ANALYSIS OF FEMALE UNIVERSITY STUDENT'S PERCEPTION OF THE SEXUAL HARASSMENT BILL

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Abstract

This study investigated the perception of female university students on the sexual harassment bill passed by the Nigerian senate, factors responsible, nature, health, social implications of sexual harassment among female students of tertiary institutions in Nigeria. The objectives of the study were: To identify the perpetrators of sexual harassment, to find out factors responsible for sexual harassment in tertiary institution in Nigeria and to ascertain the nature of sexual harassment. Survey research method were employed. The study cut across the six geopolitical zones in Nigeria. The findings showed that lecturers and administrative staff are the culprit of sexual harassment. Also, the revealing dress attitude contributes to sexual harassment and that the act of compelling female students for sexual harassment activities was the major nature of sexual harassment in tertiary institution in Nigeria.

Keywords: Perception, Female, University, Students, Sexual harassment, Tertiary, Institutions.

Introduction

Sexual harassment is rampant in higher education systems around the world, with far-reaching implications for individuals, groups, and entire organizations. One out of every three women in the globe is subjected to physical and/or sexual abuse by a spouse or sexual violence perpetrated by another person (WHO 2013). More than 2.6 billion women live in countries where rape within marriage is still not considered a crime. High infant and maternal mortality rates, a lack of education for girls and women, limited financial independence alternatives for women, and a slew of other serious health concerns all add to and worsen the negative consequences of men's violence against women(2017 World Economic Forum).

In the EU member states, between 45 and 55 percent of women (equivalent to roughly 100 million women) have been subjected to sexual harassment in the workplace (Latcheva, 2017). While nine out of ten nations have laws preventing sexual harassment in the workplace, roughly six out of ten countries lack effective laws prohibiting sexual harassment in higher education and schools (Tavares and Wodon 2018). Until the mid-1970s, the term "sexual harassment" was not generally used. The civil rights movement in the United States resulted in the enactment of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which barred discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, or sex. That act also created the US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC).

In addition, what is termed sexual harassment varies according to various societies, however, according to Numhauser-Henning and Laulom (2012) sexual harassment is seen as unwanted sexual advances, requests for sexual favour, physical, verbal or nonverbal conducts which make submission or rejection of such conduct either in an explicit or implicit form such as threats, intimidation, taunting, unwanted touching, unwanted kissing, pornography, among others. Therefore, sexual harassment can be understood from the point of view of rejection and protest from the affected person or victim.

Sexual harassment is common today, not only in the workplace but also in educational institutions. Rather than the ivory towers of the past, educational institutions have become battlegrounds for sexual abuse. Sexual harassment first surfaced at schools, colleges, and universities in the early 1980s, and the number of complaints has continuously increased since then.

Furthermore, until recently, policymakers and law enforcement agencies have mostly ignored sexual harassment in schools, and where it has been addressed, the focus has been on peer-on-peer sexual

harassment (Leach, 2013). Unwanted sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, or other sexually related verbal or physical behavior are all examples of sexual harassment (Abuya, 2012). According to the Commission on the Review of Higher Education in Nigeria (CRHEN), the topic (sexual harassment) is progressively taking on a significant dimension in Nigeria's higher learning institutions (ladebo, 2001). It is severely diminishing academic excellence in Nigeria's higher education institutions. The majority of the time, sexual harassment is viewed as an undesired (the recipient does not want it), unsolicited (the recipient did not ask for it), and repetitive attitude (the behaviour is not one isolated incident).

In schools, sexual harassment refers to unwelcome and unwanted sexual activity that disrupts the learning environment with a student's access to an equitable education. In the university setting, a similar situation may be said to occur when lecturers propose sexual favors to female students in exchange for good grades. Asking for sex in exchange for a reward or a favor, continually asking for dates and not taking "no" for an answer, demanding hugs, making unnecessary physical contact are all forms of sexual harassment, Unwanted touching, using unpleasant or offensive words or making comments about girls and women (or boys and men, depending on the circumstances), calling individuals sex-specific derogatory names, making sex-related comments about a person's physical attributes or activities, saying or doing something because you think a person does not conform to sex-role stereotypes, posting or sharing pornography, sexual pictures or cartoons, sexually explicit graffiti, or other sexual images (including online), making sexual jokes, bragging about sexual prowess, bullying based on sex or gender, spreading sexual rumours or gossip (including online) are just a few examples. (Conley *et al.*, 2017).

