures were developed and formalized, following campus-wide multidisciplinary consultative approaches.

Key takeaway: Any process of policy review should be done by experts in the matter and should involve a consultative approach with major stakeholders so as to ensure their voices are heard and for buy-in at the management level.

Step 2 Create a formal structure

By creating a formal standalone structure to deal with matters relating to gender, it both allows for dedicated resources and a safe space to address gender-related matters. It also provides a direct office for survivors of GBH to go to when they need help as opposed to trying to access help from various offices and structures such as campus health or campus protection services.

The Vice-Chancellor and his executive team took the decision to establish a standalone Gender Equity Office (GBH matters were previously handled by both the Legal Office and Transformation Office). The GEO is tasked with:

- Collecting and tracking all GBH related complaints across the university and analysing trends to inform and improve intervention initiatives
- Providing a safe and confidential space with full-time counselling support to complainants and victims of GBH

2

- Confidentially advising complainants and victims of GBH of their options
- Overseeing an independent disciplinary procedure for formal complaints against staff or students accused of GBH
- Engaging actively in advocacy around gender equality.

Key takeaway: A standalone office on gender equity allows for gender issues to be the sole focus. In a country such as South Africa, which has a “dual diversity” mandate, it is important that gender issues receive as much attention as racial transformation.

By creating a formal standalone structure to deal with matters relating to gender, it both allows for dedicated resources and a safe space to address gender-related matters.

3

Step 3 Implement oversight and advisory

It is important that there is oversight and advisory support for a gender office as they often deal with complex matters in a complex environment.

A second entity, the Sexual Harassment Advisory Committee (SHAC), was established to oversee matters of sexual harassment within the university community. The SHAC falls under the Vice-Chancellor’s mandate. It consists of members of the university’s staff who have a background in gender issues and serves as an advisory committee to the GEO.

Key takeaway: An advisory committee consisting of academic specialists allows for a second layer to both support the gender office as well as advise where necessary.



Contexts also change over time and so it is necessary to review policies and procedures regularly to ensure that they still fit with the environment.

Step 4 Continuous Review

After establishing new policies and procedures, it is important to reflect on whether these have been successful or not. An independent review of how these have been implemented can assist in identifying any issues that may still need to be addressed. Contexts also change over time and so it is necessary to review policies and procedures regularly to ensure that they still fit with the environment.

A review into the policies and procedures of the GEO was conducted four to five years after they were implemented to ensure that the GEO is operating effectively and to improve the handling of GBH matters in the university.

Key takeaway: Regular review of any gender office, policy or procedure allows for improvement and new thinking.

Resources

As a result of the review of the university's policies on gender-based harm, new policies and procedures were developed to be more victim-centric. However, in implementing these, we have come to recognize that they need to be regularly reviewed and improved upon.

Wits University policies and procedures include the following:

- [Disciplinary Procedure for Gender-Related Misconduct](#)
- [Sexual Harassment, Sexual Assault, and Rape Policy and Procedures](#)
- [Policy on Sexual and Romantic Relationships between Staff and Undergraduates](#)

Contact

For further information and support contact the Wits Gender Equity Office:

Info.geo@wits.ac.za