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Sexual and Gender-Based Violence in Higher Education in Brazil

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Summary report

This is the full-length version of the report. To access the summary version, please go to femideas.com/resources

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Key terms and abbreviations used in this report

Activist: Someone who actively promotes, pushes for, or engages in efforts to bring about social or political change.

Affirmative action: Higher education (HE) policies that ringfence spaces for people historically excluded from these spaces (e.g. people who are Black [Preto and Pardo], Indigenous, and/or disabled, as well as those that attended public schools) (Loureiro et al., 2024).

Backlash: Hostile behaviour from others following an action they deem unacceptable; it can be similar to retaliation. In this report, we talk about victim-survivors and their allies facing backlash after filing complaints of or speaking out about sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV).

Decolonisation (decolonising): The process of undoing or remedying colonialism, involving attempts to dismantle colonial power structures and the reclaiming of autonomy and culture by colonised peoples.

Domestic violence and/or abuse: Violence that occurs within the home or people's living situations. This includes violence within families, as well as between roommates in shared university accommodation. It can take many forms, including psychological, physical, emotional, mental, financial, and/or sexual.

Femicide: The killing of women because they are women (Reale, 2023).

Feminist: There are various strands of feminist thought, but, in general, the term refers to someone who supports and advocates for the equality of all genders, with a particular focus on the rights and interests of girls and women.

HE: Higher Education

HE institutions: Organisations such as colleges and universities that provide advanced educational programmes after secondary education.

FemIDEAS: Feminist, Intersectional, Decolonising, Equality, Abolitionist, Survivor-centred

Homophobia: Bigotry, prejudice, or discrimination based on a person's sexuality, particularly experienced by lesbian, gay, and bisexual people as well as those people others assume to be lesbian, gay, or bisexual.

Intersectional: A framework that examines how various social identities, such as race, gender, sexuality, and class, interlock to shape experiences of oppression, power, and privilege.

Intimate partner violence: Violence that occurs within the context of a romantic and/or sexual relationship. This can take many forms, including psychological, physical, emotional, mental, financial, and/or sexual.

LGBTQIAP+: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning, Intersex, Asexual, Pansexual, and other identities beyond these.

Moral harassment: Aggressive attitudes and behaviours meant to humiliate or intimidate someone through abuse of power; sometimes this is confused with SGBV because there can be overlap between them (Brito et al., 2022).

Naming: The act of publicly disclosing the name or identifying details of someone who has perpetrated or is alleged to have perpetrated SGBV. It can also refer to the process of naming the HE institution that has allowed or enabled SGBV to occur, and/or that mishandled reports of SGBV. Naming is often done by individuals who have experienced SGBV themselves as part of speaking out about their own experiences; activists and allies also engage in naming, usually in support of victim-survivors when speaking out. Naming can occur through various means, including social media platforms, lists populated online, dedicated websites, internal university networks, or even word-of-mouth.

Non-binary: A gender identity that is not man or woman, but something outside of or in between this binary form of gender. Sometimes non-binary identities are grouped under the transgender umbrella because they also reject gender based on sex assigned at birth.

Non-punitive forms of accountability: Forms of accountability following harm that do not rely on punishment but rather stress learning/education and behavioural change as the intended outcome.

Patriarchy: A social system which positions men as structurally powerful, usually giving them more access to public space, financial rights, and power in interpersonal relationships and in terms of the law. This puts women and minority genders at a social and structural disadvantage, gives them fewer rights, potentially makes them more vulnerable to violence, and often creates a reliance on the men in their lives.

Perpetrator/Person that harms/Person that engages in SGBV/The person who caused harm: These terms are used interchangeably to describe people who perpetrate SGBV in all its forms. The use of these terms acknowledges the challenges of naming or labelling a person based only on their abusive behaviours and that this could present a barrier to engaging people who harm in behaviour change initiatives (Wild, 2021). In no circumstance do we condone or excuse the actions of perpetrators of SGBV and emphasise the imperative for people who harm to be held to account for their behaviours.

Privatisation: The process of publicly funded institutions becoming privately funded; usually, companies or other organisations, including religions, fund private institutions while governments fund public institutions.

Rape culture: Pervasive attitudes in society that excuse, justify, and/or tolerate SGBV or blame someone who has been victimised for the harm they have experienced. Usually, these attitudes are the result of, and intersect with, patriarchy, a social structure in which men hold the most power.

Sensitisation: Awareness-raising that aims to make people sensitive to an issue. In this report, we see sensitisation used in the context of gender as well as SGBV, and often in the form of training.

Sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV): '[A] continuum of violence that includes sexual harassment; sexual assault; rape; abusive relationships; stalking; spiking; gendered bullying; and sexualised abuses of power including grooming and consensual relationships across positions of power that were harmful to one party' (Bull & Shannon, 2023, p. 4).

Transgender (trans): A term to describe someone whose gender identity is not the same as the sex they were assigned at birth.

Transphobia: Bigotry, prejudice, or discrimination based on a person's transgender status as well as those people others assume to be transgender.

Trauma-informed: Practices that are aware of the personal and societal impacts of trauma, including how trauma victim-survivors may respond to certain circumstances.

Trote/Trotting: An initiation ritual that older undergraduate students (i.e. second year and above) put incoming first-year undergraduates through. Once students undergo their trote/trotting, they are considered members of an in-crowd. Trote/Trotting activities span community service activities to humiliating or violent acts (Devaney & Titus, n.d.).

Victim-blaming: Blaming a victim-survivor for the violence they experienced instead of recognising the person/people who harmed them as responsible (e.g. the belief that a woman wearing a short skirt or revealing clothing is 'asking for' SGBV).

Victim-survivors: This term refers to people who have experienced a traumatic event, particularly an act of sexual and/or gender-based violence or abuse. The terms victim and survivor are used together to recognise that people who have experienced trauma may use one, both, or neither of these terms. We acknowledge here the definitional challenges associated with naming or labelling people based only on a present or past experience of violence or abuse and use this term not as a solution, but in the absence of a more appropriate term (Wild, 2020).

Whisper networks: Informal, often private networks (via group chats, word-of-mouth, covert messages in public spaces, etc.) used to advise or warn others about individuals or groups who are known to be harmful. They enable the sharing between people who have experienced SGBV, their supporters/allies, as well as people who may be at risk of experiencing similar harm.

Introduction

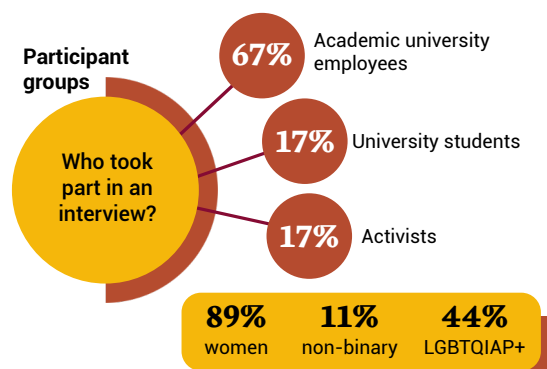
This report presents the findings from fieldwork conducted in Brazil as part of a four-country study, FemIDEAS: Transforming Theory, Policy, and Practice to Decolonise Sexual and Gender-Based Violence in Higher Education. The FemIDEAS project investigates sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) within higher education (HE) institutions to deepen our understanding of the issue and to develop more effective approaches to prevention, response, and support for those who experience it. The study is grounded in decolonial, intersectional, feminist, and abolitionist principles, and is centred on the experiences and needs of victim-survivors. Across the project, we are conducting interviews and analysing policies, procedures, and activism in four countries: Argentina, Brazil, Nigeria, and South Africa. Brazil was the third country we visited as part of this study.

We use the term SGBV throughout this report. This relatively broad terminology and scope are necessary because it can be challenging for some participants to find the precise words to describe their experiences (Bull and Dey, 2022). For this study, we use Bull and Shannon's recent (2023, p. 4) definition of SGBV as:

A continuum of violence that includes sexual harassment; sexual assault; rape; abusive relationships; stalking; spiking; gendered bullying; and sexualised abuses of power including grooming and consensual relationships across positions of power that were harmful to one party.

The study involves interviewing four main groups of participants: university students, university academic staff, other non-academic university staff, and activists. We acknowledge that, often, people will 'fit' into more than one group. All four groups included people who have personally experienced SGBV (also called victim-survivors). We listen to their accounts and experiences, while also examining the structural factors that we know can contribute to SGBV. At the same time, we examine how different universities and HE institutions address SGBV.

We carried out the fieldwork in Brazil from March to July 2024. This involved collecting data by carrying out face-to-face and online interviews using Zoom. We spoke to 18 people from 14 universities across Brazil. Most participants were women (89%), while a minority identified as non-binary (11%). A significant proportion identified as lesbian, bisexual, or gay (44%). Interviews were conducted in both English and Portuguese, with the support of our project partner, Dr Caroline Rodrigues Silva.



This report brings together insights based on what participants shared with us. It offers a brief 'snapshot' of what SGBV in Brazilian HE looks like at the current moment. It also highlights possible areas for intervention and policy reform as well as examples of promising practices or policies. It is important to note that everything is written here with the victim-survivors' experiences in mind and with an understanding that people are experts by experience.

Summary of main findings

The following themes came through in the data:

Campus safety: Safety on campus was a key issue for many participants. Several participants discussed how campus infrastructure and certain academic administrative practices—such as inadequate lighting on campuses, campuses situated in unsafe areas, and a lack of public transportation between campuses and city centres—contributed to their feeling unsafe within their universities. These safety concerns were often connected to issues of safety beyond the university, such as the need to travel at night from the university. Participants also discussed how power relations within university spaces contributed to an unsafe university culture or even violence. Despite the lack of formal institutional safety mechanisms, participants discussed other informal safety mechanisms, including crowd-sourced safety maps, not drinking to avoid drink spiking, walking in groups, mobilising WhatsApp group chats for care and support following SGBV, and ‘whisper networks’ to alert others about people who have harmed or perpetrated SGBV.

Campus rape culture and experiences of SGBV: Both students and staff spoke about how rape culture manifested in their institutions. They discussed how dominant discourses of sexism and misogyny contributed to victim-blaming as well as the normalisation, minimisation, or tolerance of SGBV. In some cases, these ideas produced sexually violent behaviour and together create the conditions for the perpetration of SGBV within Brazilian universities. Data indicated that SGBV in Brazilian universities takes several forms: student-on-student violence; intimate partner violence or domestic violence; staff-to-student sexual misconduct; and moral harassment. These violences occur to varying degrees and prevalences and are often under-reported.

Existing policies, procedures, and support measures: Policies and procedures for responding to SGBV are not in place in all universities; however, data suggested they are most commonly in place in some public and federal universities. Where policies do exist, they are often not implemented in practice, nor are they victim-survivor-centred. This means the policy could require ‘proof’ of harm that many victim-survivors cannot provide, it may not recognise all victim-survivors (e.g. members of staff), and/or there may be a lack of wellbeing support available for those who have been harmed. Some victim-survivors face barriers to reporting, including transgender and non-binary people.