Lynch (2013) posits that sexual harassment has become order of the day in Nigerian tertiary institutions as a result of its level of occurrences and complaints received from victims. They also observed that the recent stories of sexual harassment coming out from the Nigerian tertiary institutions known as fortress of academic and moral excellence is not encouraging and highly disturbing due to the high rate of reported cases of sexual harassment among female students that is detrimental to the development of the Nigerian educational system politically, socially and economically.

A number of scholarly works such as Julie (2013) equally reconnoitered the effects of sexual harassment on female students as a serious psychological effect on the academic performance of the female students. It also has negative effects on the health of the victims leading to fear, trauma, depression, anxiety, loss of trust and most likely contracting sexually transmitted infections. Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) or Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS). In addition, they further assert that sexual harassment causes discomfort on the academic performance of the victims, infringing on the victims right. Thus, it is against this background this study investigates the perception of female university students on the sexual harassment bill passed by the Nigerian senate, factors responsible, nature, health, social implications of sexual harassment among female students of tertiary institutions in Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Sexual harassment is no more a new social phenomenon in Nigerian tertiary institutions. It has become a common deviant practices in most of the tertiary institutions in Nigeria. In a recent study, it was reported that sexual harassment in education is higher in countries with weak educational systems, low levels of accountability, high level of poverty and gender inequality. It was further discovered that sexual harassment is more prevalent in institutions where educators are poorly trained, underpaid and severely under sourced (Lynch, 2013). Tertiary institutions are ivory towers where academic and moral excellences are expected to be promoted. In addition, Rigg (2008), posit that the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) refer to eight goals for development adopted by the world leaders at the United Nations to address problems affecting the world, such as poverty, women empowerment, education, health, environmental degradation and child mortality with the aim of bringing development through improving people's social and economic conditions, more especially in the world's poorest nations.

However, with the high incidence of sexual harassment of female students of tertiary institutions and its consequences on the victims, the issue of sexual harassment is likely to be a serious threat to achieving the girl child education in Nigeria. It is worth noting that sexual harassment in tertiary institutions has become the order of the day and constitute serious menace to the development of educational system in Nigeria. It has created nonconductive and unsafe learning environment for the female students which has promoted

slow and uneven progress towards attaining gender equality of Millennium Development Goals that it is detrimental to sustainable development. Therefore, it is pertinent to note that sexual harassment is a threatening social phenomenon in Nigerian educational sector; which has severe psychological and social consequences on the victims as well as economic and political consequences on the nation in achieving sustainable development. Thus, it is against this background this study investigates the perception of female university students on the sexual harassment bill passed by the Nigerian senate, factors responsible, nature, health, social implications of sexual harassment among female students of tertiary institutions in Nigeria.

Objectives of the study

- 1. To identify the perpetrators of sexual harassment in Nigerian tertiary institutions.
- 2. To find out factors responsible for sexual harassment in tertiary institution.
- 3. To ascertain the nature of sexual harassment
- 4. To find out whether sexual harassment has effects on the victims

Causes of Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment can happen anywhere within and outside schools, in the classroom, the locker room, on a field trip, sporting event, and even outside school premise such as on the way to and from school. However, sexual harassment is likely to happen when there is no clear observation from the school authorities for example, during class breaks, lunch or recess, among others. Some of the causes for the high occurrence of sexual harassment are highlighted below (Chukwudi and Gbakorun, 2011).

i. Indecent dressing

While perception with regard to indecent dressing might differ, generally dressing that is revealing might influence the opposite sex in the school environment to initiate social interaction that might subsequently lead to sexual harassment (Muhammad *et al.*, 2007). Wearing skimpy or transparent clothes for example, may arouse the sexual emotion that could lead to physical, verbal and nonverbal sexual harassment. Studies have shown that campus girls who are dressed skimpily are usually prone to receiving compliments, wishes and having their demands gratified (Chukwudi and Gbakorun, 2011).

