

IMPACT OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT ON PSYCHOSOCIAL ADJUSTMENT OF FEMALE UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS IN HIGHER INSTITUTIONS IN ANAMBRA STATE

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Abstract

There is a noticeable upsurge in evil acts in higher institutions in Anambra state ranging from cultism, drug, alcohol, violence and revolt to sexual harassment. Sexually harassed individuals can suffer through a number of psychological effects. The study adopted ex-post-facto research design to investigate the impact of sexual harassment on psychosocial adjustment of female undergraduate students in higher institutions in Anambra state. Four research questions guided the study. From a population of 4,852 students in 300 and 400 levels in three selected higher institutions in Anambra state, 80 students who agreed to participate in the study formed the sample for the study. Data were collected through questionnaire of 29 items to elicit information on the impact of sexual harassment on psychosocial adjustment of undergraduate students. The instrument was validated by experts in education. Reliability of the instrument

was determined using Cronbach Alpha and an alpha coefficient of 0.79 was obtained. Research questions were answered using frequencies, percentages and mean. Result revealed the prevalence of sexual harassment in tertiary institutions in Anambra state. It also revealed that sexual harassment is associated with increased risk of anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder, as well as diminished self esteem, self-confidence and psychological well-being. The researchers recommended team teaching in higher institutions, discouraging the culture of silence and the perpetrators of sexual harassment to face the law among others.

Keywords: Sexual harassment, psychosocial adjustment, female undergraduate student.

Introduction

There is a noticeable upsurge in evil acts in higher institutions in Anambra state ranging from cultism, drug, alcohol, violence and revolt to sexual harassment. The world today is one huge horror-chamber and an extended theatre of spiritual wickedness ranging from sexual harassment of a student by a fellow student, sexual harassment of a lecturer by a student and sexual harassment of a student by a lecturer. Sexual harassment in higher institutions of learning is a reflection of what is happening in the larger society of ours. There are rising cases of sexual harassment which are unreported because the victims will either play ball and keep it to herself to avoid stigmatization or refuse the offer and continue to fail the course till succor comes. Omonijo, Uche, Nwadiofor and Rotimi (2013) in a study on sexual harassment in 3 selected private faith-based universities in Ogun state, South-west, Nigeria found out that the majority of female students' experience sexual harassment on campus.

Sexual harassment is any unwanted behaviour of a sexual nature which makes one feel offended, uncomfortable, intimidated or humiliated. Human

interactions are inevitable in any society. Interactions cut across ages, sex, tribes, religious affiliations among others. No man can exist in isolation. There must be interactions with others. Some levels of sexual advances/gestures are expected but should be done in a civilized and socially acceptable ways. Put in another way, there is supposed to be mutual agreement which makes man different from lower animals such as cock, hen, dog, sheep among others.

The case is different in some higher institutions in Anambra state where a lot of social vices are manifested and one of such is sexual harassment of female students. This has continued to attract the attention of psychologists, educationists, researchers and media. Ganiu (2021) assert that the preponderance of sexual harassment in higher institutions in Nigeria and the alleged cases of negotiation of marks have necessitated legislative efforts of returning sanity to the higher institutions. Nigeria's senate has passed a bill aimed at combating sexual harassment as part of a broader move to upload ethics in the country's higher institutions. Ganiu observed that this law is highly essential as it will certainly curb or, at least, reduce the dastardly act of sexual abuse among academics. In the context of this research work, sexual harassment is viewed by the researchers as forceful carnal knowledge of a student by a lecturer, contrary to the students wish/desire. The lecturer' impose/lures the student forcefully into sex thus exercising his power/authority over the student. In most cases, the academically weak students are victims. Psychologically, there is supposed to be mutual understanding between two people involved in sex, but where it is done without the consent/agreement of one, it becomes sexual harassment and serious violation of human right and dignity.

Cases of sexual harassment abound our everyday news here in Nigeria. From the media example television, newspapers, various social sites, you read/hear/listen to the daily news of father sexually harassing his daughter, a boss sexually harassing his employee, lecturer sexually harassing female students among others. Yesufu and Adimula (2018) assert that sexual harassment can be

in three forms namely: Sexual harassment of a student by another student, sexual harassment of a lecturer by a student and sexual harassment of a female student by a lecturer. This paper focused on sexual harassment of a female student by a lecturer.