Despite these challenges, there is evidence of good practice for responding to SGBV within Brazilian HE, with some institutions offering dedicated SGBV commissions (offices) and the use of survivor-centred practices for responding to SGBV within their institutions. The data also indicated that, in many cases, good practice aligns closely with feminist praxis and values, with change often initiated and driven by feminist students and staff rather than by the institution itself.

Awareness-raising and training: Training and sensitisation initiatives on topics such as gender inequalities or SGBV are implemented in some institutions. Data suggested that these are typically organised by groups of feminist students and staff, independent of the university itself, and therefore not reflective of institutional priorities. Some participants expressed the need for accessible, intersectional training facilitated centrally within the university, including for newly enrolled staff and students, men (both students and staff), and

students and staff in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM).

Lack of accountability, backlash, and institutional silencing: Data showed how victim-survivors and activists frequently face backlash and institutional silencing when trying to speak out and seek redress for SGBV. This means people who harm—especially men academics—continue to act with impunity while victim-survivors face increased violence. Backlash appeared in various forms, including hostile behaviour from colleagues, gendered academic misconduct by men professors towards women students, and active obstruction of publishing opportunities. It also involved abusive men pretending to be victim-survivors when reports were made concerning their behaviour, with other men protecting them within the department. Often, this form of backlash was accompanied by litigation aimed at silencing victim-survivors and avoiding accountability.

Legacies of colonisation: intersecting inequalities and violence(s): Brazilian HE is not a neutral space. It continues to reflect the enduring structures of coloniality, where systemic inequalities persist even as access has expanded through affirmative action policies. These policies have been crucial in opening university doors to historically excluded groups: Black people (Preto and Pardo), Indigenous peoples, and those from low-income backgrounds. Affirmative action serves the purpose of facilitating entry; however, it should neither be regarded as nor serve as a means to address SGBV. Addressing violence requires the implementation of distinct institutional mechanisms and commitments.

Within this context, SGBV emerges as a systematic and structural issue. Black women, Indigenous women, low-income students, transgender students, and LGBTQIAP+ students face increased exposure to SGBV, compounded by intersecting dynamics of racism, classism, sexism, queerphobia, and transphobia. These dynamics demonstrate that SGBV in HE is not experienced uniformly, but rather varies based on positionality and social markers of difference.

It is important to recognise the limitations of our study. We did not interview Indigenous women in Brazil, partly due to the types of institutions included in our sample and the broader demographic reality that Indigenous students make up only around 0.4% of the national university population. Their absence from the data is a limitation that deserves attention in future research, as their experiences might further challenge and complicate our findings.

Protest, solidarity networks, and social media: Although formal protest movements are limited in the current context, many participants described how staff and student solidarity functioned as a form of collective action and care. These collaborations were often guided by feminist principles, particularly in relation to supporting victim-survivors of SGBV. Participants explained that they created solidarity networks between students and staff—especially feminist staff members or those who teach on gender-related issues. Finally, in the absence of institutional accountability, many victim-survivors and their allies also turned to social media to publicly name individuals who had caused harm, using these platforms as a form of activism and 'whisper network'.

These themes are discussed in detail in the '[Main findings](#)' section. The next section discusses the methodology and methods, including the trauma-informed and participant-led approach used, informed consent, anonymisation protocols, the recruitment strategy, and challenges.

Methodology and methods

The methods used included one-on-one interviews with four distinct participant groups: (i) university students, (ii) university academic staff, (iii) other non-academic university staff, and (iv) activists. All four groups included people who have personally experienced SGBV (also called victim-survivors). Interviews were conducted via Zoom or in person. The interviews were trauma-informed and participant-led, ensuring that the approach was sensitive to the participants' needs, and allowed them to guide the discussion on their terms.

A trauma-informed approach recognises the impact of trauma on individuals and creates a supportive environment that prioritises participant safety and wellbeing. It also aims to minimise the potentially negative effects of taking part in the study. A participant-led approach means participants have choice and control over their involvement, the direction of the interview, and the questions they answer.

Participants were informed about what taking part would involve and signed a consent form to indicate their understanding and agreement. This report contains quotes provided during the interviews. To protect the privacy and anonymity of the participants, as well as to avoid detection of their institution, they have been assigned a number. Participants come from different religious and cultural backgrounds, and their names reflect those identities; it is for this reason that numbers are used instead of pseudonyms.

Recruitment

The FemIDEAS team worked closely with the project partner, Dr Caroline Rodrigues Silva, who connected us with key stakeholders in Brazil. The majority of participants were recruited via purposive sampling. After interviewing key contacts, we employed snowball sampling to engage additional participants. An open call for participants was also issued on Twitter/X and via the project website.

After the interview, all participants were given a post-interview support pack with locally specific information regarding free support services as well as information on how to access specialist mental health support funded by the project, should that be required. All participants were provided with a shopping voucher as a token of appreciation for their time. To avoid spurious participation or 'imposter participants', information regarding the voucher was not communicated in advance. This strategy was determined in collaboration with the project advisory groups, following experiences in earlier stages of the study.

The next section provides contextual information concerning Brazilian universities and HE institutions. It offers an overview of the HE sector, a discussion of the history of HE and its evolution against the backdrop of colonisation, followed by an examination of SGBV in Brazilian HE.

Background information: Brazilian HE

Brazilian universities are modern institutions, established in a country that had already gained independence but remained deeply shaped by the logic of modernity/coloniality. Although created in the 20th century—during a period when Brazil sought to consolidate its national identity—these institutions were nonetheless founded upon colonial models of power and knowledge. This framework privileges Eurocentric epistemologies, hierarchises bodies and ways of knowing, and naturalises racial, gendered, and class-based inequalities. Throughout the 20th century, HE expanded alongside national development projects and mechanisms of political control. While university education came to be portrayed as a pathway to modernisation and social mobility, access remained restricted to a white, male elite connected to agrarian capital and the liberal professions.

During the military dictatorship (1964–1985), universities became complex spaces of repression and surveillance, but also of resistance and critical thinking. From the 1990s onwards, with government reform and economic liberalisation, the private sector expanded quickly, turning HE into a competitive market. This introduced private universities alongside public universities.

Only in the past two decades—through affirmative action policies, particularly the academic quota laws (Law No. 12.711/2012 and Law No. 13.409/2016)—has Brazilian HE begun, in a more systematic way, to include Black, Indigenous, Quilombola, low-income, and disabled students. These policies marked both a democratic and an epistemic shift, challenging the historic monopoly of whiteness and elite control over university knowledge. The quota system has expanded access and transformed universities into key sites of struggle for cognitive and social justice.

The Brazilian HE system is composed of four main types of institutions: colleges, university centres, universities, and federal institutes of education, science, and technology. These categories differ in focus, scope, and degree of autonomy:

- Colleges are primarily teaching-focused, offering undergraduate degrees in specific areas and having limited academic autonomy.
- University centres have a broader profile, offering postgraduate programmes and engaging in some research and outreach activities.
- Universities integrate teaching, research, and extension, enjoy full autonomy to create new programmes, and represent the historical core of scientific production in the country.

Federal institutes of education, science, and technology combine technical, technological, and HE, oriented towards professional training and the regionalisation of public education.

According to the 2024 Higher Education Census, published by the National Institute for Educational Studies and Research (INEP, 2024), Brazil has 317 public institutions and 2,244 private ones. Among the public institutions, 43.8% are state-run (139), 38.5% are federal (122), and 17.7% are municipal (56). The survey also reveals that most Brazilian universities are public, accounting for 56.3% of all universities in the country. It is important to note that most of our data comes from students and staff at public universities.

These figures reveal a marked asymmetry between the public and private sectors—an outcome of a historically uneven expansion in which the marketisation of education has advanced in parallel with persistent budgetary constraints in public universities. This reinforces social, racial, and territorial inequalities in both access to and continued participation within HE.

Recent studies indicate that the Brazilian HE system faces persistent structural fragilities that hinder the realisation of education as both a right and a public good. Among the main gaps identified are:

- Insufficient funding and dependence on irregular federal transfers in public universities,
- Inadequate infrastructure and a lack of permanent maintenance plans, particularly in campuses located outside major urban centres,
- Unequal HE systems as a result of the country's colonial legacy and regional inequalities in access and quality between the North/Northeast and South/Southeast regions,
- Low representation of historically marginalised groups, with still limited participation of Black and Indigenous people, women with caregiving responsibilities, disabled people, and trans people in decision-making spaces,
- Limited access to HE for marginalised groups as a result of geographical barriers, the cost of HE, and limited places for students at public universities,
- Precarious working conditions for academic and technical staff, with excessive workloads and unstable contracts,
- A deficit of student retention and support policies, undermining the continuity of academic trajectories,
- Hierarchical and patriarchal institutional cultures that render gendered, racial, and class-based violence invisible,
- Lack of integration between educational, social, and territorial policies, which weakens coordinated action among universities, municipalities, and states,
- Absence of consolidated mechanisms for the prevention and response to SGBV, still incipient after the enactment of Federal Law No. 14.540/2023,
- Varied quality of education across the sector, poor management of institutions, limited research opportunities, and a lack of adequate or available employment opportunities post-graduation (Bertolin & McCowan, 2022; QAHE Association, n.d.; Majee & Ress, 2020; Pascuci & Fishlow, 2023).

These elements demonstrate that Brazilian HE remains structured by colonial and unequal logics, sustained by practices that reproduce historical exclusions. It is in this context that SGBV occurs and in which universities work to prevent and respond to SGBV.

SGBV in Brazilian HE institutions

As in many parts of the world, gendered power dynamics within Brazilian universities mirror those that operate in the wider society. According to Maito and colleagues (2021), young women are structurally vulnerable to SGBV—particularly sexual violence. They cite data from the Brazilian Public Security Forum (2019), which indicates that 42.6% of Brazilian women aged 16–24 have experienced some form of violence. As in other contexts, HE students may be over-represented within this age group. This pattern persists within universities: cisgender women, transgender women, and non-binary people are the groups most frequently subjected to SGBV, while cisgender men—especially men professors—are most commonly responsible for perpetrating it (Blay et al., 2018; Brito et al., 2022; Maito et al., 2021). This trend aligns with global patterns.

SGBV in Brazilian HE began to receive sustained attention in the early 2000s. Student mobilisation, however, dates back to the 1980s, particularly following high-profile cases such as the 1987 murder of University of Brasília student Thaís Muniz Mendonça by her ex-boyfriend, Marcelo Bauer, also a student at the same institution (de Almeida & Zanello, 2023). Despite the increasing visibility of SGBV on university campuses and the collective action these cases provoked, there is still no national framework for preventing and responding to SGBV within Brazilian HE institutions. Most universities continue to lack permanent support structures, clear reporting protocols, and comprehensive institutional policies. As Buarque de Almeida of University of São Paulo has stated:

The majority of Brazilian universities don't have the necessary structures or policies to deal with [SGBV] [...] In most cases, the maximum they do is organize awareness campaigns with posters and brochures distributed on campus. (Andrade, 2022, n.p.)