ii. Exposure to sexual materials

Students are enticed by sexual materials that are accessible to any internet browser and this arouses their sexual emotions which may lead to a desire to perform a sexual act on classmates. One of the hazards of information communication technology is the introduction of e-sexual harassment" with the use of electronic networks for sending pornographic pictures, sexual messages and many other illicit sexual activities. Study shows that sexual jokes among employees could create a hostile work environment (Ashgar, *et al.*,2011). Inferably, sexual jokes are also common among the students which undoubtedly have a tendency of creating hostility by female students towards male students as they may perceive it as a form of harassment.

iii. Use of illicit drugs

Studies have shown that sexual misconduct has been committed under the influence of drugs besides negative effects on the personality of students (Katz, *et al.*, 2000). Further, the prevalence of the use of alcohol among secondary school and college students has contributed to sexual harassment.

iv. Activities in secluded environments

It is on record that in the context of school or college environments, where activities are allowed to be conducted in secluded area, sexual harassment would most like occur (Adams-Curtis and Forbes, 2004). For instance, where male and female student/teacher are allowed to conduct a task in a secluded area, the tendency of sexual harassment is more likely to occur compared to those who are engaging in their activities in a group and in an open place.

Based on this finding, the authors categorised harassment in the instant university settings into three:

- sexual harassment
- non-sexual harassment i.e. gender harassment and

• Mixed harassment i.e. gender harassment mixed with sexual harassment.

According to Aja-Okorie (2014), the commonest form of sexual harassment in Nigerian universities is that from lecturers to students, although there is harassment from student to student and students to lecturers. The harassment between lecturer and lecturer as well as that from third party to the student or lecturer are also in existence in academic environment. The third party harassment is that type of unwanted social behaviour be it sexual or non-sexual, that an independent contractor of the organization extends toward student, lecturer or administrative staff. Sexual harassment perpetrated by 'lecturers, non-academic staff and even students have always been an issue in Nigerian Universities (Gbulie, 2018). This stance is unequivocally buttressed by "sex for grades "scandal which occurred recently in Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU), where a professor was dismissed from service for demanding sexual gratification in exchange for marks from a female student in the institution (Gbulie, 2018). The phenomenon of sexual harassment in the academia remains a source of concern taking into account its negative impact on students from all walks of life (Jega, 2013).

Empirical Review

Ayinla and Adesola (2019) examined the crisis management strategies of Nigerian tertiary institutions and stakeholders' reactions after the British Broadcasting Corporation's sex-forgrades report. They adopted qualitative research design. The study analysed 13 available press releases of institutions retrieved from some institutions' websites and sampled opinions of 20 stakeholders comprising parents, students and lecturers through a in depth interview. The study discovered that the institutions mostly used denial with diminish response strategy to blame societal decadence, scapegoat female students for and downplayed the severity of sexual harassment incidence by the institutions. More so, all the stakeholders distrust the credibility of local media in the reportage of sexual harassment cases. The researchers recommended that Nigerian higher educational institutions should not adopt a denial response strategy for sex scandal cases.

Ezegwu, Obichili, and Addeh (2020) analysed Facebook comments on a BBC documentary on sex for the grade in two famous universities. The objectives of this study were: to find out the frequency of the comments on a BBC documentary on sex for a grade in two famous universities on BBC News Africa's Facebook page, to identify the tone of the comments on sex for the grade in two famous universities and to ascertain the dominant mood of the comments on BBC documentary on sex for grade in two famous universities.

This study adopted quantitative and qualitative research methods. The research study found that the commentators used the Facebook medium to express their views on the BBC documentary on sex for A grade in two famous universities, especially after the documentary was posted on BBC Africa's Facebook page. It was further discovered that comments posted on the release day of the BBC documentary had 37 (54.40%) items, while comments posted after Dr. Igbenegbu's suspension had 31 (45.50%) items. The positive dominant tone of the comments was Most of the commentators supported the idea of exposing such crime to society. The study recommended that media organisations should sustain the online platform as it enables commentators to react to online news and provide an avenue for them to interact with one another and express their opinions on the contents of the article or news events.

Fayankinnu (2004) carried out a study at Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba – Akoko Ondo State in which 200 students were interviewed using a questionnaire. The findings revealed that males, female lecturers and students are harassers. The study also revealed that male lecturers (83.4%) and female students (65.6%) were the major harassers. On how female students harass the male lecturers, the study revealed that they do so through their mode of dressing (70.2%), visits to their offices at odd times (52.9%), buying gifts such as

pants or pornographic tapes (64.2%), passing pleasant remarks about lecturers (55.0%) and telling lecturers indirectly that they want them (59.7%). The study reported that in spite of the prevalence of the phenomenon; minimal efforts are taken to address the problem.

