

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN UNIVERSITIES AND RESEARCH ORGANISATIONS

NATIONAL FIELDWORK REPORT

Country: PORTUGAL

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Date: 07/05/2021

1. INTRODUCTION

The process of assumption of gender inequalities in HEIs (High Education Institutions) is recent in Portugal. The first HEI to have a GEP (Gender Equality Plano) was the University of Beira Interior (UBI), a young institution in the inner country. UBI was a pioneer in 2011 with the first GEP of a Portuguese public university (Sales Oliveira & Augusto, 2017). For several years afterwards, Portuguese HEIs showed some interest in the matter, but only in the last couple of years, concrete projects related to Gender Equality started to run. Most of them are happening in the context of international European projects.

Gender-Based Violence (GBV) is still not an issue inside universities and research organizations in Portugal. In the last decade, research in this thematic has grown much in connection with a greater awareness of Domestic Violence (DV) as a urgent social problem (Lisboa et al, 2020). GBV tends to be associated with DV, namely dating violence, which has been increasingly considered an important issue (Caridade, 2018). But until now, Dating Violence research and intervention focus mainly on teenagers. Universities and research organizations are not seen as risk places.

Even though, since 2017, a project that addresses dating violence in High Education is running (included in the annotated bibliography and detailed in next point). In 2020 several sexism in Academia complaints were news in media. An international campaign about Sexism was able to involve 7 HEIs, and small awareness and data collection projects are being conducted in HEIs mainly by students associations. All this together seem to indicate a change of perception towards GBV in HEIs in Portugal, as we will explore further in this report.

2. MAPPING OF POLICIES AND LEGAL FRAMEWORKS

Existing laws on GBV don't address universities and research organizations. Even for the workplace, there is scarce legislation, and the existence is very recent. GBV is regulated by the Penal Code, and in the past, it had some specific mentions to the kind of relationship between the aggressor and the victim or to the context of the crime - for example, hierarchical asymmetries or labor context. But in the context of Istanbul convention ratification, it was reviewed, and now it presents a broader written form to cover all kinds of situations. This option seems to indicate that decisions might have considered that creating specific legislation for job and employment contexts was not the better approach. But then, soon after and in the opposite sense, in 2016 was approved by Parliament the harassment law and its reinforcement, in the sequence of research that I introduced in the annotated bibliography. This research showed the hidden reality of our labour market (Torres et al, 2016).



Portuguese Academia suffers from *academic bias* towards gender issues in general and GBV in particular as an organizational problem. Universities and research organizations tend to be seen as places where these kinds of problems don't happen. It is a *difficult truth* (Burns, 2016), and we are in the process of starting to deal with it.

In what concerns policies, the current national strategy on gender equality (ENIND) running from 2018 until 2030 and implemented by the State agency CIG (Commission for Citizenship and Gender Equality) represents a change in the guidelines of State intervention. ENIND brought a longer perspective than previous policy and is aligned with the UN sustainable development goals. In this strategy, we are able to find three measures addressing GBV in HEIs, but there is nothing planned for research organizations. The measures are 1) the introduction of prevention and intervention measures related to GBV in the HEIs GEPs; 2) training; 3) GBV being included in the curricula of HEI disciplines. Some pilot experiences have been already initiated, namely in the Medicine Master at the University of Beira Interior. However, there is still no results available.

One other remarkable initiative is the existence since 2017 of an intervention and research project about Dating Violence in High Education that annually collects and disseminates data (Neves et al, 2021). Until 2019, this project was funded by State Equality Secretariat and since then is funded by the European Social Fund.

A [European campaign](#) about sexism is being developed in Portugal by and the NGO PpDM (Portuguese Platform for Women Rights) in partnership with CIG. Universities and Research centers have been involved with 15 academics from seven HEIs participating in the dissemination of the campaign in their organizations. Additional activities are planned, for example, curricula introduction in courses curricula of the matter and organization of seminars.

It is being developed a project for Gender inclusion in the academic curricula in general and GBV is highlighted as an important thematic, This project promoted by the Science, Technology and High Education Ministry is involving the national agency for courses accreditation, an agency that has a prominent role in Academia, so it is expected that the results bring a high level of commitment of the HEIs (for more information see <https://gehei.dges.gov.pt/en>).