Although not all HE institutions are taking action to address SGBV, there is some movement across the sector. Several universities—such as the University of São Paulo (USP), University of Brasília (UnB), and São Paulo State University (UNESP)—have created policies and procedures for responding to sexual violence and harassment (Andrade, 2022; de Castilho, 2023; Marques, 2023).

Additionally, the University Council of the University of Campinas (UNICAMP) created the Gender and Sexuality Commission in 2019, which leads the Service for the Care of Sexual Violence. This service centralises complaints, refers victim-survivors to existing resources, and constructs cases to send to the Chancellor's Office if the victim-survivor wishes for an investigation (Andrade, 2022; Marques, 2023).

There is a lack of national data on the prevalence of SGBV within Brazilian HE institutions. The available data is often specific to a single university or campus site of a larger institution (e.g. Blay et al., 2018; Brito et al., 2022). However, this data nevertheless indicates that SGBV is a persistent issue within Brazilian HE institutions. A study by the Women's Office at University of São Paulo (USP), the largest public university in Brazil, found that 7% of respondents reported experiencing sexual violence, with mainly non-binary respondents (18%) and cisgender women respondents (11%) having experienced it, along with 2% of cisgender men respondents (Blay et al., 2018).

Other studies reinforce this pattern: a study at the Ribeirão Preto campus of University of São Paulo found that, of the forms of gender-based violence that occurred within the institution, sexual harassment—especially by teaching staff against students—was most common, followed by incidents of sexual assault, and then rape (Maito et al., 2021). Substantiating these findings, a study at the Federal University of Pelotas (UFPel) found that nearly one in three student respondents reported experiencing some form of intimate partner violence including psychological, physical, or sexual violence (Valério et al., 2024).

Race and ethnicity also shape experiences of violence, as Indigenous women in Brazilian HE institutions may experience SGBV at higher rates than white women (Vieira & Almeida, 2023). These findings highlight the importance of examining SGBV through an intersectional lens that considers different axes of power, such as gender, race, sexuality, class, and territory, simultaneously.

Existing literature also demonstrates that moral harassment is highly prevalent in Brazilian universities. Originating in labour law and union campaigns in the early 2000s, the term is broadly defined as 'violent behaviours and attitudes that are based on humiliation, aggression, psychological terror and abuse of power' (Andrade, 2018, cited by Brito et al., 2022, pp. 17–18). Brito and colleagues (2022) note that moral harassment is sometimes mistaken for sexual harassment, particularly when it stems from harmful gendered norms, but it constitutes a distinct phenomenon. Their study at the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS) found that moral harassment was the most prevalent form of harassment within the university: 40% of student and professor respondents, and over 50% of technical staff, reported having experienced it.

Although sexual harassment was less frequently reported in the study—with 15% of women respondents experiencing it as well as 5% of men—Brito and colleagues (2022) note that both sexual harassment and moral harassment are under-reported. This is largely due to concerns that there is not sufficient 'proof' or a witness to corroborate the victim-survivor's lived experience (Brito et al., 2022). Under-reporting is common elsewhere in Brazilian HE institutions, which limits understanding of the full scale and scope of the issue (Andrade, 2022).

Data collection on SGBV is, however, mainly focused on institutions in the South and Southeast regions. This reflects a form of internal coloniality within the field of education. The statistical silence surrounding certain regions does not indicate an absence of violence; rather, it exposes a lack of visibility and the insufficient public investment required for data collection and policymaking (Souza et al., 2021; Silvo Basso & Ferrazza, 2024; FURG, 2023).

The visibility of research from certain regions does not indicate an absence of work elsewhere; rather, it highlights the unequal circulation and recognition of knowledge produced in different parts of the country.

Universities in the North and Northeast—such as the Federal University of Bahia (UFBA), the Federal University of Pará (UFPA), the Federal University of Paraíba (UFPB), the Federal University of Maranhão (UFMA), the Federal University of Piauí (UFPI), the Federal University of Rio Grande do Norte (UFRN), and the Federal University of Acre (UFAC)—have generated significant studies and initiatives, yet these are rarely documented or disseminated within dominant academic circuits. Examples include research on perceptions of sexual violence among students and faculty in Ceará (Aguiar et al., 2022), and the mapping of institutional policies for addressing violence against women in federal universities (UFPB, 2023).

Together, these laws create a comprehensive legal framework; however, implementation within universities remains inconsistent and fragmented. The continued prevalence of SGBV indicates that

At the national level, Brazil has passed a number of laws addressing different forms of SGBV, including:

- Sexual harassment (Law No. 10.224; de Castilho, 2023),
- Violence against women (Decree No. 10.112; Ministry of Women, 2023),
- Domestic and family violence (Maria da Penha Law; Instituto Maria da Penha, 2024),
- Femicide (Law No. 14.188; Reale, 2023),
- The Programme for the Prevention and Responses to Sexual Harassment and Sexual Violence within the federal public administration (Law No. 14.540/2023; Sá de Miranda & Paredes Arcenales, 2023).

institutional responses are still inadequate and a lack of coordinated, stable, and cross-sectoral mechanisms.

The literature reviewed in this section refers to localised studies conducted at different times. This should be read as indicative of structural dynamics and trends, given that Brazil still lacks a unified national system for monitoring SGBV in universities. Ultimately, SGBV remains a key challenge, and women and gender- and/or sexuality-minoritised students continue to experience especially high rates of SGBV. The widespread under-reporting of SGBV makes it difficult to determine true prevalence rates of SGBV in Brazilian HE. There is also a risk that the scale and severity of the problem may be underplayed by HE institutions. In the section that follows, the main findings from this study are explored. We begin by examining campus safety.

Main findings

This section sets out key findings following fieldwork conducted in Brazil, beginning with an overview of safety within HE institutions.

Campus safety

Safety on campus was a key issue for many participants. Several people discussed how campus infrastructure coupled with administrative practices involving the scheduling of late-night classes, campuses situated in unsafe areas, and lack of public transport between campuses and city centres together contributed to them feeling unsafe within their universities:

So, my building is the last, in a deserted place, and we're the few courses that still have evening classes. We have classes until 11 o'clock at night, and the students keep insisting that we finish earlier, so they don't have to expose themselves on the way from the campus to the city centre, which is dangerous. (N9/316, academic)

Well I must say that Brazil is a very dangerous country so not only [in] terms of sexual harassment, that is a problem, also in the sense but the campus is completely unsafe [...] when I teach in the night I used to run to my car and I also used to say to my students go before, before to take a bus and so on because it's very dangerous but I wouldn't say only in terms of harassment as I told you just that you can get murdered and everything else [...] you were afraid of being robbed, you were afraid of get your body touched and I think the number was like 90% of the people they said they was afraid today, 90%. Even men and women but the difference was about the body. Women they were afraid of get robbed and to get their body touched, you know. (N3/310, academic)

Data indicated that many academic staff and students were acutely aware of these risks, which are connected to, and often reflective of, concerns about safety beyond the university space. These safety concerns are also not evenly distributed or experienced by every person in the same way, as the following account indicates:

The public transportation wasn't so good, it was like, just [...] one per one hour. So it's too long to wait and of course about the money [...] most of the students don't have money [...] to take a bus or Uber or something like that and then most of the, the people walking this, this, this distance. That it's not so far but because the conditions became super dangerous. (N18/325, academic)

This extract suggests that students with fewer resources, particularly those reliant on public transport, face heightened safety risks both on and off campus. By extension, it indicates that having greater resources can offer a degree of 'protection' from the vulnerabilities associated with transport. Broader issues of class-based violence and discrimination are explored in the '[Legacies of colonisation](#)' section.

In addition to finishing classes early to allow people to return home safely, a group of students and academics also created a safety map for people, especially women, to navigate university spaces:

So, we realised that it would be good for women to know which sorority house, fraternity house will be safe for them. [...] we designed a map, it's a national map, we used Google maps for that, right. And these women they can register themselves and be anonymous. And they can sign the map where they suffer gender violence. [...] This place will be red, yellow or green. Green that is a safe place, yellow because there is some issues. And red because it's not a safe place. When a person touched in the map, in the place, it will be like the data, like what happened there.

This also can be used for public places and private ones. [...] And in this app we also have a button to call [...] the specific gender police, because here we have a specific type of investigation police, investigative police, which only investigates gender violence [...] So, we have a button that can connect it. (N6/313, academic)

Although safety within and beyond HE spaces was discussed as a connected issue, some accounts suggest that not all universities understand safety in these terms, especially when in the context of SGBV:

[W]e were talking about sex harassment in the workplace and in the university [...] it's like, it's always the problem is the other's, not my problem. Then we face it, it as a problem that we can, this can happen everywhere because we are not safe as a society, and they don't exist in this vacuum too. Oh, now this, this, this place it's safe the other it's not, we are just doing this exercise to create a safe space. (N18/325, academic)

This participant highlighted that violence does not only occur outside of universities, but because universities are part of society, they too are impacted by social issues, including SGBV and other forms of violence.

Beyond infrastructure, participants also identified power relations within university spaces as contributing to an unsafe university culture or even violence:

I think in university one of the biggest problems involves hierarchy. So it's important to have spaces where we will talk in the same level, students, professors, administrators and the community. (N8/315, academic)

[I]n this correlation of forces that we've come to realise, the hierarchies of the power structures within the university, we see that the teachers end up [...] using these relations of power to be able to do whatever they want, they're the ones who also have political and economic power, in the sense of grants, in the sense of internships, in the sense of possibilities, you know, to open doors or close doors. (N5/312, student)

And there are other issues like when you're dealing with egos at university, because we know that violence is an answer—when someone questions a power relationship, the answer is always violence. Like when you are kind of—especially when we're talking about coloniality gender. We have sexual/racial divisions of labour that are naturalised. So, when you question a white man in a power position with knowledge or with a complaint the answer is violence. The answer is violence. (N6/313, academic)

As discussed in the next section, hierarchies that produce power differences can create the conditions for the perpetration of SGBV. Power differentials occur at various scales—between students and staff, between staff in diverse roles (e.g. a lecturer and a senior administrator) or between staff who occupy different positions within broader social hierarchies (e.g. race, class, gender, disability). Unequal power structures can embolden and enable people located at the top of a power hierarchy to perpetrate violence without repercussions, while at the same time making it more difficult for those at the bottom of the hierarchy to access justice or redress.

Students, however, rely on informal safety practices in the absence of institutional support or protection. These include avoiding alcohol consumption at academic conferences to guard against drink spiking, walking in groups, and enacting ethics of care through WhatsApp group chats, where members can seek support following incidents of SGBV.