Methodology

The methodology adopted for this study was the social survey technique. The population comprised six schools across six geopolitical zones. The schools were: Nnamdi Azikiwe University and Imo State University (South East geopolitical zone), University of Ibadan and Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile Ife (South West geopolitical zone), University of Uyo and University of Calabar (South-South geopolitical zone), University of Maiduguri and Gombe State University (North East geopolitical zone) and Benue State University and Nasarawa State University, Keffi (North Central geopolitical zone).

A random sample of 300 respondents, across six (6) selected tertiary institutions in Nigeria was used as the population sample. These institutions were selected based on being cosmopolitan by nature of the schools; thus, findings from these schools can be used for inference. Hence, purposive stratified sampling technique was adopted by the researcher to select two higher institutions from each of the geopolitical. 30 respondents were randomly selected from the selected institutions and 30 questionnaires were purposively distributed and administered to the respondents who are female students within each of the six selected schools and who are willing to respond to the subject matter of this research work through the aid of some volunteers as research assistants. The data collected for this study was then subjected to simple descriptive statistical analysis. All the 300 copies of the questionnaire were filled and returned successfully

Variable	Frequency	Percentage	
Age groups			
18-22	42	14	
23-27	191	64	
28-32	27	09	
33-37	22	07	
38 and above	18	06	
Total	300	100	
Marital status			
Single	228	76.00	
Married	57	19.00	
Divorced	15	05.00	
Total	300	100	
Level			
Undergraduate	253	84.33	
Postgraduate	47	15.67	
Total	300	100	

Data Presentation and Analysis Table 1: Bio-Data of the Respondents

Table 1 illustrates that majority of the respondents are between 23-27 (64%) and they are also single (76%). Also, most of them are undergraduate students with about 84%.

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Sexually harassed by whom?	Frequency	Percentage	
Lecturers/administrative staff	226	75.33	
Male students	68	22.67	
No Response	06	02.00	
Total	300	100	

Table 2:Data on Perpetrators of Sexual Harassment

Table 2 indicates that majority of the respondents (75.33%) indicated that lecturers and administrative staff are the leading culprit of sexual harassment. Only 22.67% of the respondents claimed male students are culprit of sexual harassment and 02.00 % of the respondents failed to respond. Thus, majority of the respondents are of the view that lecturers and administrative staff are the culprit of sexual harassment.

Table 3: Data on Factors Responsible for Sexual Harassment

Factors responsible for sexual harassment	Frequency	Percentage
Desperate to pass examinations	47	15.67
Revealing dress attitude	156	52.00
Lack of respect for opposite sex	32	10.67
Failure of victims to report	37	12.33
Alcohol/ drug abuse	23	07.67
No response	05	01.66
Total	300	100

Table 3 revealed that majority of the respondents 52% are of the view that revealing dress attitude is responsible for sexual harassment while 15.67% of respondents opined that desperate to pass examinations is responsible for sexual harassment. Then, 10.67% of respondents said lack of respect for opposite sex as responsible for sexual harassment. While 07.67% and 01.66 and of respondents' view failure of victims to report and alcohol/drug abuse as factors responsible for sexual harassment respectively. 01.66% of the respondents did not respond. Thus, revealing dress attitude contributes to sexual harassment.

Table 4: Data on Nature of Sexual Harass

Nature of sexual harassment	Frequency	Percentage
Compelling female students for sexual activities	184	61.34
Expressing sexual jokes/comments	27	09.00
Threatening to fail female students if she refuses sex	49	16.33
Making sexual gestures	34	11.33
No response	06	02.00
Total	300	100

Table 4 illustrates that most of the respondents 61.34% opined that the act of compelling female students for sexual harassment activities is the major nature of sexual harassment, 16.33% of the respondents view threatening to fail female students if she refuses sex as nature of sexual harassment. While 11.33% and 09.00% of the respondents perceive making sexual gestures and expressing sexual jokes/comments as nature of sexual harassment respectively. 02% of the respondents did not respond to the question.