Psychologists, educationists and researchers have attempted various definitions of sexual harassment. However from review of literatures, the basic definition of sexual harassment comes from the United States Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) who explained sexual harassment in its guidelines as: Unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favours, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature when:

1. Submission to such conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of an individual's employment, or
2. Submission to or rejection of such conduct by an individual is used as a basis for employment decisions affecting such individual or
3. Such conduct has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with the individual's work performance or creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive working environment.

This definition of sexual harassment by UNEEOC (United Nations Equal Employment Opportunity Commission) was adopted verbatim by the Criminal Law of Lagos State 2011 but added that any person who sexually harasses another is guilty of a felony and is liable to imprisonment for three (3) years.

Olamide(2017) assert that sexual harassment is persistent and unwanted sexual advances where the consequences of refusing are potentially disadvantageous to the victim. Olamide noted that sexual harassment is particularly difficult crime to define and prove because it dwells in the shadows. It resides in a world of my word against yours, often without witnesses and collaboration. Yesufu et al (2018) described sexual harassment as a gender-based discrimination, victimization or deprivation that is sufficiently serious, and

interferes with or limits students ability to participate in or benefit from the institutions educational programmes. Yesufu and Adimula further noted that sexual harassment presents itself in power based differentials which manifest in the creation of a hostile environment that breeds retaliation and victimization.

Supporting the above, Adebowale (2019) explained sexual harassment as bullying or coercion of a sexual nature, or the unwelcome or inappropriate promise of rewards in exchange for sexual

favours. She noted that sexual harassment has become societal problem in the recent time, mould into different shapes starting from sexual abuse to rape. It is illegal and a demoralizing act. Campbell (2017) observed that sexual harassment is really not about sex. It is about power and aggression and manipulation. It is an abuse of power and problem.

An undergraduate female student in the context of this research work refers to a university student who has not yet received a first degree or a female student who is studying for their first degree at a college or university. Sexual harassment of female undergraduates in higher institutions is a violation of fundamental human right of women and also violate their dignity. Sexual harassment covers a range of inappropriate and unwanted advances –from unwanted touching, groping, kissing without permission to making sexualized remarks about a person’s appearance, clothes and desirability. Okeke (2011) in line with the above fact, assert that sexual harassment ranges from inappropriate touch, inappropriate gestures directed to them to inappropriate jokes told in front of them. Oral interview with some of the participants in this study revealed that sexually harassed victims often have their life turned into a misery and educational institution became a place to be avoided.

The sexual attacks led to feelings of demoralization and humiliation, causing loss of self-confidence and self-esteem. The victims often has trouble studying or paying attention, less able to perform well, participating less, no

longer going to study group, thinking about dropping a class or even leaving the institution.

In Igbo traditional society of Nigeria where the researchers come from, there is an adage “A dog is not supposed to eat the bone tied to his neck”. The reverse is the case today as some lecturers who are expected to play the roles of fathers, uncles and brothers to students end up having carnal knowledge of them thus defiling them. This is shameful, an indeed wicked act portraying a high level of moral bankruptcy, irresponsibility and witchcraft. To support this statement, Imonikhe, Aluede and Idoho (2012) assert that some male lecturers use sex for grade as baits for luring female students to give in to their sexual advances.

Sexual harassment in tertiary institutions is a massive problem in Nigeria. Review of literature reported cases of sexual harassment of female students by male lecturers in some universities in Nigeria. For instance, there was a popular case of a female student and a male professor in Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-ife (Omoyase, 2019), over sex for grade. More so, another lecturer was suspended in same university over alleged sexual assault (Punch, February 5, 2020). There was also the suspension of Academic staff union of universities’ branch chairman of Ambrose Ali University, Ekpoma, Delta State, Nigeria (Punch, March 19, 2019) over sex for grade.