One of the most significant structures of collective safety discussed in the data were 'whisper networks' to alert others about people who have harmed or perpetrated SGBV. They typically took the form of in-person conversations, writing names on bathroom stalls or walls, and in dedicated, closed WhatsApp groups:

[E]ven before I got to the university, when I was in high school, I had a friend who was there and she, I told her that I was going to apply to UNESP [São Paulo State University] and to social science and she said, 'Be careful with this teacher, with this professor'. (N10/317, student)

[C]entral campus [...] which has [...] the women's toilets, all the photos filled in with the names of teachers, students, with the aliases of Instagram profiles, always reporting rapists, harassers. (N9/316, academic)

There's a WhatsApp group [...] where people from both the university and the city, women, share information about these harassers, these men who are committing violence, and it's become a support network. For example, I'm leaving university at 11 o'clock at night and [...] a guy is chasing me. This person gets on WhatsApp and says, 'Guys, I've just passed you, be careful'. (N9/316, academic)

These informal safety networks also function as a mechanism for naming people who have harmed, which we discuss in the '[Protests, solidarity networks, and social media](#)' section.

In the next section, campus rape culture and experiences of SGBV within HE institutions are discussed.

Campus rape culture and experiences of SGBV

Concerns about campus safety are often closely tied to concerns about SGBV within HE institutions. In this section, we briefly discuss rape culture on Brazilian HE campuses before analysing the forms that SGBV takes.

Participants spoke at length about how rape culture manifested in their institutions. Both student and staff participants talked about instances in which they heard sexist discourse on campus that often excused SGBV or victim-blamed, which together function to sustain a broader institutional culture of misogyny:

I study part of the time during the, the afternoon and part of the time during the night and here it's a tropical country so it's super-hot. Then the professor starts to say, 'Oh you can't use like, jeans shorts because if you use shorts you allow me to look at you and so please' [...] the phrase was, 'please don't [wear] shorts at my class otherwise it's your fault'. (N18/325, academic)

[W]e have a lot of students and female professors and administrative professionals in the university that are making appointments every day or every week to tell us about their story [...] because they are facing a sexist culture in their jobs, in their life at the university. (N13/320, academic)

Sometimes these attitudes led to sexually violent behaviour, as shown below. Notably, this behaviour was perpetrated against a group of feminists in 2013, when protesting violent 'trote/trotting' practices during their university induction week. Incoming women students were pressured into parading in front of men, particularly older students, in a mock beauty pageant, to be embarrassed (Globo.com, 2013). In 2013, men attending the

pageant attacked protestors by shouting homophobic and aggressive remarks at them, passing around leaflets that encouraged people to assault women (CartaCapital, 2013; Globo.com, 2013). One participant described their experience at this protest as follows:

Most people on that protest, they were not from our university. [...] And they will be so hostile, like, people would put their dicks on their [women's] faces. They would make- 300 people telling a girl [...] to go stick it up her ass, you know. (N1/08, activist)

These attitudes and behaviours create the conditions for the perpetration of SGBV in Brazilian universities, while also excusing or minimising it. We know that no HE institutions in the world exist in a vacuum, but rather often reflect the broader societal conditions. Like other countries, Brazil continues to be heavily shaped by patriarchy and unequal gender norms, which locate women and minoritised genders as inferior to men and which contribute to the widespread normalisation of SGBV and a culture of impunity (Maito et al., 2021; Mendes & da Silva, 2020).

Participants told us that SGBV in Brazilian universities takes several forms, including student-on-student violence, intimate partner violence or domestic violence, staff-to-student sexual misconduct, and moral harassment. These each entail specific challenges regarding how HE institutions can or should respond to them, which we will explore in the next section on policies and procedures.

Data indicated that domestic violence, as defined and understood in the Brazilian legal context, occurs both between intimate partners and between students living together:

[W]e have a problem with domestic violence and intrafamilial violence too and sometimes we received students to tell us [...] they are facing violence in their life sometimes; it's not in the university but their personal lives and that [...] influenced the student's life. (N13/320, academic)

[T]his case that I told you about, that the man kind of threatened to kill a student, he was a student too. [...] a lot of students kind of live there [in student houses] so they experience, like, some domestic violence in there, it's really common. (N10/317, student)

According to Brazilian federal law (namely the Maria de Penha Law), intimate partner violence and domestic violence can occur between students who live together, or between a student and a partner from outside of the university (Instituto Maria da Penha, 2024). The accounts above are reflected in scholarship on intimate partner violence in Brazilian HE institutions, with one study at the Federal University of Pelotas (UFPe) finding that nearly one in three students reported experiencing some form of intimate partner violence, including psychological, physical, and or sexual violence (Valério et al., 2024).

Many student participants discussed experiencing SGBV from academic staff. Sometimes this took the form of staff making inappropriate sexual advances towards students. In other instances, it manifested as academic malpractice, such as withholding academic support, awarding unduly low grades, or refusing to provide letters of recommendation, as a means of 'punishing' students for rejecting lecturers' advances:

And then, at one point, he sat down next to me and put his leg against mine. And then I realised that, to some extent, it was becoming a dangerous situation. (N7/314, academic)

[A]fter reporting my adviser I didn't have any follow-up, it was his follow-up, I didn't have any support, I had to find a lawyer on my own, I had to fend for myself, so it's one girl against an entire institution. (N4/311, academic)

Literature suggests that staff-to-student SGBV is common in Brazilian HE, especially in the form of lecturers sexually harassing students (Maito et al., 2021). According to existing research, men professors and members of staff are the most likely group to perpetrate SGBV, and women students and non-academic members of staff are most likely to be victim-survivors (Blay et al., 2018; Brito et al., 2022; Maito et al., 2021). This reflects a worldwide pattern of SGBV perpetration and victimisation, which is supported by a significant body of global research.

Moral harassment, or aggressive attitudes and behaviours meant to humiliate or intimidate someone through abuse of power (Brito et al., 2022), was also discussed by several participants. Moral harassment can be hard to recognise both for the people experiencing it (as we see in the first quote below) and for the people within the university trying to respond to SGBV (as demonstrated in the second quote below):

I'd never heard of bullying, so much so that when I suffered it, I had no idea what it was about, I felt incompetent, I threw up every day at work, I cried a lot, I really started to have a lot of physical symptoms. (N2/09, student)

[I]t was moral harassment in this case. So the people that are there judging they don't know what it is. (N14/321, academic)

Moral harassment is frequently under-reported in universities. Often, this is because people do not know where to report. In other cases, it is owing to concerns that they do not have adequate 'proof' or witnesses to corroborate their experiences. Given the emphasis placed upon evidence in many reporting pathways and policies, a complaint of moral harassment may not be progressed or taken seriously (Brito et al., 2022).

The next section examines some existing policies and procedures for responding to SGBV within HE in Brazil.

Existing policies, procedures, and support measures

In this section, we discuss the existing policies, procedures, and support measures responding to SGBV in Brazilian HE institutions. Challenges in responses are addressed first, before we move on to a discussion of good practice for responding to SGBV.

While Brazil has a robust legal framework for responding to various forms of SGBV on the national or federal level (e.g. Decree No. 10.112; Law No. 10.224; The Maria de Penha Law No. 11.340; Law No. 14.188), there is no national framework for responding to SGBV within Brazilian universities. As a result, not all universities have policies or procedures, with our data suggesting that some public and federal universities are more likely to have SGBV policies in place. However, even when in place 'on paper', policies may not be implemented in practice, as the following two quotes indicate:

[T]he first university [...] they don't have properly policy about addressing sex harassment, racism, homophobia, homophobic things, they have nothing about that. (N18/325, academic)

These policies, like often they don't mean anything because they're just there to say that the university is doing something when they aren't doing anything. (N10/317, student)

Where policies do exist, they often do not centre victim-survivors. As such, policies might require a level of proof that many victim-survivors cannot provide, as illustrated in the first quote below. This is compounded by a lack of anonymity afforded to victim-survivors in the process. Policies may also not acknowledge the experiences of all potential groups of victim-survivors, such as staff members, as indicated in the second

quote below, and, finally, as shown in the third quote, frequently policies do not include provision for wellbeing support:

[S]o either you report it, and you don't hear back, or you have to provide evidence and identify yourself. (N17/324, academic)

But [...] for professors I don't think it works the same because we have [...] an assistant policy for students that's really strong, but we don't have the same for professors. (N8/315, academic)

[S]he asked for [...] therapy to [...] kind of support her during the process. But it's so complicated [...] So she didn't get a therapist, and I think [...] 90% of the people don't get to. So, the whole process [is] extremely violent and there's no support to the student. (N10/317, student)

Together, these omissions in some existing policies can serve as a significant deterrent to reporting or making disclosures of SGBV. Training on supporting transgender or non-binary victim-survivors is also lacking and is only offered in very few institutions. However, in some cases, staff may not be receptive to such training, including other cis women:

I was talking about a policy that was implemented by the university, but the workers were not trained at all and [...] are not willing to learn about transgender people. (N12/319, activist)

Our findings regarding the lack of institutional policies and procedures, as well as the challenges faced by victims-survivors even when policies do exist, align with existing research by Brazilian scholars, which concludes that many Brazilian universities lack the necessary infrastructure to handle SGBV (Andrade, 2022).

Despite these challenges, there is also evidence of good practice for responding to SGBV within Brazilian HE. One institution with a dedicated SGBV commission (office) ensures that the first point of contact for victim-survivors reporting a complaint is a cisgender or transgender woman, and that the initial response is welcoming:

[T]he person who is going to receive this formal complaint [...] has to be a woman. [...] of course, everyone [who] recognises themselves as women, can occupy this position. [...] how to receive the victim. It's how to welcome, it's like embrace this person because the first contact that this person has after gender violence has to be a welcoming place [...] A secure place. (N6/313, academic)

That this role is reserved or mandated for women only signals an awareness and understanding of the gendered dynamics of SGBV, in which most people who perpetrate it are men while most people impacted by it are women and gender minoritised individuals (Brito et al., 2022; Maito et al., 2021). It is also a policy and procedure that is overtly trans-inclusive, which is crucial, considering trans and non-binary people's structural vulnerability to SGBV (Blay et al., 2018; Maito et al., 2021).

