



Perception of Sexual Harassment among Female Students of Tertiary Institutions in Northern Nigeria

Suleiman, Mohammed Saeed

Department of Sociology, Federal University, Gashua, Yobe State

mohammedsaeedsuleiman@gmail.com, mohammedsaeedsuleiman@fugashua.edu.ng

ABSTRACT

Nigerian tertiary institutions popularly referred to as the citadel of academic and moral excellence have come a long way in moulding leaders and intellectuals who have contributed to the development of the world. However, the moral fabric that holds the tertiary institutions is seriously eroded as a result of prevalence sexual harassment. Sexual harassment is a topical phenomenon in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. This study examined the prevalence, factors responsible, nature, health and social implications of sexual harassment identified by female students of tertiary institutions in Northern Nigeria. A sample of 300 students from 6 tertiary institutions in Northern Nigeria was randomly selected and used for this research. Questionnaires were used and the data collected was then subjected to descriptive statistical analysis. The study revealed that majority of the female students in tertiary institutions in Northern Nigeria have experienced sexual harassment (80%) and they equally indicate that lecturers and administrative staff are the leading culprits of sexual harassment. Similarly, majority of the respondents opined that revealing dress attitude is responsible for sexual harassment while majority of the respondents illustrated that compelling female students for sexual harassment activities is major nature of sexual harassment. Likewise, 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 infections, contracting HIV/AIDS, loss of womb, unwanted pregnancy and abortion, among others. The study concluded by recommending that the government and other stakeholders should fully initiate and implement sexual harassment preventive policies and as a matter of urgency, academic and administrative staff should be trained on how to utilize sexual harassment policies for effectiveness. The study also recommended that female students should be provided with adequate information about policies and support services available to reduce sexual harassment.

Keywords; Female student, perception, sexual harassment, tertiary institutions, Northern Nigeria

Introduction

The development of indigenous Nigerian society hinges mainly on values, norms and laws among others, while issues related to sex were regarded as restrained matters

because they are hardly discussed openly. However, in the contemporary Nigerian society, issues related to sex are now widely discussed without much restraint due to the

fact that the relationship between men and women have taken different dimensions especially in places of work, worship, hospital, educational institutions e.t.c. These days, sexual harassment is prevalent, not only in the place of work, but in educational institutions also. Sexual harassment is a social phenomenon that is no longer confined to western countries, but Africa as a continent and Nigeria as a country inclusive. In Nigeria, sexual harassment has become a contemporary issue and prevalent in the Nigerian tertiary institutions and it cuts across all cultures and faiths. Owoaje (2010); Lynch (2013); Omonijo, Uche, Nwadior and Rotimi, (2013); Okeyo (2014) and Idris, Adaja, Audu and Aye, (2016) posit 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.

In addition what is termed sexual harassment varies according to various societies, however, according to Ogunbameru (2006); European Union Journal (2006) and 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, phonography, among others. Therefore, sexual harassment can be understood from the point of view of rejection and protest from the affected person or victim.

In a related development, sexual harassment of female students in tertiary institutions in Nigeria in general and Northern Nigeria in particular may not be over emphasized due to its negative consequences on the victims such as psychological pain, melancholy, stigma among others. A number of scholarly works such as Adedokun (2005); Bunyi (2008); Morris and Daniel (2008); Norman, Aikins and Binka, (2012) and 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.

Therefore, since the social phenomenon of sexual harassment is on the increase in most of our tertiary institutions in Nigeria and Northern Nigeria inclusive, and couple with the challenges of Boko Haram insurgency that condemned the modern system of education. It is worth noting that sexual harassment is one of the challenges to sustainable economic, social and political development of the nation called Nigeria. Hence, for a meaningful sustainable development to be achieved in Nigerian education sector, harassment of female students must be approached with all seriousness. It is imperative therefore to equip female students in tertiary institutions with abundant information which will help them protect themselves against sexual harassment. Thus, this research intends to investigate the prevalence, factors responsible, nature, health and social implications of sexual harassment among female students of tertiary institutions in Northern 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 (Beninger, 2013; Lynch, 2013 and Sharma, 2013). Tertiary institutions are ivory towers where academic and moral excellences are expected to be promoted.