3. #MeToo and Istanbul Convention

Portugal was the first European country to ratify Istanbul Convention as early as 2013. This is usually referred to as proof of the openness of the country to this matter. Since then, the convention is being discussed in Academia but mainly focusing its implementation in Portuguese society in general and analysing its impact in Portuguese jurisdiction (Pinto, 2017). One concrete impact that the ratification was the introduction of an addition in the article 170º of Penal Code reinforcing the offence of verbal proposals and criminalizing it (Cunha, 2016). This addition was highly controversial, still generating much debate. The measure was largely discussed by law experts and academics with a strong line of defence by feminist jurists (Beleza, Pinto, Sousa, Cunha, Sottomayor) but also in the opposite side claimed as an illicit incrimination (for example, Caeiro & Figueiredo, 2016). In terms of public opinion, it received critics and was motive of joke and prejudice.



Recently the president of APMJ (Associação Portuguesa de Mulheres Juristas/ Portuguese Association of Women jurists) defended that Portugal still lacks the essential to accomplish the convention. According to her, the spirit of the Convention is to prevent and eradicate and for that is needed to change mentalities and intervene deeper at the social policies level (Ferreira & Lusa, 2021). In the 6th of April

to mark the 10th anniversary of the signing of the Istanbul Convention, the Portuguese Presidency of the Council of the EU organised a high-level conference to review the 10 years of the convention's existence, including analysing the steps forward and steps backwards, the challenges arising from the COVID-19 pandemic, and responses to the new forms of violence against women" (2021.portugal.eu, para.1).

The national balance made in this event highlighted the strong commitment to the fight against domestic violence, namely the protection measures and territorialisation of the networks of intervention developed, but also the remaining need for continuous and profound work in gender stereotypes deconstruction.

This is the general context of the Istanbul convention impact in Portugal. I wasn't able to find any initiative or even reflection about the Istanbul Convention focusing on universities and research organisations as places for intervention.

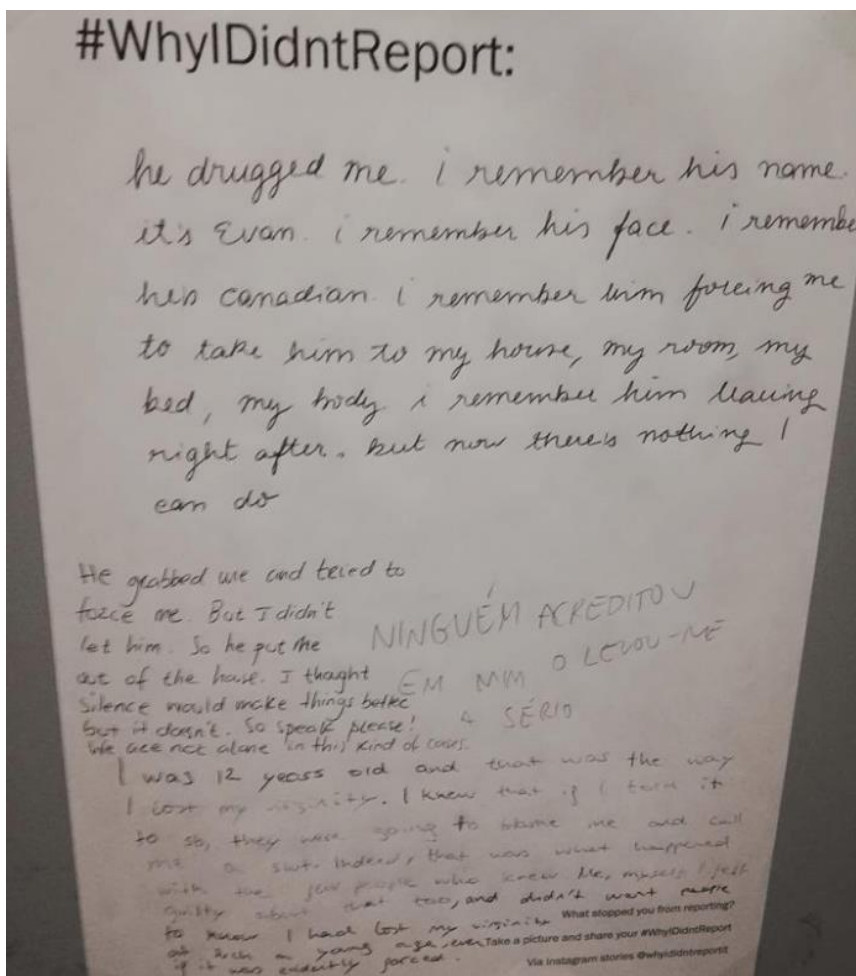
#MeToo movement was covered by the media and discussed in Portugal, mainly among feminist movements and scholars. Some people argue there was no #MeToo in Portugal (Faustino, 2018). Others say we have a less obvious way to do the fight (Flor, 2018) because it was not visible a rise in sexual harassment complaints presented to the authorities. Despite this, in the same newspaper article, the main Workers Union (CGTP) argues that in 2018 they receive hundreds of case reports, so it seems that what is missing is the formalization of the complaints.