This same commission (office) employs other victim-survivor-centred practices, including the investigation of anonymous complaints and limiting the number of times someone must disclose their experience of SGBV during an investigation, as seen in the first quote below. They also offer longer-term therapeutic intervention as part of a package of wellbeing support, as indicated in the second quote below:

[I]t could be [an] anonymous complaint. It's always under confidentiality. And we establish also that this victim will [...] speak out about her story about the gender violence episodes, just one time because we don't want to re-victimise her again. (N6/313, academic)

[R]egarding the survivors [...] during the whole process they will be followed by a psychiatrist or with psychological supervision. This is something that was kind of new here, because the university offer[ed], before this project, only two weeks of psychological help. Not psychiatry, and only two weeks of psychological help. And this process can last, like, years. (N6/313, academic)

Several participants also highlighted the importance of non-punitive responses to SGBV within universities. Two participants described the use of educational measures aimed at changing behaviour, rather than relying solely on punitive sanctions for individuals found responsible for SGBV following a complaints process:

[W]e have this procedure towards responsibility, towards- [...] it's not punishment, it's more like [...] accountability, but it's not collective. It's individual. [...] there are some measures that we can apply [...] we try to leave the punishment idea [...] we are an educational institution. So, we had to apply something that is more [...] like educational measure than a punishment. (N15/322, academic)

Another participant described a similar process in their university, where they chose a non-punitive response in a case where a university committee found several medical students responsible for homophobic behaviour:

What we would do, one of the options was the expelling, that they would lose the course [...] but the committee decided that, no, it was not an option [...] They are medical students, they will become doctors in the future, it's more interesting that we could make them learn something about it and not to repeat it than to just give up their formation. So [...] they needed to do some extension courses about gender and sexuality that the university already has, and we have transgender nucleus in the medicine and so they could come with us to understand the problems of this population [...] Of course, of course, all the time [they were supervised]. (N8/315, academic)

This extract suggests a more holistic approach to addressing SGBV that considers the implications of behaviour change initiatives not only in the immediate term, but also in the longer term—in this case, the consequences would be far-reaching, considering the profession the students were training in. This type of approach suggests more innovative and expansive thinking that could help build institutional culture change through the use of non-punitive responses to SGBV.

Participants discussed how these types of promising practices are typically led by feminist students and staff, who together push universities to make changes in how they approach the problem of SGBV within their institutions. They also highlight that universities rarely instigate these initiatives and often SGBV is not viewed as an institutional priority, as the following alludes to:

[I]t was a personal initiative, like, for me and other professors, because we don't have money, so it's something that you compromise your house and your time. (N6/313, academic)

This type of piecemeal approach to addressing the issue of SGBV, reliant upon the goodwill of a small number of women students and staff, means that this work is often under-resourced and unsustainable. Ultimately, the individual feminist women leading these initiatives—typically unpaid—often risk 'burnout' as they undertake these responsibilities in addition to their already substantial workloads.

In the next section, training and sensitisation efforts are discussed in the context of broader prevention strategies.

Awareness-raising and training

While the last section examined response mechanisms, we now turn to preventative mechanisms. In this section, we analyse awareness-raising and training available in Brazilian HE institutions with regard to issues of gender inequality and responding to SGBV. Data indicated that some training and awareness-raising initiatives are offered within Brazilian HE, though these tend to be organised by groups of feminist students and staff independently of the university, rather than being coordinated centrally or as part of a broader institutional strategy to address the issue:

[W]e lectured a lot of students, and a lot of students came to us to talk about it. But it kind of happens because we make effort to and not because the uni and [...] we are students, we are not trained people. So it's kind of not our job but we do that because we think it's necessary. [...] I saw how the university was not prepared to tell us about those things, so the university doesn't want us to know there are ways of making a complaint. (N10/317, student)

[W]e do campaigns on the Internet showing that what is harassment, [...] how to proceed [...] some other groups they also do this, but, you know, are particular groups [...] but that is nothing official from the university [about how to] avoid harassment. Even not something that tells you what is harassment [...] there are some people that get together to speak but not official from the university, that doesn't exist. (N3/310, academic)

These accounts further corroborate the assertions made in the last section regarding the extent to which feminist students and staff are responsible for mobilising change within their universities regarding SGBV policies and procedures. Despite the lack of institutionalised training, many participants expressed the desire for training within and from the university, especially initiatives that are tailored for specific groups of students or staff, as well as specific subject areas.

One member of academic staff stressed the need to train incoming or newly enrolled students at the start of their academic careers to build a more inclusive culture:

[T]raining students who enter. You could say 'hello guys you are here, you are entering university and now let's talk about some nice ways to treat people around you' [...] women and guys, everybody, you know, to speak not only about the gender issues but to speak about everything else because we know that the harassment happens much more with the minorities including racial stuff. (N3/310, academic)

Other participants discussed the importance of engaging with men, including both students and staff. One academic talked about her work engaging men as partners and how sharing different gendered experiences can increase men's awareness of gendered inequalities:

[W]e need to touch the heart of men too [...] Every week we have meetings and talk about what is to be a man in our society, in our university [...] they need to be our partners in this important fight. [...] we have so, so different experience in the academic life. So, like, safety in the campus is a problem because we don't have effective illumination [...] so at night it's very dark, it's very difficult for a woman to walk around the campus but for men it is not a problem, so we need to teach the men about this. (N13/320, academic)

In talking about men's role in the prevention of SGBV, another academic highlighted how men in medicine and science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects as a population could benefit from targeted intervention, owing to the often-increased prevalence of patriarchal attitudes in male-dominated

fields:

[L]et's go to science, science is cool, and a woman's place is wherever she wants [...] but we still have a macho structure, it's a lot of men [...] people will come in and think you shouldn't be there, and they'll make jokes like, 'the lab is prettier', 'someone has come to make coffee', and then I'll tell you about the unwanted touches. (N4/311, academic)

While this section focused on what HE institutions can do to prevent SGBV through training and awareness-raising, the next section examines how HE institutions currently abdicate responsibility for addressing SGBV and target victim-survivors and their allies for speaking out about SGBV.

Lack of accountability, 'backlash', and institutional silencing

Evidencing the need for training and sensitisation, this section discusses the experiences of victim-survivors and activists with backlash or retaliation, as well as institutional silencing, after they attempt to speak out and seek redress or justice for SGBV. It will also briefly touch on the lack of accountability for men who not only perpetrate SGBV, but who also 'close ranks' to protect their peers from SGBV allegations or from facing redress for their actions.

One student spoke extensively about the backlash encountered by those in her university who speak out or report incidents of SGBV, providing the example of her best friend, who experienced prolonged targeting after reporting a professor for SGBV. The woman concerned was discouraged by several academic staff members from reporting SGBV during a committee meeting, and after making the report, she was subjected to continuous hostility. As the following quote indicates, this hostile behaviour amounted to significant academic malpractice and was ongoing:

[S]he knows she can't do some classes because the professors will make her do bad in papers and assignments [...] mainly [the] way they do that is by making people don't pass their exams or things like that. (N10/317, student)

The account above points to an institutionalised patriarchal culture in which men protect other men, collectively mobilising against those who speak out about their abusive behaviours or those of their peers. In this case, academic staff retaliated not only against the victim-survivor but also against her friends and allies, including a woman professor who supported her. Retaliation took multiple forms, such as the coordinated obstruction of opportunities to publish their work. This example illustrates not only the nature of the backlash faced by some victim-survivors but also the extent to which such backlash operates as a powerful mechanism of institutional silencing—one that, as shown here, unfolds across multiple scales.

Participants working on addressing SGBV within their HE institutions also spoke at length about the retaliation they received for their work on this issue. One academic staff member described how she was routinely and aggressively targeted because of her engagement in efforts to address SGBV:

I already suffer mobbing¹, but mostly because of my power position and because I deal with gender violence. So, when I have to deal with these conflicts, usually men, white men, cisgender heterosexual- [...] Usually older than me. And they always react with some violence, like verbal violence, intimidation,

¹ Mobbing is a form of harassment in which a group collectively and repeatedly humiliates, isolates, or intimidates a single person. Typical behaviours include rumour-spreading, social exclusion, deliberate undermining of work, and continual criticism. The intention is often to pressure the individual to leave their job, resulting in substantial psychological distress.

this kind of stuff. [...] it's usually gaslighting. And not respecting my position as a person who can decide about this conflict. (N6/313, academic)

This account underscores how people—usually women—engaged in the prevention or investigation of SGBV and men's violence often encounter hostility, typically from men. Often, these men, or their peers, engage in misogynistic or abusive behaviours themselves. In the above case, the men's behaviour took the form of coordinated 'gaslighting'², in which the woman's authority and knowledge to determine responsibility in investigations of SGBV within the department was questioned and undermined.

Another form of backlash described in the data took the form of abusive men, as well as those protecting them, posing as victims or 'scapegoats' of an unfair institutional process. These types of spurious assertions were made by some men as a direct response to reports of SGBV made about them in an attempt to avoid redress, accountability or taking responsibility for their own behaviours. At times, the men concerned have mobilised a 'leftist' political discourse to undermine the victim-survivor, the institutional policy and procedure, and to conceal their SGBV, as indicated in the first quote below. In other instances, data indicated that some men accused of SGBV turn to litigation, filing lawsuits against victim-survivors who have reported them or made disclosures about their abuse, citing grounds of defamation, as the second quote illustrates:

[W]hite, male professors, they tell you to do not make a complaint. [...] They use the whole leftist discourse [...] if you do use the bureaucracy, if you do use Ouvidoria [the ombudsman office] you are not a real leftist because you're using [...] the mechanisms of capitalism [...] professors working class [...] you're using it to hunt us. (N10/317, student)

So, this professor, for example, they lose the process at university but then they file a criminal process against these women saying they were, like, defamed, there were no legal process regarding this. Me, the Rector, the Prorector of Student Affairs and the survivors, we are in the criminal process because a professor who was convicted by sexual harassment is now saying that we committed a crime of defamation. It's like ten women against one guy. (N6/313, academic)

Given that men academics are consistently identified as the group most frequently engaging in SGBV (Blay et al., 2018; Brito et al., 2022; Maito et al., 2021), mechanisms of coordinated silencing and patriarchal cultures in which men protect other men are highly concerning. Not only do they enable men to continue to operate with impunity, but they also severely undermine any institutional policy or procedure that may exist 'on paper'. For those experiencing SGBV, this means negotiating additional layers of violence at both the institutional and individual levels if they attempt to use a policy or make a complaint. Consequently, in the absence of an institutional response that meaningfully addresses backlash, policy instruments mobilised by complainants will remain ineffective. Such behaviours will persist unchecked, rape cultures will be reinforced, and victim-survivors—as well as their supporters—will continue to be harmed.

In the next section, the impacts and intersections of the legacies of colonisation are addressed.

² Gaslighting is a form of mental manipulation by which someone makes another person question their own understanding of reality.

Legacies of colonisation: intersecting inequalities and violence(s)

In this section, we examine how legacies of colonisation continue to shape universities and impact the lives and experiences of the people within them in unequal and diverse ways. First discussed is how colonisation has structured universities as places for different groups of people, as well as how affirmative action programmes have attempted to counter this. Attention then turns to an analysis of the racist, classed, homophobic, and transphobic violence(s) that can occur within institutions.