Table 5. Data on Effects of Sexual Harassment on victims		
Is sexual harassment having effects on victims	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	256	85.33
No	35	11.67
No Response	09	03
Total	300	100

Table 5: Data on Effects of Sexual Harassment on Victims

Table 5 shows that majority of the respondents 85.33% agreed that sexual harassment have social and health implications while 11.67% of the respondents disagreed, 03% of the respondent failed to respond. Also, the respondents mentioned some of the social and health implications of sexual harassment victims experienced such as: stigma, depression, poor academic performance, loss of esteem, contracting sexually transmitted diseases or Infections, contracting HIV/AIDS, loss of womb, unwanted pregnancy and abortion among others. Thus, it is clear that sexual harassment has serious negative consequences on the victims.

Discussion of Findings

This study reveals that the majority of the female students in tertiary institutions in Nigeria has experienced sexual harassment and they equally indicate that lecturers and administrative staff are the leading culprits of sexual harassment. This confirms the findings of Idris et.al (2016) that sexual harassment is prevalent in tertiary institutions and it is presently widespread through higher institutions in Nigeria. In addition, Beninger (2013) assert that female students are sexually exploited by lecturers in many tertiary institutions. The consequence for sexual harassment has made the tertiary institutions environment not conducive for learning for the female students creating gaps and slowing the gender equality of one of the MDGs goals.

Equally, majority of the respondents opined that revealing dress attitude responsible for sexual harassment while some of the respondents opined that desperation to pass examinations, lack of respect for opposite sex as responsible for sexual harassment, failure of victims to report and alcohol/drug abuse are factors equally responsible for sexual harassment. The implication of this is that the factors responsible for sexual harassment are relative; however, the respondents viewed all these factors as responsible for sexual harassment.

In addition, majority of the respondents illustrates that compelling female students for sexual harassment activities is the major nature of sexual harassment, while some of them opined that threatening to fail female students if she refuses sex as nature of sexual harassment, making sexual gestures and expressing sexual jokes/comments as nature of sexual harassment as well. This corroborates the findings of Ogunbameru (2006) and Sharma (2013) that nature of sexual harassment varies such as inappropriate sexualized comments or gestures, unwanted physical contact and sexual assault or rape among others. The implication of this is that it weakens the educational system and bridge gender inequality in the society.

Similarly, majority of the respondents agreed that sexual harassment have social and health implications such as stigma, depression, poor academic performance, loss of esteem, contracting sexually transmitted diseases or Infections, contracting HIV/AIDS, loss of womb, unwanted pregnancy and abortion among others. This finding bring into line the assertion of Julie (2013) that the effects of sexual harassment on female students has serious psychological effect on the academic performance of the female students, it also has negative effects on the health of the victims leading to fear, trauma, depression, anxiety, loss of trust and most likely contracting sexually transmitted diseases and infections as well as HIV/AIDS.

Conclusion

Sexual harassment is considered as a widespread occurrence that goes uncontrolled in Nigerian higher institutions. Female students are more vulnerable to unwanted sexual advances from lecturers or other authority figures. Many underprivileged students, who are also negatively influenced by their friends, are willing to trade their bodies for better grades on their exams. Rape cases continue to fill the pages of the newspaper on a daily basis, with no aggressive replies in the form of retribution. The study concludes that majority of the respondents

are of the view that lecturers and administrative staff are the culprit of sexual harassment. Further findings revealed dress attitude contributes to sexual harassment and that the act of compelling female students for sexual harassment activities was the major nature of sexual harassment in tertiary institutions in Nigeria.

Recommendations

The following suggestions are made in light of the observations and conclusions achieved:

- 1. Lecturers and administrative staff that are found culprit of sexual harassment should be dismissed or have their appointment terminated, as it will serve as deterrent to others.
- 2. School authorities should sanction female students that did not dress properly to school or classes.
- 3. Authorities of tertiary educational institution should devise adequate measure to ensure that lecturers do not leak examination questions to female students as a means of sexually harassing them.
- 4. Students disciplinary committees should be made up of men and women with proven integrity so that cases of students misbehaviour are not manipulated in exchange for sex.
- 5. To raise awareness, sexual harassment behaviors should be incorporated into the conditions of service for tertiary education employees, as well as faculty and student handbooks.

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