Very recently #MeToo movement gain a new breath in Portugal with the public testimony of an actress stating that she was sexually harassed. In the last weeks, several women (public figures and citizens) have shared their stories. In an interesting opinion article Pinto (2021) reflects on the public reaction (using media coverage) to this movement, arguing that the phenomenon of victim-blaming is still dominant in the country.

I found no evidence of a direct influence in universities and research organizations. But as inserted in the LimeSurvey, in the last two years occurred three cases of teachers accused of GBV harassment in HEIs by students. These cases had concrete consequences: these offenders were suspended from their HEIs. This was not happening a couple of years ago, so I personally believe that movements like #MeToo or even Maio Feminista in Chile have a subtle underground influence in this awakening for GBV in HEIs Portuguese community. One clue of this is the next figure, a picture taken in 2018 in a Portuguese university toilette. The sentence in Portuguese says, "No one believed me. No one took me seriously."

Figure 1. Picture was taken in a Portuguese university toilette





Source: Margarida Catela Teixeira in Faustino, 2018



4. PUBLIC OPINION ON GBV

Since the institution of DV as a public crime in 2011, Portuguese society has been a stage of a profound change of mentality about GBV. Slowly gender stereotypes are being deconstructed. In terms of social perceptions, GBV is no longer considered acceptable. 85% of the Portuguese population refer to it as inadmissible (Simões, 2011). So we can say with some basis that GBV is already recognised as a major social problem in the country (Sottomayor, 2015). But beneath this general *politically correct* perception remains an environment of dominant androcentric culture that pushes the problem to the *others* (Simões, 2011) and therefore create obstacles to victims' claims. These resistances in Portuguese society can be concretised in two examples that illustrate two processes: 1) the non-recognition of some situations as GBV; 2) the false accusation argument.

In September 2020, a claim of verbal sexual harassment was presented by a young woman passenger against a railway officer. She accused the officer of making comments to her breast while validating her ticket. The situation brought a new wave of discussion around the legitimacy of the law and its limits of application. The case followed its path but was illustrative of the media treatment of the issue. The next figure is a print screen of news on the case. I call special attention to the picture chosen of the victim introduced at the top of the article objecting to her.

Figure 2. Newspaper article about verbal sexual harassment claim case in Portugal

JN IN Direto Nacional Local Justiça Mundo Economia Desporto Pessoas Inovação Cultura Opinião NM E

Decisão

MP diz que revisor da CP não importunou sexualmente passageira assediada mas admite ofensas

César Castro
04 Janeiro 2021 às 10:08

f t +

COMENTAR

TÓPICOS
Justiça
Assédio
CP



Sara Sequeira
Foto: DR

Procuradoria da República da Comarca de Santarém concluiu que revisor da CP, apesar de ter ofendido a "honra" e a "consideração" da passageira durante viagem de comboio, não praticou quaisquer atos exibicionistas nem

Source: Castro (2020)



From my point of view, this is a very concrete example of how the first process can overlap with the second, the discredit of the victim. It is a widely known phenomenon concerning GBV (Bongiorno et al. 2020). A claim of GBV tends to generate an immediate *victim-blaming* and/or discredit movement. It is even worse when public figures are involved as the movement #whyldidn'treport is clear evidence (Faustino, 2018).