As discussed in the '[Background information](#)' section, HE in Brazil is deeply shaped by coloniality (Leite, 2010; Pascuci & Fishlow, 2023). Several participants described how the importation of a colonial European model of education into Brazilian universities has converted them into exclusionary spaces suitable for white people and the production and preservation of white knowledge. Brazilian HE is still a significantly unequal context for the various groups of people impacted by ongoing legacies of coloniality, particularly Black and Indigenous students and staff, as well as those from low-income backgrounds (Majee & Ress, 2020; Zeidan et al., 2024). While affirmative action policies and programmes have improved access to HE for specific groups of people in Brazil, persistent cultural attitudes towards those who received their places via affirmative action have resulted in backlash for these students and staff, as the second quote below indicates:

Yes, we have affirmative programmes [...] for Black professors, for example, and we cannot, it's not fulfilled, so all the vacancies for professors are filled [...] They're white professors that come in [...] probably because the rent's not good, the remuneration, salary, so it's a problem. (N8/315, academic)

[T]he caucus system [...] generated a kind of reaction from white students so I think there is [...] harassment towards Black students in the sense they don't have the quality to be there they came because of a policy of caucus [...] and I think it is very difficult for students to be in this kind of placement that they don't feel completely integrated in the same way as white students. (N14/321, academic)

The first account illustrates that, for affirmative action programmes to be effective, universities must implement them in the spirit in which they were designed, as well as adequately fund and resource them. Without this, such programmes may fail to address the broader intersecting inequalities—particularly economic disparities—that Black, Indigenous, and other marginalised students and staff must navigate within university spaces. The second account highlights how stigma and entrenched racism mean that recipients of affirmative action policies are routinely undermined, and their right to access education is questioned or delegitimised, as they are framed as 'undeserving'.

Universities remain fundamentally structured in ways that are hostile and unwelcoming to Black and Indigenous Brazilians. This shapes not only their overall experience of university life but also their exposure to SGBV. Black and Indigenous students frequently face heightened risks of SGBV within Brazilian HE (dos Santos Bezerra, 2022). Our findings echo existing literature, demonstrating that Black women continue to be sexualised and disproportionately subjected to SGBV, a consequence of intersecting systems of oppression and inequality that operate within HE spaces in Brazil and beyond.

Turning to the quotes below, in the first, a Black woman academic describes how the whiteness of her Brazilian university shaped institutional responses to her report of SGBV. In the second quote, a Black student discusses how common it is for Black Brazilian students to experience SGBV while studying abroad in Portuguese universities:

[W]e're always problematising that the university is very white, it's very white, it's made with white knowledge for white people [...] but in practice, what does it mean, how does it affect us [...] I think it's the listening, in terms of having other Black people there, it helps because of that, it doesn't leave you alone, it doesn't let you fall into madness, you know? (N16/323, academic)

I've received many reports of students who came to study in Portugal and were raped, and then I said, why do you think this happens? And then they answered me like this, they said, 'you know what?' It's just that, I think there's this whole issue with Brazilian women, you know, samba, carnival, thongs [...] they're treated like prostitutes, you don't look at the body of a racialised woman, the body of a Brazilian woman. (N5/312, student)

Other groups, particularly LGBTQIAP+ staff and students, are also subjected to various forms of violence within Brazilian HE. Homophobia and transphobia occur both in social settings, as the first quote below illustrates, and in academic settings, as demonstrated in the second:

There is misogyny, there is racism [...] So, I, myself took people from parties they were organising because there were gay guys kissing and [others] would literally throw, like, a can full of beer in their faces. (N1/08, activist)

We have had a teacher, male, straight, cisgender teacher that sent [...] his professional email to promote transphobic discourse of the use of the bathrooms in which the transgender people were considered a threat to all of the people of the external community or Brazilian traditional family, you know? Even we are doing [...] an administrative process prosecuting him internally at the university, [but] nothing happened to him, literally nothing. That was the impunity, the feeling of the impunity causes some symbolic gender-based violence for the transgender people as well. (N12/319, activist)

These accounts illustrate how students and staff are often situated at the intersection of multiple identities, which converge to intensify the discrimination and marginalisation they experience within HE. The second account also highlights how broader societal discourses—particularly those shaped by far-right politics and religious fundamentalism—enter the university sphere and influence how issues of SGBV are recognised, interpreted, and addressed for certain groups.

Transphobia also occurs at the structural level within Brazilian HE; one trans activist participant talked about how the administrative systems within their university are not coordinated in terms of how they manage gender-affirming practices, such as name changes for trans and non-binary people:

In 2019 we had a very significant change in the university because now the transgender person can [update their names] online in the students' portal of the university. But we don't have the systems of the university being unified, so even if a transgender person needs to do or has done [...] the submission of their preferred name to the system it applies only for the classroom. Not for the library, not for the university, the restaurant of the university. So, the transgender person needs to do it online and then do it at the library and then do it at the restaurant of the university and then do it into the extension projects. It's been a very, very tiring thing to do. Even if the transgender people do that, we have some crazy things like the restaurant of the university exposes your 'dead name'³ and your preferred name together to anyone who would be willing to see that. (N12/319, activist)

³ Dead names are the names that transgender people were assigned at birth and which they no longer use in their daily lives.

The above account is another example of how, even when a policy is in place within an institution, its implementation is fragmented or absent, thereby undermining intended benefits. But, more crucially, the inadequate implementation of a policy such as one aimed at trans inclusion also produces new harms and emotional labour that the people featured in the policy must then manage.

At the national level, Brazil has the highest number of lethal crimes against LGBTQIAP+ people in the world (Mendes & da Silva, 2020, p. 1709; Reale, 2023). Despite national laws against homophobia and transphobia (Perrone, 2019), the lived reality for many LGBTQIAP+ and non-binary students and staff in Brazilian HE remains violent. This violence is often motivated by homophobic and/or transphobic prejudice, or facilitated by institutional systems that fail to account for these groups' specific needs. SGBV within Brazilian universities occurs against—and reflects—this broader backdrop of fatal violence against women and queer, trans, and non-binary people.

In the next section, we analyse activism, 'whisper networks', and the politics of naming people who have engaged in SGBV.

Protest, solidarity networks, and social media

This section analyses protest and activism, solidarity networks, and the politics of naming people who have engaged in SGBV. We first discuss the lack of protest movements around SGBV before analysing staff–student solidarity. We then examine whisper networks used to share the names of known perpetrators of SGBV, and the public naming of said people on social media as a form of activism.

Several participants discussed their involvement in, or awareness of, past protest movements related to SGBV on university campuses. A few academics noted, however, the apparent absence of a current or active movement concerning SGBV in their universities, citing broader societal issues that in the current moment have taken priority, such as the need to address racism and government education policy:

At the moment [...] more [movements] about racism than- and then about sexual harassment because [...] the Black social movements, they became stronger at the last years. (N18/325, academic)

[O]nly if there is a strong student movement [against SGBV] in this sense. They have others, they are against the government, they want resources, it's much more about their educational policies and the state of the university, resources for information. They don't take these issues [SGBV] as a kind of priority. (N14/321, academic)

One participant, an activist, explained that the lack of current protest within universities does not necessarily reflect a lack of political will from students and/or staff, but rather that universities are increasingly taking steps to prohibit political activism on campus. One of the ways institutions do this is by shutting down students' access to public spaces within campuses:

We had a really, really strong political movement in campus, in that university because our organisation was so big for so many decades. We had literally big use of the public space in our [domination] inside the campus, which was in the city centre. [...] they [the university] wanted to forbid us to use the space so we were politically not as empowered. (N1/08, activist)

While formal protest movements are currently limited in the Brazilian HE context, many participants discussed how staff and students forged bonds of solidarity as a form of collective action and care within the institution and beyond it. Participants discussed how students approach certain professors for support or advice

concerning SGBV. As the following quote indicates, students tend to approach feminist staff or those who teach subjects that engage with issues of gender or who have demonstrated an understanding of the issues:

[C]ertain professors who, for example, have a subject that is talking about gender relations, or who are going to have a welcoming attitude, more proximity, other relationships with the students, end up being sought out and become confidants. (N5/312, student)

Participants described forming a 'collective' of students and academic staff to establish dialogue across feminist and social movements. While these collectives offered important support to victim-survivors, they also encountered significant obstacles in doing so, as one student participant explained:

[W]e don't have an institutional structure, we started to take in a lot of girls, a lot of complaints were coming in, and we also realised that there was hostility from the university, not only towards the students who decided to bring all these issues to light, but also towards the teachers who took them in. (N5/312, student)

The account above reflects the types of hostile behaviours described earlier, when women make disclosures of abuse about men within the institution. But in this case, staff–student solidarity networks provide some degree of protection against such behaviours.

Additionally, in the absence of institutional accountability measures for those who harm within HE institutions, many victim-survivors and their allies turned to social media to name people as a form of activism and 'whisper network'. Naming via social media can also facilitate evidence gathering, as seen in the first quote below. It can also enable connections among victim-survivors and, at times, help them to realise they have been harmed by the same person, as both quotes below demonstrate:

[On] Facebook we saw a lot of people that were harassed by the same professor [...] so we kind of took screenshots of it to prove that it wasn't only her, it happened to many people [...] through social media we had a lot of cases, and we learned a lot from that, things that we wouldn't have the chance to do if we hadn't social media. (N10/317, student)

I think women [...] comprehend that it's [SGBV] not an issue that involves just her and herself, but it's a structural issue. [...] it also comes with social media and with the facility to exchange experiences. And in Brazil especially we had the Me Too movement already [...] it was just the trigger; it was a trigger for more debate. So it helped a lot because even, for example, my generation that didn't talk about what happened before, then we started talking, 'Oh my God, that happened to you? It was the same professor, I can't believe it'. (N8/315, academic)

These accounts underscore how social media can provide a forum in which people with shared lived experiences of abuse can come together and, crucially, communicate a message that they are not alone. Not only is this a key support avenue, but it also counters the isolating tactics often used by men who perpetrate SGBV.

But these public forms of naming are not without risks. A few participants mentioned the legal consequences they could or have faced as a result of naming people, such as the named person suing them for defamation. Nevertheless, people who engage in naming are often aware of this risk and conduct themselves accordingly (e.g. by describing the actions without explicitly stating the person's name), so that they can speak out for themselves or their allies.

In summary, while public protests and coordinated movements against SGBV in universities may be limited currently, students and staff have responded by coming together to create vital spaces and mechanisms for support and solidarity. These include informal support networks, whisper networks, and, sometimes, publicly naming people via social media. These structures are particularly important considering the lack of institutional support and accountability mechanisms in the vast majority of Brazilian HE institutions.

Recommendations for Brazilian universities

Co-development process

From October 2025, the FemIDEAS team began an iterative process of co-developing a set of evidence-based, victim-survivor focused recommendations for policy, practice, and academia, based on the learning from the data analysis discussed in this report. The recommendations we put forward were co-developed, reviewed, and refined in collaboration with our key stakeholders and partners engaged in efforts to address SGBV in Brazilian HE. Importantly, this also included interview participants who wished to be part of the process.

To design the recommendation development process for all our fieldwork locations, the project team consulted with members of the study's Expert Advisory Group, as well as our Lived Experience Group, to ensure that the recommendation development process across all fieldwork sites was accessible, inclusive, and victim-survivor-centred. While this consultation process was not country-specific, the contributions of all these groups were essential to the meaningful co-development of recommendations.