Furthermore, Ignatius Ajuru University of Education (IAUE) in Rumuolumeni, Portharcourt on 27th September, 2020 suspended a lecturer for allegedly impregnating a student of the institution. It was learnt that that the university indicted the lecturer for allegedly intimidating and assaulting the student before impregnating her (City Beats News, September 27, 2020). Also the management of Imo State University (IMSU), Owerri-Nigeria on 10th September, 2020 suspended two (2) lecturers caught in an alleged sex-for marks scandal. In a recent video which trended online, the lecturers were caught in a compromising situation with their female students. The two lecturers’ who were caught pants down, are senior academics and are now cooling off in a police cell

in Owerri, Nigeria. Meanwhile, there has been a further assertion making the rounds that one of the ladies in the escapade was about getting married and in spite of her explanations and pleas, one of the said lecturers demanded and collected the sum of one hundred and fifty thousand naira (#150,000 only) and still insisted on sleeping with her (Premium times, September 10, 2020).

Ganiu (2021) noted the utmost relevance to interrogate the other side of this same coin which is the activities of many female students too, which frankly could be unethical. Ganiu observed that many female students in higher institutions are adults with sexual cravings and emotional attachments too. In the words of Ganiu, “ how again do we explain their own crushes, infatuations and manipulative advances towards their male lecturers? Or is being a lecturer tantamount to being a divinity?

Taiwo, Omole and Omole (2014) identified a number of factors as motivation for perpetuation of sexual harassment. This include lust, pursuit of happiness, lack of norm of morality, dead conscience among others. The researchers assume that a lecturer who harasses a student sexually may be doing so because they are experiencing the stress from various personal problems or life traumas such as marital trouble or divorce, medical problems or financial difficulties. This assumption may be right or wrong but the truth remains that lecturers hold positions of trust. They are expected to design teaching programmes and carry out their teaching duties to help their students develop as mature thinkers. This may involve close working relationships in tutorials/laboratories, individual meetings for supervision of projects. For impressionable young students, the boundaries between intellectual development and personal life may become blurred. In this situation, some lecturers easily move from intellectual to personal and sexual relationships. Students therefore must learn to be assertive and establish strong personal boundaries. Supporting this view, Eliana (2019) suggested development of a complaints mechanism while

Fredrik and Maja (2020) opined that active leadership which demonstrates that sexual harassment will not be tolerated prevents sexual harassment.

Psychosocial adjustment refers to people's capacity to adapt to the environment, which implies that the individual has sufficient mechanisms to feel good, integrate, respond adequately to the demands of the environment, and achieve his/her objectives (Madariaga, Arribillaga and Zulaika, 2014). However, in the context of this research work, psychosocial adjustment has to do with the impact of sexual harassment on the behavioural and social life of the victim, that is, how it affects the student's relationship with others as well as her feeling about herself. Researchers like Langer (2017), Buchanan, Settles, Wu and Hayashino (2018), as well as Keswara, Murti and Demartoto (2018) observed that sexual harassment frequently causes pain and suffering to the victim ranging from emotional and physical stress to fear, withdrawal, lack of focus among others. There is no doubt that sexual harassment often leaves the victims in pains, humiliated and embarrassed. It is against this background that this research work sought to investigate the impact of sexual harassment on the psychosocial (behavioural and social) adjustment of female undergraduate students in higher institutions in Anambra State.

Statement of Problem

Sexually harassed individuals can suffer through some psychological effects ranging from irritation and frustration to anxiety, stress and trauma. Depending on the situation, a victim can experience anything from mild annoyance to extreme psychological damage, while the impact on a victim's career and life may be significant and also leave them in ruins.

The aim of the study therefore is to investigate the impact of sexual harassment on psychosocial adjustment of female undergraduate students in higher institutions in Anambra state. The study was guided by four research questions which include:

1. What is the prevalence of sexual harassment among female undergraduate students in higher institutions in Anambra state?
2. What are the perceived causes of sexual harassment among female undergraduate students in higher institutions in Anambra state?
3. What are the perceived impact of sexual harassment on psychosocial adjustment of female undergraduate students in higher institutions in Anambra state?
4. What are the possible psychological measures/techniques that could be adopted to curb/curtail/reduce sexual harassment of female undergraduate students in higher institutions in Anambra state to the barest minimum.