The second example highlights exactly this. It is an episode that profoundly impacted Portuguese society: the mediatic case of sexual assault involving the football player Cristiano Ronaldo in 2018. It was quite visible in the public opinion the tendency to introducing doubts about the claims despite all the medical evidence (Faustino, 2018). Garraio, Santos, Amaral and De Sousa Carvalho (2020) suggest that this case even produced a backlash against #MeToo in Portugal. In this respect, Ventura (2018), providing a longitudinal analysis of sexual crimes treatment in Portugal, showed that Portuguese courts still incentivise women not to talk when they suffer GBV.

So in what concerns public opinion on GBV, Portugal seems to be still *crossing the desert*: pushed to the worldwide context to face this phenomenon but yet highly influenced by a traditional androcentric culture that blames the victim and considers this only happen to others.

IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON DISCUSSIONS ABOUT GBV

Specific research about the impacts of Covid-19 in Portuguese society with a gender focus was funded by FCT (Science and Technology Foundation) in 2020. GBV was the area with the higher number of projects funded which shows the importance given to this matter. These specific groups of projects about gender and violence are now coming to their end, so in a very near future, more information will be available.

In general, there has been a strong awareness in Portugal of the expected impacts of the pandemic context and specifically of the confinement periods in GBV. Both state agencies and NGOs have been fighting for the reinforcement of prevention and intervention measures. Again, as already highlighted before in this report, the focus was mainly DV. Last Summer, after the first confinement, it notorious a strong growth in DV cases, so these organizations pressured the State and developed awareness campaigns in the face of the possibility of other periods of confinement.

“In Portugal, academic women seem to be more exposed to (...) the severity of psychological/emotional effects of the COVID-19 crisis” (Marques, Miguel & Lopes, 2021, para.6). The impact of the pandemic in HEIs was huge, from teaching and current management – online teaching, the stop of most events and mobilities – to research agendas and social interaction and environment. The exclusive use of digital platforms for teaching, meetings and all interactions brought news problems and inequalities: students with no access to the internet or informatic equipment were excluded from the activities (UN, 2020). Iori, Silva and Fonseca (2020) studied the impact of covid-19 in international students based in Portugal. Although the sample is not representative, their results allow saying that the confinement affected this community strongly due to their condition of dislocated. A strong impact on women students mental health was perceived, but it is not possible to connect it to GBV since the research doesn't explore the violence dimension. At UBI, a complaint of online discrimination based on racism and sexism among students was presented to CI-UBI (UBI Equality Commission). The commission followed up the claim and came to the conclusion that international students seem to be the target of discrimination in the institution in the context of the pandemics. Intervention measures are being designed.



5. CONCLUSION

This report aimed to present an overview of GBV in Portuguese universities and research institutions, also giving the general context of the awareness of Portuguese society to this problem.

Portugal is still very far from having a GBV strategy for these institutions. Socially represented as gender-neutral and safe environments, HEIs and RFOs are at the bottom of the list for prevention and intervention in this matter despite being each more composed by the more vulnerable groups to this kind of violence, such as women and international students.

Despite this and probably due to the worldwide context of higher awareness to GBV where movements like #MeToo and Mayo Feminista at Chile, some small-scale mobilizations start to become visible in Portuguese academia. From projects and policies starting to address GBV in HEIs, a rise in the number of claims and action taken by HEIs in its sequence to a pioneer project of a GBV observatory, Portuguese HEIs seem to be slowly awakening to the problem. We cannot

say the same for RFO that seem to be still far from assuming a reflexive perspective. Hopefully, in the near future, this tendency will grass in HEIs and start to spread to RFOs.

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This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 101006261.

The contents of this publication are the sole responsibility of Institute of Sociology of the Czech Academy of Sciences and do not necessarily reflect the opinion of the European Union.