Similarly in his view, Obasanjo (2012) opined that education must foster in the individual those values which make for good citizenship such as honesty, selflessness, tolerance, dedication, hard work, personal integrity, all of which provide the rich soil from which good leadership is produced. In addition, Amin (2006) and 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 Northern Nigeria. In addition to the threat are the challenges of Boko Haram insurgency that condemned conventional system of education in totality as well as the kidnapping and molesting of the female students in Chibok in Borno State. 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 and Northern Nigeria in particular. It has created non-conductive 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 imperative as a matter of urgency and national interest, to arrest the problem of sexual harassment of female students in tertiary institutions in Nigeria and Northern Nigeria in particular.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study intends to examine the perception of sexual harassment among female students of tertiary institutions in Northern Nigeria. Thus, the specific objectives of this research intends to investigate the prevalence, factors responsible, nature, health and social implications of sexual harassment among female students of tertiary institutions in Northern Nigeria

Theoretical Framework

Feminism is the theoretical framework adopted for this research. Going by the socio-political structure of Nigerian society that is patriarchal in nature, the dominance of men over women cannot be over emphasized. Thus, the feminist perspective is relevant to this research work.

Ray (2007); McLaren, George and Cornell, (2008); Bunwaree (2010) and Mama (2011) posit that feminism as a theoretical perspective champions, equality, political rights, natural justice among others if

women are to compete with men in the public domain. Feminists further assert that feminism is not just a belief but a theoretical construction about the nature and role of women's oppression, exploitation, marginalization and subjugation in the society.

It is worth noting that from the traditional and cultural context of Nigerian society, women are viewed as second class citizens. They are always taken for granted. Women form part of the society and they are expected to be given the opportunity to explore their potentials under a free and fair atmosphere. However, the challenges of sexual harassment surfacing in most of the tertiary institutions that are supposed to be citadels of academic and moral excellence as well as the negative consequences of sexual harassment have slowed down the progress of attaining the gender equity of the MDGs. Therefore, the position of this study relies on feminism theory. Thus, the relevance of the theory to the understanding of this study assert that sexual harassment flourishes in tertiary institutions in Nigeria due to the fact that women are seen from traditional and cultural contexts as people to be exploited and therefore, it is important to note that sexual harassment is a frightening 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.

Methodology

The methodology adopted for this study was the social survey technique. A random sample of 300 respondents, across six (6) selected tertiary institutions in Northern 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

zones of North West, North Central and North East respectively. Thus, six tertiary institutions in Northern Nigeria were used for the study in totality, namely: Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria; Abubakar Tawa Balewa University of Technology, Bauchi; Federal Polytechnic, Bida; Federal Polytechnic, Iddah; Federal College of Education, Kano and Federal College of Education (Technical) Potiskum, respectively while 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.

Data Presentation

In this section, the data on perception of sexual harassment among female students of tertiary institutions in Northern Nigeria are presented in the tables below. The respondents' responses are summarized and interpreted as follows.

Table 1 reveals the bio-data of the respondents; it is clear from the study that majority of the respondents were under the age group 21-25 years that may be linked sexually active age group and may be prone to sexual harassment. The marital status of the respondent illustrated that most of them are single and mostly likely to have experienced any form of sexual harassment. The table also indicates that most of the respondents are undergraduate students.

Table 2 illustrates that majority of the respondents (84%) have experienced sexual harassment. It is only 12.33 % of the respondents that have not experienced sexual harassment. While 03.67% of the respondent failed to respond. Meaning, sexual harassment is prevalence among the

female students in tertiary institutions in Northern Nigeria.