Method

The study was conducted using ex-post-facto research design. This type of research design seeks to establish cause-effect relationships. The researcher usually has no control over the variables of interest and therefore cannot manipulate them. Indeed the researcher only attempts to link some already existing effects or observation to some variable(s) as causative agent(s) (Nworgu, 2015). The study was carried out in Anambra state using three (3) state government higher institutions. These three institutions were selected using purposive random sampling technique. The population consists of all 4,852 female undergraduate students in 300 and 400 levels of study in the Faculty of Arts in the various institutions. A written form introducing the researchers were first of all given to the 4, 852 students. The form also contains 2 questions:

1. Have you been sexually harassed by a lecturer?
2. If yes, are you willing to participate in the study?

The researchers deemed it necessary to ask the above questions as a result of the socio-cultural factors which often affect the behavioural responses of sexually harassed victims that often dictate their varying responses which range

from concealment due to fear and shame to ignorance of channel of legal redress. From the completed forms, 123 students indicated having experienced sexual harassment, while 80 students agreed to participate in the study. Therefore, the sample size comprised of 80 students who volunteered to participate in the study. Four research questions guided the study.

A researcher-developed instrument titled “Impact of sexual harassment on psychosocial adjustment of students” (ISHPAS) was used for data collection. The instrument has four sections with a total of 33 items. It was structured on a 4-point likert scale ranging from strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree. Three experts in the department of Educational Psychology and Measurement and Evaluation from Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka validated the instrument. The reliability of the instrument was determined using cronbach alpha with overall reliability coefficient of 0.79.

The researchers administered the questionnaire directly to the chosen sample for the study. A total of 80 copies of the questionnaire were given out and all were successfully completed and returned. The research questions were answered using frequencies percentages and mean. Acceptance point for the items was 2.50 and any mean below 2.50 was regarded as rejected.

Result

Table 1: Students response on the prevalence of sexual harassment in higher institutions in Anambra state.

Students = 80

| Prevalence | Students Frequency | Percentage |
|------------|--------------------|------------|
| Very rare | Nil | Nil |
| Often | 24 | 30 |
| Common | 56 | 70 |

Table 1 shows that 30% of students agreed that sexual harassment often takes place in higher institutions while 70% acknowledged that sexual harassment is common in institutions of higher learning in Anambra state.

Table 2: Mean and standard deviation scores of students on the possible causes of sexual harassment in higher institutions.

Students = 80

| S/N | Items | SA | A | D | SD | X | Remark |
|-----|--|----|----|----|----|------|--------|
| 1 | Lustful desire. | 24 | 26 | 20 | 10 | 2.78 | Agree |
| 2 | Lack of conscience. | 28 | 27 | 15 | 10 | 2.91 | Agree |
| 3 | Abuse of power. | 36 | 24 | 15 | 05 | 2.78 | Agree |
| 4 | Lack of self contentment. | 35 | 28 | 17 | 10 | 2.72 | Agree |
| 5 | Moral bankruptcy. | 32 | 28 | 15 | 05 | 3.09 | Agree |
| 6 | Pursuit of pleasure/happiness. | 30 | 32 | 10 | 08 | 3.05 | Agree |
| 7 | Lack of self control. | 40 | 25 | 10 | 05 | 3.25 | Agree |
| 8 | Personality disorder. | 35 | 25 | 15 | 05 | 3.15 | Agree |
| 9 | Inferiority complex. | 30 | 22 | 18 | 12 | 2.88 | Agree |
| 10 | Immaturity. | 25 | 32 | 13 | 10 | 2.90 | Agree |
| 11 | Spiritual forces/evil spirit/ Demonology. | 30 | 25 | 15 | 10 | 2.94 | Agree |

Table 2 shows that the students with a mean score of 2.50 and above agreed that the 11 items in the instrument which include lust, abuse of power, lack of self control, personality disorders among others were some of the possible causes of sexual harassment in higher institutions in Anambra state.