To ensure that the recommendations were intersectional and reflective of the needs and interests of the individuals, communities, and institutions represented in this work, we first developed draft recommendations based on the findings from the Brazil fieldwork. We then shared documents outlining our main findings and the draft recommendations with our key stakeholders and partners. Participants were invited to review both documents in advance of taking part in focus groups, which were held in Portuguese and facilitated by our Brazilian project partner, Dr Caroline Rodrigues Silva.

All materials shared during these activities were fully anonymised, and we ensured that no individual could be identified from the information provided. We then brought together the insights and feedback gathered through these consultations to formulate a set of evidence-based recommendations, included below.

Recommendation Collection: Online Focus Group

- Recommendation developed by the project team, based on findings from the Brazil fieldwork.
- Shared documents outlining our main findings and draft recommendations with key stakeholders and partners.
- Hosted online (Zoom) in Portuguese and facilitated by Brazilian project partner, Dr Caroline Rodrigues Silva.
- Meetings organised by participant group.
- Invited attendees included key stakeholders and partners from policy, practice, research and activism to review recommendations and provide feedback.

Enacting the recommendations

These recommendations are directed at universities and focus on actions that institutions can take to strengthen their prevention of, and responses to, SGBV. They are therefore applicable to the following institutional roles, particularly within universities and federal institutes:

- **Rector's Office / General Directorate** – primarily responsible for incorporating the SGBV policy into the Institutional Development Plan (PDI) and the annual budget; ensuring funding; appointing permanent commissions; and embedding the policy within university governance structures.
- **Pro-Rector of Planning and Administration (PROPLAN/PROAD)** – responsible for guaranteeing specific budget allocations for prevention, training, and support initiatives.
- **Pro-Rector of People Management (PROGEP/PROGEPE)** – responsible for integrating mandatory training on gender and SGBV prevention into professional development programmes and career progression pathways.
- **Pro-Rector of Teaching and Extension (PROEN/PROEX)** – responsible for incorporating gender-related content into curricula and pedagogical projects, and for supporting outreach initiatives focused on violence prevention and the promotion of equality.
- **University Councils and Congregations** – responsible for approving and overseeing the implementation of SGBV policies, including establishing commissions, setting regulations, and producing annual monitoring reports.
- **Permanent Commissions for SGBV Prevention and Response** – responsible for coordinating and monitoring prevention, support, and training activities, and for liaising with other institutional sectors and local protection networks.

We encourage universities to take ownership of, and responsibility for, implementing these recommendations. We recognise, however, that there will be instances in which universities and their leadership will need to use this report to engage with state actors—such as federal bodies (including, but not limited to, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Women, the Ministry of Racial Equality, the Ministry of Human Rights and Citizenship, and the Office of the Comptroller General), as well as municipal governments, secretariats, and local networks that share responsibilities for safety, mobility, and care within university communities. Such engagement may be necessary when advocating for funding, integrating feminist approaches into existing practices and training, or collaborating with municipal authorities to implement infrastructure changes. We also encourage universities to draw on these recommendations to advocate for additional resources and funding where required.

Recommendations for improving Brazilian HE's response to SGBV

Policies and procedures

- **Establish clear, comprehensive policies and procedures for responding to SGBV.**
 - This includes **creating clear reporting and referral protocols, defined timelines, and confidentiality guarantees.**
 - These **must apply to all victim-survivors** (students and staff), be developed in consultation with victim-survivors and relevant experts, and undergo regular evaluation for efficacy.
 - Policies should be **widely publicised** (e.g. online and through poster campaigns) **and supported by training** for:
 - Staff responsible for implementation,
 - All staff on how to access and signpost resources,
 - All students.
 - Universities **must ensure policies are implemented properly, consistently, and in a timely manner**, regardless of the identity of the victim-survivor or perpetrator.
- **University policies must use a comprehensive, broad, and intersectional definition and understanding of SGBV** (further discussed in '[Addressing coloniality and intersectional harms](#)').
 - This definition **must explicitly recognise the full spectrum of SGBV**, extending beyond physical violence to include structural, psychological, economic, and moral harassment.
 - **Heteronormative assumptions concerning SGBV should be resisted** (e.g. that SGBV is only/always something that a heterosexual man does to a heterosexual woman).
 - **Responses to SGBV must be trans-inclusive.** This includes people who have medically transitioned, people who have socially transitioned, and people who do not identify with the gender binary. All staff responding to disclosures should receive training on transgender issues.
- **Policies and procedures must be victim-survivor-centred.**
 - Examples of good practice from our participants include:
 - Ensuring (cisgender or transgender) women are available as first points of contact,

- Not requiring a criminal justice level of proof in investigations,
 - Accepting anonymous complaints,
 - Centralising responses so that victim-survivors only need to disclose their experience once,
 - Offering holistic wellbeing support (see [University infrastructure and safety](#)).
- **University policies must recognise their duty of care to all students and staff, irrespective of whether harm occurs on or off campus.**
 - This includes spaces such as on and off-campus accommodation, study-abroad programmes, and conferences.
 - Brazilian universities, for example, should liaise with partner international institutions where possible to address SGBV experienced by Brazilian students abroad.
 - Universities should **provide information on where to report SGBV that occurs in spaces outside the university**, such as conferences, and ensure procedures are in place for supporting students and staff.
 - **Where possible, universities should establish a dedicated, centralised commission (office) for SGBV response and prevention. This commission would implement SGBV policies, conduct investigations, provide the necessary support, and carry out training and advocacy.**
 - It would **act as a single point of contact**, with staff liaising across departments (e.g. accommodation, academic services, faculties) to minimise the need for individuals to repeat their disclosure.
 - The commission should be **autonomous and have dedicated funding**. One way to strengthen autonomy is by ensuring that these commissions report directly to the Rector's Office or General Directorate, avoiding hierarchical subordination that may create conflicts of interest.
 - These commissions should be comprised of wellbeing support staff, a first point of contact for receiving complaints, investigators, trained student and staff members to serve on disciplinary panels, legal support (when required), and people conducting training, awareness-raising, and advocacy.
 - Universities should **provide stipends, allowances, or workload recognition and allocation of time** for members of SGBV commissions.
 - The commissions should also **coordinate with existing university services**—such as student-led clinics (e.g. free legal aid clinics) and the university hospital—to ensure comprehensive support when needed.
 - Commissions should **establish transition committees to preserve institutional memory and learning**. This includes creating digital archives and repositories of policies, protocols, and practices to ensure personnel changes do not break continuity.
 - Universities should **integrate this SGBV commission with university integrity, ethics, and equity policies**.

- **Universities should provide clear support pathways and safeguards for victim-survivors.**
 - **Free and comprehensive mental health support** should be offered to all victim-survivors at the point of disclosure and throughout any investigation. This support should not be dependent on a formal complaint and should remain available for as long as needed.
 - The university could establish collaborations with existing **student- and staff-led clinics** (e.g. mental health clinics) to provide these services. Such collaborations can help build trust and strengthen community support for victim-survivors of SGBV.
 - Where needed, universities should make **provisions to enable victim-survivors to continue with their education**. This may include study support, extensions for assignments, or the temporary pausing of programmes.
 - Universities should implement appropriate **safeguarding measures** to ensure that victim-survivors do not have to interact with the person who harmed them during a complaint process or after an upheld finding. Safeguarding measures should be discussed with and led by the needs and wishes of the victim-survivor. These measures may include but are not limited to:
 - **Preventing the person who caused harm from accessing certain areas of the campus or university grounds** (e.g. the victim-survivor's accommodation and surrounding areas) and/or restricting their access to shared spaces on specific days so the victim/survivor can use these spaces without fear of encountering them,
 - Imposing a **no-contact order** preventing the person who caused harm from contacting the victim-survivors by any means (directly, through another person, or via phone or digital/online channels, including email and social media),
 - Facilitating a **change in university accommodation for the person who caused harm**, if this is something the victim-survivor requests,
 - **Amending the timetable of the person who caused harm**, if this is in line with the victim-survivor's wishes.
- **Universities should consider non-punitive responses that centre on education and cultural change.**
 - **Non-punitive approaches aim to enable people who engage in SGBV to change their behaviour.** In one example shared by a participant, medical students who had engaged in homophobic behaviour were required to attend classes on gender and sexuality, and to complete supervised community service on specialised wards caring for LGBTQIAP+ patients.
 - SGBV commissions should be **trained on non-punitive ways of addressing harm** (e.g. on using education to achieve behavioural change as opposed to punishment) (for more on training, see ['Training, advocacy, and pedagogical interventions'](#)).
- **Universities need to implement processes for SGBV policy oversight, management, and accountability structures.**
 - Universities should **create internal accountability mechanisms**, including annual reports and social participation in monitoring processes.

- Universities can ensure social participation in SGBV policy evaluation by involving student collectives, unions, and feminist and anti-racist community networks.
- **SGBV policies must be integrated into the Institutional Development Plan (PDI)**, multi-year plans, and institutional evaluations. They should be approved by senior councils and integrated into the annual budget.

University infrastructure and safety

- **Universities should improve campus infrastructure to enhance safety for students and staff. Research indicates that campus infrastructure can either exacerbate or help prevent SGBV, and these recommendations aim to address the structural conditions that contribute to this issue.** This could include:
 - Ensuring that campuses are well-lit, especially between buildings and car parks,
 - Implementing 'safer' routes with designated points where students and staff can access support if they feel unsafe,
 - Providing free campus shuttle buses or establishing partnerships with municipalities and public transport providers to ensure free night-time transport so that students and staff do not have to walk alone in unsafe areas outside of the campus after classes,
 - Creating lactation rooms and rest areas and guaranteeing free provision of menstrual products and basic hygiene items,
 - Ensuring there are accessible and gender-neutral bathrooms across all campuses.
- **Universities must review safety models and replace securitised approaches with prevention policies and conflict de-escalation practices.**
 - This could involve using **community-based safety models**. These models involve students, staff, and community leaders collaborating to create safer spaces through peer support, advocacy, and solidarity initiatives that reflect intersectional needs.
 - Universities could **conduct bystander intervention training** for students and staff.
 - Additionally, universities should ensure that **security and facilities staff undergo mandatory training on non-discriminatory approaches**.
 - To ensure new models are working, universities could set up infrastructure and safety oversight committees with participation from students, staff, and local collectives.
- **University systems must also centralise infrastructure for transgender students and staff.**
 - Names and pronouns should only need to be updated once and applied consistently across all platforms, such as classrooms, the library, hall of residences, cafeterias, and other university spaces.

- **Universities should create space for students and staff to organise in university spaces.**
 - Universities **should not restrict access to public spaces on campus or ban student unions**. Making space for groups to organise in these spaces may increase trust between the university community (i.e. staff, faculty, students) and the university management.
 - If/When students and staff engage in protest in or beyond university spaces, universities should not retaliate against them for doing so.