Table 3 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 1: Bio-Data of the Respondents

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Age Group		
16-20	42	14.00
21-25	191	63.67
26 -30	27	09.00
31-35	22	07.33
36 and above	18	06.00
Total	300	100
Marital Status		
Single	228	76.00
Married	57	19.00
Divorce	15	05.00
Total	300	100
Level		
Undergraduate	253	84.33
Postgraduate	47	15.67
Total	300	100

Source: Field Work (2016)

Table 2: Data on Prevalence of Sexual Harassment

Have you ever been sexually harassed?	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	252	84.00
No	37	12.33
No response	11	03.67
Total	300	100

Source: Field Work (2016)

Table 3: Data on Perpetrators of Sexual Harassment

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

Source: Field Work (2016)

Table 4 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 see 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 5 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 6 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.

Table 4: 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

Source: Field Work (2016)

Table 5: Data on Nature of Sexual Harassment

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

Source: Field Work (2016)

Table 6: 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

Source: Field Work (2016)

Discussion

This study reveals that the majority of the female students in tertiary institutions in Northern Nigeria have experienced sexual harassment and they equally indicate that lecturers and administrative staff are the leading culprits of sexual harassment. This confirms the findings of Mejiuni (2013), Muasya (2013) and Idris et.al (2016) that sexual harassment is prevalent in tertiary institutions and it is presently widespread through higher institutions in Nigeria. In addition, Dhlomo, Mugweni, Shoniwa, Maunganidz and Sodi, (2012) and 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 assertions of Adedokun (2005); Bunyi (2008); Morris and Daniel (2008); Norman et.al. (2012) and 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 have 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 a recurring social phenomenon among female students in tertiary institutions in Nigeria and Northern Nigeria in particular. It is worth noting that for several years tertiary institutions in Northern Nigeria have been battling with the challenges of sexual harassment of female students. This study argued that female students in tertiary institutions in Northern Nigeria are sexually intimidated and harassed leading to poor attempt to access educational opportunities which can increase the negative attitude of parents in Northern Nigeria towards girl child education. The

main reason for the continuous perpetuation of this callous act as argued by this study is the existence of weak mechanisms and redress in these tertiary institutions. Therefore, sexual harassment constitute serious obstacle to attaining the gender equality of MDGs for sustainable development because it weakens the integrity of the ivory towers. It is a menace to the society and it is also underreported. Thus, it is the responsibility of the managements of all the tertiary institutions in Northern Nigeria to reduce the sexual harassment to the lowest rate in order to create a conducive environment for the female students.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that the government and other stakeholders need to fully initiate and implement sexual harassment preventive policies. As a matter of urgency academic and administrative staff should be trained on how to utilize sexual harassment policies for effectiveness. The female students should be provided with adequate information about policies and support services available to reduce sexual harassment. In addition, strict adherence to the ethics of places of work, keeping to decent and acceptable dress code will help in reducing sexual harassment of female students in tertiary institutions in Northern Nigeria in particular and Nigeria in general.

References

- Adedokun, A.O. (2005). Sexual Harassment in Nigeria Educational Settings: Preliminary notes from Qualitative Assessment of Lagos State University. *Sexuality in Africa Magazine*, 2(4) Pg. 11-13
- Amin, S. (2006) "The Millennium Development Goals: A Critique from the South". Monthly Review. Vol. 57. No. 10
- Beninger, C. (2013). Combating Sexual Harassment in Schools in Sub-Saharan Africa: Legal Strategies Under Regional and International Human Rights Law. *African Human Rights Law Journal*, Vol. 13 Pg 281-301
- Bunwaree, S. (2010). *Governance, Gender and Politics in Mauritius*. Mauritius: ELP Publications, Editions Le Printemps Ltd