Table 3: Mean and standard deviation scores of students on the impact of sexual harassment on their psychosocial adjustment.

Students = 80

| | | | | | | |
|--|----|----|----|----|------|-------|
| 12 Hatred for a course and the lecturer. | 28 | 26 | 16 | 10 | 2.79 | Agree |
| 13 Humiliation . | 38 | 22 | 12 | 08 | 3.12 | Agree |
| 14 Depression. | 35 | 26 | 14 | 05 | 3.14 | Agree |
| 15 Fear and trauma. | 30 | 22 | 18 | 10 | 2.90 | Agree |
| 16 Withdrawn s yndrome. | 39 | 25 | 10 | 07 | 3.18 | Agree |
| 17 Low self este em. | 40 | 25 | 10 | 05 | 3.25 | Agree |
| 18 Aggressive be haviours. | 35 | 20 | 15 | 10 | 3.00 | Agree |
| 19 Feeling of unh appiness/sad. | 26 | 22 | 20 | 10 | 2.85 | Agree |
| 20 Feeling of reject tion. | 36 | 28 | 06 | 10 | 3.12 | Agree |
| 21 Inferiority compl ex. | 30 | 20 | 23 | 07 | 2.91 | Agree |
| 22 Stigmatization. | 10 | 35 | 25 | 10 | 2.56 | Agree |
| 23 Feeling of rejection. | 40 | 25 | 10 | 05 | 3.25 | Agree |
| 24 Abandonment of academic pursuit. | 32 | 28 | 15 | 05 | 3.09 | Agree |

Table 3 shows that the students with a mean score of 2.50 and above agreed that all the 13 items in the instruments which include fear and trauma, depression, low self esteem, feeling of rejection, inferiority complex among others were among the impact of sexual harassment on psychosocial adjustment of victims of sexual harassment in higher institutions in Anambra state.

Table 4: Mean and standard scores of students on the possible measures for curbing sexual harassment in higher institutions.

Students = 80

| | | | | | | |
|--|----|----|----|----|------|-------|
| 25 Adoption of team teaching. | 28 | 27 | 15 | 10 | 2.91 | Agree |
| 26 Higher institution authorities should assign 2 to 3 lecturers per office and not 1. | 30 | 22 | 18 | 12 | 2.88 | Agree |
| 27 Higher institution authorities should set up committee against indecent dressing. | 40 | 25 | 10 | 05 | 3.25 | Agree |

- 28 Assign a student to 2 supervisors for project 30 20 23 07 2.91 Agree
and not one.
- 29 Serious sanction for lecturers who engage in 36 28 06 10 3.12 Agree
sexual harassment.
-

Table 4 shows the students' agreement with a mean score of 2.50 and above that measures like adoption of team teaching, putting a serious fight against students' indecent dressing, assigning more than a lecturer to an office, making the perpetrators of sexual harassment to face the law and assigning a student to 2 supervisors for project supervision could be effective measures for curbing sexual harassment in higher institutions in Anambra state.

Discussion

The findings of the study revealed the prevalence of sexual harassment in tertiary institutions of Anambra state. This agrees with the findings of Omoyase (2019) that there is prevalence of sexual harassment of female students of tertiary education in Taraba state, Nigeria with no significant difference among the respondents in the universities, polytechnics and colleges of education. Again, the findings of the study aligns with Okeke (2011) that majority of the participants had experienced sexual harassment ranging from inappropriate touch, inappropriate gestures directed to them to inappropriate jokes told in front of them. The findings of the study is also not different from that of Omonijo et al (2013) who examined the prevalence of sexual harassment on three faith-based private universities in Ogun state, South-West, Nigeria and found that the majority of female students experience sexual harassment on campus. This seems to underscore the reason for the engagement of investigative journalism on sexual harassment in some of the universities in Nigeria. Their findings trended on social media exposing many lecturers and professors alike. Little wonder,

Imonikhe et al (2012) noted that some male lecturers use sex for grade as baits for luring female students to give in to their sexual advances.