Addressing coloniality and intersectional harms

- **Universities must recognise that communities most impacted by coloniality (e.g. Indigenous and Black students and staff) face higher risks of SGBV.**
 - Universities should allocate targeted resources—including specialist staff, training, and communication campaigns—to address SGBV against these groups.
 - They should also ensure that at least one Black staff member is available to receive reports or disclosures of SGBV.
 - Individuals involved in commissions addressing SGBV (see '[Policies and procedures](#)') must receive adequate training on intersectional harm and be equipped to provide appropriate support.
- **Universities should confront homophobia and transphobia in both academic and social settings, including SGBV against LGBTQIAP+ students and staff.**
 - This requires expert training, university-wide awareness campaigns, and clear consequences for students and staff who engage in such violence (further discussed in '[Policies and procedures](#)').
- **SGBV should not be understood as an isolated issue confined to the university, but as one that reflects broader societal dynamics, including gender and structural inequalities, coloniality, racism, and related systems of power.**
 - Policies must therefore **recognise that SGBV can be motivated by racism, coloniality, classism, homophobia, and/or other prejudices**.
 - Additionally, SGBV response policies **must be integrated with other institutional agendas**, such as racial equity, disability inclusion, and accessibility.
 - Universities **must map existing support networks around campuses and build integrated referral pathways**. Staff in all relevant networks should receive training on how to work together effectively.
 - Universities should **evaluate and adjust as necessary** the work they do to include groups minoritised by race, gender, and/or class.
- **Universities should take steps to disrupt the discrimination faced by students and staff entering university spaces through affirmative action.**
 - Bias against those who entered university—as staff or students—via affirmative action reinforces existing forms of discrimination (e.g. racism against Black and Indigenous people, and classism) and

shapes how victim-survivors from these groups experience institutional responses to SGBV.

- Universities must **actively work to disrupt legacies of coloniality by promoting structural and cultural changes**, such as reviewing and updating recruitment practices, so that existing race, class, and gender inequalities within the institutional hierarchy are disrupted.

Training, advocacy, and pedagogical interventions

- **Universities must lead on training, awareness-raising, and advocacy around SGBV.**
 - Training should be co-developed with people with lived experience, delivered regularly to both staff and students, and take into account the various intersections of power operating within the university. Training should **holistically address SGBV by interrogating gender hierarchies and campus rape culture**.
 - These trainings on gender, diversity, and SGBV prevention should be **mandatory for all members of the university community**.
 - For staff—including those in management posts, programme coordination, academic leadership, non-academic positions, and security teams—universities should integrate such training into workload allocation, career plans, progression pathways, and probationary periods. Such integration aims to ensure that professional advancement is linked to an ethical commitment to safer and inclusive academic environments.
 - For students, universities should include educational and awareness activities on gender, race, and sexuality in student induction programmes, pedagogical weeks, and both curricular and extracurricular activities, reinforcing the pedagogical dimension of SGBV prevention.
- **Universities must develop advocacy and awareness-raising campaigns to address campus rape culture and SGBV through an intersectional lens.**
 - In facilitating advocacy and awareness-raising initiatives, universities need to **bring together a range of stakeholders**, including student and staff unions, student societies, and mental health and wellbeing services.
 - Universities could also engage diverse members of the university community through cultural interventions such as film screenings, art exhibitions, poster campaigns, and street theatre.
 - Universities **must facilitate pedagogical interventions to address campus rape culture** by integrating high-quality, gender-related programmes and themes as a mandatory and permanent part of the curriculum for undergraduate and postgraduate students across all fields. This means incorporating a gender perspective into courses that are not specifically focused on gender (e.g. business, law, medicine).
 - These topics should be intersectional and developed in consultation with different stakeholders across the university community and subject experts, and regularly evaluated to ensure the content remains current, responsive, and fit for purpose.
 - Additionally, SGBV prevention and awareness activities should be included in course pedagogical

projects (PPCs).

- **Universities must address staff abuses of power—both against students and less-senior staff—to challenge hierarchies that enable violence.**
 - This could include mandatory training for new staff on professional conduct, refresher training for existing staff, and anonymous reporting mechanisms promoted through awareness campaigns.
- **Universities should create peer training programmes (led by students and staff, respectively) to train fellow students and colleagues on SGBV prevention, gender, and diversity.**
 - Such training could be beneficial in establishing trust and community accountability.
- **Universities must work towards decolonising understandings of SGBV across curricula, educational campaigns, and research centres.** This could involve:
 - **Developing permanent educational campaigns** that use accessible language and visuals, adapted to local and regional contexts,
 - **Supporting intersectional courses, study groups, and research centres** as permanent spaces for critical learning and collective formation. Fund research on different approaches to address and prevent SGBV,
 - **Strengthening gender perspectives within curricula** by incorporating voices from the Global South, including Black, Indigenous, Latin American, feminist, and decolonial scholarship.

Institutional accountability and culture change

- **Senior leadership teams must demonstrate a genuine commitment to SGBV prevention and intervention.**
 - Senior leadership occupies a key role in creating a culture of 'believability' across the institution—believing victim-survivors should be a core institutional value, with clear, publicly communicated commitments to being accountable to victim-survivors.
- **Universities must not tolerate backlash against victim-survivors and their allies.**
 - Clear mechanisms and consequences should be in place for those intimidating or retaliating against them, alongside safer reporting and support pathways for victim-survivors and their allies.
- **Universities need to collect and publish data on SGBV cases to increase institutional transparency and public accountability. Universities should be transparent by publicly sharing data on SGBV cases.**
 - This data would include the **outcomes of internal investigations and actions taken** against those who have been found responsible for causing harm following an investigation. Sharing could take the form of annual reports in accessible multilingual formats.
 - Our data shows that these actions help establish trust between the university community and university management and may promote increased reporting of SGBV by victim-survivors.
 - Universities should **include SGBV response and prevention targets in their multi-year plans and**

institutional management reports.

- This may involve setting measurable indicators and monitoring targets for SGBV prevention and transformation of institutional culture, ensuring transparency and accountability to the academic community. These indicators should combine quantitative metrics (such as the number of cases, training uptake, and budget) with qualitative ones (including perceptions of safety and culture change).
- Universities should **regularly collect, monitor, and share data on campus safety**. This could include:
 - Creating institutional observatories on gender, diversity, and campus safety to produce continuous data and analysis,
 - Conducting participatory diagnostics on safety, accessibility, and mobility on campuses, with the participation of students, technical/administrative staff, and faculty,
 - Publishing periodic reports on accessibility, safety, and wellbeing conditions.
- **Universities should prioritise diversity and restructure offices at all levels to reflect the composition of their student and staff communities. This is a crucial step towards implementing the cultural and structural changes necessary to address broader, intersectional gender hierarchies.** This could include:
 - Ensuring gender parity and racial diversity in management, councils, committees, selection panels, and decision-making bodies,
 - Creating mentoring and leadership programmes for under-represented groups, ensuring equitable access to academic and administrative opportunities,
 - Developing institutional equality plans with clear intersectional goals and indicators,
 - Ensuring diversity in management positions and academic committees,
 - Restructuring ombuds offices to ensure autonomy and teams trained in gender, race, and diversity.

Network building and community engagement

- **Universities should create regional SGBV response networks with other universities to share policy, practices, indicators, and resources.**
- **In recognising SGBV as a societal issue—not one confined to HE—universities should develop permanent outreach programmes focused on gender equality, violence prevention, and broader cultural change.**
 - Universities should **actively engage with the local communities surrounding their campuses** in efforts to prevent and respond to SGBV. This may involve establishing ongoing dialogue with local organisations and activist movements to support their work, exchange knowledge and resources, and develop collaborative approaches.
 - Universities can also **create safer spaces for community conversations**—such as annual forums—to

understand local needs in relation to SGBV prevention and response. Additionally, they can organise cultural workshops, including a range of arts-based practices, to foster community participation and shared learning.

- **Universities should foster partnerships with collectives, gender centres, unions, and social movements to build and implement policies and practices for addressing and preventing SGBV that are victim-survivor-centred.**
 - In working with and learning from local collectives and movements, universities should provide adequate resources such as physical and communication infrastructure (rooms, materials, social media), scholarships, and logistical and technical support for grassroots initiatives.

Resourcing

- **To implement all the recommendations put forth here, universities need to provide long-term, sustainable funding for addressing and preventing SGBV. Long-term, sustainable changes to prevention and response approaches require institutional investment.**
 - One way to achieve this is to include specific **SGBV budget lines in annual budgets and Institutional Development Plans** (PDIs).
 - Universities should also allocate a specific budget for the implementation of equality and diversity policies, as well as safety and accessibility work, into PDIs with public monitoring of outcomes.
 - Universities should also **provide complementary funding sources via international partnerships as well as national calls** from the Ministry of Education (MEC), the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq), and the Brazilian Federal Agency for Support and Evaluation of Graduate Education (CAPES).
 - Universities should create **funding calls specifically for collectives and community networks** engaged in preventing SGBV and supporting victim-survivors, enabling them to work collaboratively with the institution to address harms occurring within university spaces or involving university members (for more information on the importance of outreach and community engagement, see '[Network building and community engagement](#)').
- **Universities must prioritise adequate resources for victim-survivor support.**
 - Resources should be **allocated for the provision of victim-survivor support**, including wellbeing support, prevention activities, and victim-survivor-centred responses. Universities must centre the voices of victim-survivors when developing support services, and be guided by evidence and feedback from feminist staff and students, unions, and other community networks.
 - Adequate and sustainable resourcing also includes **employing qualified professionals** to conduct investigations, delivering training and advocacy, and building robust data systems to monitor and track SGBV casework.
- **Universities must recognise and value the work undertaken by staff and students to address and prevent SGBV—including care work and the provision of support to victim-survivors—at an institutional level. This should be reflected through measures such as workload reduction, dedicated grants,**

incentives, and formal career recognition.

- This is essential to prevent the burden from continuing to fall disproportionately on women, racialised groups, activists, and other precarious or marginalised community members.
- Feedback processes that inform policy and practice from feminist staff and students are vital, and universities must adequately resource these initiatives.

Available free resources

Organização/Serviço	Número de Telefone	Website / Opções de Acesso Online
Central de Atendimento à Mulher – Ligue 180	180 WhatsApp: +55 61 9610-0180 Suporte também via Telegram ou Vídeio Libras para aqueles que utilizam a língua de sinais.	www.gov.br/mulheres/pt-br/aceso-a-informacao/acoes-e-programas-1/casa-da-mulher-brasileira
Casa da Mulher Brasileira Espaços seguros para mulheres em situações de violência, abertos 7 dias por semana, 24 horas por dia. Inclui alojamento temporário de emergência. Atualmente, existem seis unidades em operação: Campo Grande (MS), São Luís (MA), Fortaleza (CE), Curitiba (PR), Boa Vista (RR) e São Paulo (SP).		
Ministério dos Direitos Humanos e da Cidadania – dial human rights	100 WhatsApp: +55 61 99611-0100	www.gov.br/mdh/pt-br/ondh/ Disponível na Apple Store (iPhone) e Google Play (celulares Android).

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