- Bunyi, G.W.(2008) Negotiating the Interface between Upper and Higher Education in Sub-Saharan Africa: Gender Dimensions. Unpublished Paper Presented at the Biennale on Education in Africa organized by Association for the Development of Education in Africa, Maputo, Mozambique. 5th -9th May, 2008
- Dhlomo,T., Mugweni, R.M., Shoniwa, G., Maunganidze, L. and Sodi, T. (2012). Perceived Sexual Harassment among Female Students at Zimbabwean Institutions of Higher Learning. *Journal of Psychology in Africa*, 2 Pg 269-272
- Idris, H., Adaja, J., Audu, S. and Aye, G. (2016). Analysis, Causes and Effects of Sexual Harassment on the Performance of Female Employees in some Selected Organizations in Kogi State, Nigeria. *International Journal Democratic and Development Studies*, 2 (2) Pg. 31-39
- Julie, A. (2013). Sexism and Sexual Harassment in Tertiary Institutions. *Gender and Behaviour*. Vol.1 Pg.5237-5243
- Lynch, S. (2013) The Fight against Sexual Harassment in Arab Campuses. Retrieved on 5th April, 2016 from <http://chronicle.com/article/the-fight-against-sexual-harassment>
- Mama, A. (2011). What Does it Mean to Do Feminist Research in African Contexts? Feminist Review Conference Proceeding Pg. 4-20
- Mclaren, M.A., George, D. and Cornell,H.W. (2008). Gender Equality and the Economic EmpowermentForum on Public Policy. United Nations Development Programme, Human Development Report 2007-2008 Pg. 1-4
- Mejium, O. (2013). *Women and Power: Education, Religion and Identity*. Dakar: CODESRIA Pg 236
- Morris, L.K. and Daniel, L.G. (2008) Perception of a Chilly Climate: Differences in Traditional and Non-traditional Majors for Women. *Research in Higher Education*. Vol.49 Pg, 256-273
- Muasya, J.N.(2013). Students Perception of University of Nairobi's Institutional Culture, Kenya: Access, Sexual Harassment and Gender, Lambert Academic Publishing, Omni Scriptum Gmbh and Co. KG, Germany
- Norman, I.D., Aikins, M. and Binka, F.N. (2012). Faith Based Organizations: Sexual Harassment and Health in Accra-Tema Metropolis. *Sexuality and Culture*. Vol. 1 Pg.100-112
- Numhauser-Henning, A. and Laulom, S. (2012). Harassment Related to Sex and Sexual Harassment Law in 33 European Countries. Discrimination versus Dignity. European Network of Legal Experts in the Field of Gender Equality. Retrieved on 5th April, 2016 from <http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/files/your-rights/final-harassment-en.pdf>
- Obasanjo, O. (2012). "Education and Development" A Lecture Delivered at the 2012 Graduation Ceremony of University of Nigeria Nsukka, Nigeria January 26th, 2012
- Official Journal of the European Union (2006). Directive 2006/54EC of the European Parliament and the Council of the 5th July, 2006 on the Implementation of the Principle of Equal Opportunities and Equal Treatment of Men and Women in Matters of Employment and Occupation. Retrieved on 9th May, 2016 from <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/Legal-content/EN/TEXT>
- Ogunbameru, K.A. (2006). *Sexual Harassment in Nigerian Tertiary Institutions*. Ibadan: Spectrum BOOKS Ltd

Okeyo, V. (2014). Using Men to End Gender Violence. Daily Nation. Wednesday, 2014. Pg. 2-3

Omonijo, D., Uche, O., Nwadiakor, K. and Rotimi, O. (2013). A Study of Sexual Harassment in three Selected Private Faith-Based Universities, Ogun State, South-West, Nigeria. *Open Journal of Social Sciences Research*. Sciknow Publications Ltd. 1(9) Pg. 250-263

Owoaje, E. and Olusola-Taiwo (2010). Sexual Harassment Experiences of Female Graduates of Nigerian Tertiary Institutions. *International Quarterly of Community Health Education*. 4 Pg. 337-348

Ray, S.(2007). Understanding Patriarchy, Gender and Environment. Unpublished Foundation Course, Human Rights. Department of Political Science, DaulatRah College, University of Delhi, India

Rigg, J. (2008). “The Millennium Development Goals” In: Desai, V., and Potter R. B. ed. *The Companion to Development Studies*. London: Hodder Education.

Sharma, Y.(2013) Harassment, Sexual Abuse and Corrupt Education World Wide. University World Wide News. Retrieved on 9th May, 2016 from <http://www.universityworldnews.com/articlephp?story>

\