

Students' Sense and Sensibilities. An Exploratory Study of Perceptions around Gender Equality and Violence against Women in Romania's Largest University

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Abstract: Gender continues to be under-researched in Romania. The present exploratory study aims to contribute to filling this gap by analysing perceptions about four gender dimensions among students at Babeş-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca, the largest university in Romania. The four dimensions that are examined are: gender equality (as perceived at a national level compared to at the university level), prevalence of gender stereotypes (in relation to characteristics associated to personal and professional life), gender-based violence and sexual harassment (in Romania and in the university), and workplace discrimination. A brief theoretical review of the aforementioned notions is followed by quantitative research in the form of a questionnaire which was applied online and offline between October 2018 and March 2019 to 275 students enrolled in Bachelor, Master and Doctoral studies at Babeş-Bolyai University. The study found that students had a rather high awareness about gender issues in general and held favourable views towards gender equality and its enforcement. They assessed the university to be more gender-equal than the country as a whole, were not generally prone to stereotype about male and female traits, however, women claimed more traits for themselves than men. Students also believed women were much more likely to be subjected to sexual harassment, and rather rarely experienced gender discrimination, with the exception of professional promotion. The study is a good starting point for representatives of Babeş-Bolyai University and its students to create action plans and procedures to foster gender equality and reduce sexual harassment and discrimination. In addition, the study has the potential to be replicated at other universities in Cluj-Napoca and across the country.

Points for practitioners: The results of this exploratory study may be used by representatives of the university in designing a more inclusive educational environment for all its students, by - for instance - informing its students about sexual harassment and gender equality through campaigns, brochures, etc. or by creating more efficient mechanisms of sanctioning and reporting inappropriate behaviour. Upon receiving information about the results of the study, BBU' students may seek to create action groups where they could debate gender issues or more generic human rights topics and thus contribute to a more informed student body. The authors' intention is to replicate the study at all state universities in Cluj-Napoca, but, last but not least, it may be replicated in other universities across the country and serve as the basis for a more in-depth comparison of perceptions about gender issues in Romanian academia.

Key words: gender equality, gender stereotypes, violence against women (VAW), discrimination, tertiary education.