The findings of the study showed that a number of factors have been enumerated as motivation for perpetuation of sexual harassment. Supporting this finding is the research work of Taiwo et al (2014) that lust, pursuit of happiness, lack of norm of morality, dead conscience, pursuit of pleasure, lack of temperance, passion, habit, value, personality disorder, inferiority complex, cheapness, abuse of power are some of the causes of sexual harassment. In addition, indecent dressing pattern among female students who almost go naked in their appearance can also be a driving factor for continued incidence of sexual harassment. Many female students are so morally bankrupt that they rely absolutely on their womanhood for high grades without due preparation.

The findings of the study revealed that sexual harassment has serious impact on the psychosocial adjustment of students. This agrees with the findings of Langer (2017) that sexual harassment frequently causes pain and suffering. Victims perceive sexual harassment as annoying, offensive, upsetting, humiliating, intimidating, embarrassing, stressful and frightening. Buchanan et al (2018) noted that when sexual harassment diminishes, dehumanizes and disempowers its targets (victims), emotional and physical stress and stress-related mental and physical illness, including post-traumatic stress disorder may result. Also, Keswara et al (2018) assert that psychological impacts of sexual harassment included fear, anger, self-consciousness or embarrassment, withdrawal, fear of new people and situation, lack of trust, lack of focus, self-preoccupation, negative attitudes, trauma and potential sexual disorder.

Furthermore, the findings of the study revealed implementation of team teaching in higher institutions, discouraging the culture of silence, discouraging students from approaching lecturers to solicit for grades, universities putting up a serious fight against female students' indecent dressing and perpetrators of sexual harassment facing the law as some of the measures that could be effective

in curbing sexual harassment. This agrees with the findings of Eliana (2019) to institute a clearly defined, strongly worded and readily accessible anti-sexual harassment policy. Eliana assert that this is a clear statement from a tertiary education institutions leadership that sexual assault and sexual harassment are unacceptable. She also suggested development of a complaints mechanism as well as establishing a fair, accessible and transparent complaints mechanism that ensures confidentiality and security while reporting an incident. Still supporting the findings of the study, Fredrik et al (2020) noted that passive leadership increases the risk for both male and female employees of being subjected to sexual harassment, while clear and active leadership which demonstrates that sexual harassment will not be tolerated prevents sexual harassment. Fredrik et al further opined that structural characteristics of organizations that are expected to produce increased job satisfaction ad engagement also reduce the incidence of sexual harassment.

Conclusion

Sexual harassment is an epidemic throughout global higher education systems and impact individuals, groups and entire organizations in profound ways. It is a pervasive chronic problem that can cause enduring psychological and social harm. Sexual harassment of female undergraduate students in higher institutions is a violation of fundamental human right of women and also their dignity. It is a social evil that must be fought with all effective educational and psychological measures to curb it. Enough of allowing the perpetrators of sexual assault and harassment to go free, they should face the law.

Recommendations

The researchers recommend as follows:

1. Nigerian University Commission (NUC) and other higher education governing bodies should approve and officially sign into law making team

teaching compulsory in higher institutions. This will prevent those lecturers who use “sex as bait for grades” from having monopoly of a course which of course gives them the advantage to sexually harass students.

2. University authorities should put up a serious fight against indecent dressing pattern among female students who almost go naked in their appearance. This could be achieved via setting up a “committee against indecent dressing” in each department with the head of department as the chairman, 3 lecturers and the students’ course representatives as members. Here, the various course representatives are expected to submit names of indecent dressed students’ to the head of department for appropriate sanctions.

3. A student should be assigned to 2 lecturers for project supervision so that if one is a “devil”, the student will fall back on the other person.

4. Any lecturer caught in sex scandal should be given open and public disgrace ranging from termination of appointment to 5 years of imprisonment or both. This will serve as deterrent to others.

5. Culture of silence should be discouraged. University authorities should as a matter of necessity set up independent panels to which victims of sexual harassment may report incidences of such harassment. It is necessary to state that ignoring the situation can often lead to a cycle of ongoing harassment and victimization.

6. University authorities should present the opportunity for female students to come forward and make complaints and there must be mechanism in place for the complaints to be listened to and appropriate steps must be taken.

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