

Prevalence of Sexual Harassment in a Faith-Based Institution of Higher Learning in South-Western Nigeria

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Abstract

Tertiary institutions are ivory towers where academic and moral excellences are expected to be promoted. However, it has become where sexual harassment is a common deviant practice. This study aimed to determine the knowledge and prevalence of sexual harassment among college students in a private institution in Ogun state, Nigeria. The study employed a cross-sectional survey design to enroll 394 college students across the undergraduate levels of the university, using a 22-item self-administered validated instrument by a multi-stage sampling procedure. Demographic characteristics, knowledge and prevalence of college students on sexual harassments were measured. The mean age of respondents was 18.84 ± 1.833 years, with majority (71%) being between ages 15–19, and 70% being females. About 39% and 38% respectively confirmed they have been victims of sexual harassment or know friends that have been harassed sexually. Level of knowledge on sexual harassment was 3.90 ± 0.866 and prevalence of sexual harassment was 4.88 ± 3.194 computed on a mean and standard deviation scale, translate to a prevalence score of 40.67%. Prevalence of Sexual Harassment was high among college student even though they had good Knowledge. A more proactive measures needs to be put in place to curb the menace in a Christian own institution of higher learning.

Keywords: Sex for grade, sexual harassment, college students, faith-based institutions

1. Introduction

Sexual harassment is an epidemic throughout global higher education systems and impact individuals, groups and entire organizations in profound ways. Precarious working conditions, hierarchical organizations, a normalization of gender-based violence, toxic academic masculinities, a culture of silence and a lack of active leadership are all key features enabling sexual harassment (Bondestam & Lundqvist, 2020). Sexual harassment is no more a new social phenomenon in Nigerian tertiary institutions. It has become a common deviant practice in most of the tertiary institutions in Nigeria (Suleiman, 2017). Reports have it 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 under sourced (Beninger, 2013; Lynch, 2013; 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.

Sexual harassment is a frequent situation that occurs all over the world, in places such as institutions, schools, workplace environment and within the family (Lei et al., 2019). Studies around the globe has shown an alarming prevalence rate of SH among university students which vary considerably across studies, ranging from about 20% in Israel, the Netherlands and Taiwan (Attar-Schwartz, 2009; Timmerman, 2005; Wei & Chen, 2012) to as high as 90% in the U.S. (Lichty & Cambell, 2012; Ormeod & Perry, 2008). Subsequently in Africa, few studies had also shown a high incidence of sexual harassment among university students. For instant, Ogbonnaya and Emma-Echiegu (2017) (Ogbonnaya, Ogbonnaya, & Emma-Echiegu, 2011) reported a prevalence of 67% among students attending University of Malawi while another study in South Africa reported that 30% of female students were raped and sexually harassed by male students and teachers in high schools [Smit & Du Plessis, 2011]. Earlier studies from educational institutions in Nigeria had reported range from 67 to 99% on various forms of sexual harassment in public institutions (Imonike, Aluede & Idogho, 2012; Eom et al., 2015). Furthermore, studies had also shown a high prevalence among female respondents (Petersen & Hyde, 2013; Rosenthal, Smidt & Freyd, 2016; Bucchianeri et al., 2014) while other studies found different prevalence between males and females depending on the type of harassment considered (Chiodo et al., 2009; Olaleye & Ajuwon, 2012).

Consequently, the United Nations Member States in 2015 as a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity by 2030, posit that the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), also known as the Global Goals would be adopted by the world leaders at the United Nations to address problems affecting the world, such as goal 1 which says no poverty; goal 3 which says good health and well-being and goal 4 which says quality education 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 students in tertiary institutions and its consequences on the victims, the issue of sexual harassment is likely to be a serious threat to achieving good quality education in Nigeria.

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 (Suleiman, 2017). Thus, it is imperative as a matter of urgency and national interest, to arrest the problem of sexual harassment of students in private tertiary institutions in Nigeria where the problem is under researched. This study was therefore proposed to determine the knowledge and prevalence of sexual harassment among college students in a private institution in Ogun state, Nigeria.

2. Methods

2.1 Study Design

This study adopted a cross-sectional design using multi-stage sampling technique to select respondents to partake in the study. A validated questionnaire which was self-administered for data collection.

2.2 Description of Study Area and Population

Babcock University is a first class Seventh-Day Adventist institution, building servant leaders for a better world. The university consists of 9 schools and one college which are; School of Agricultural sciences, School of Basic and Applied Sciences, School of Computing and Engineering Sciences, School of Education and Humanities, School of Law and Security studies, School of Nursing Sciences, School of Public and Allied Health, Babcock Business School, School of Post Graduate Studies and Benjamin Carson College of Medicine. The study population for this study consisted of male and female undergraduate students in Babcock University.

2.3 Data Collection and Analysis

Data was collected using a close ended questionnaire. Instrument was pretested with 10% of the sample size from a population with similar characteristics but not the actual population. The test-re-test technique was used to determine reliability of the instrument. Errors and omissions were corrected based on the pre-test before the final questionnaire for the study was produced. Cronbach's Alpha test for internal consistency was 0.765. Ethical approval was obtained from the Babcock University Health Research Ethical Committee before commencement of the research. Instrument was distributed using trained research assistants and to ensure anonymity of respondent's, personal identifiers were not requested. Data from this research was analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 25, as a coding guide to generate descriptive and inferential statistics and to analyze the frequency of the levels.

3. Results

The study results indicates that the mean age of respondents was 18.84 ± 1.833 years old and most (70%) of the age distribution were between 15–19 years, indicating a young population, risk of underage and age of consensual sex

among respondents. Majority of the respondents were female (70.6%) compared to 29.4% male respondents. Almost (81%) the entire study population were predominantly Christians and 18% Muslims. (See Table 1)

Table 1. Socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents

Socio-demographic variables for consideration	Respondents in this study; N=394	
	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Age (in years) \bar{x} SD 18.84 \pm 1.833		
15-19	280	71.1
20-24	107	27.2
25-29	7	1.8
Gender		
Male	116	29.4
Female	278	70.6
Religion		
Christianity	319	81
Islam	71	18
Traditional	4	1
Marital Status		
Single	374	94.9
Engaged	17	4.3
Married	3	0.8
Level		
100	22	5.6
200	155	39.3
300	140	35.5
400	62	15.7
500	15	3.8

Majority of the respondents (70.6%) affirms that sexual harassment occurs in this institution while 39% confirms that they had been sexually harassed in the institution before. Additionally, 38.8% of the respondents affirm to have close friends who had been harassed in this institution before. Furthermore, 19.8% of the respondents affirm to have been sexually harassed in exchange for a good grade in the past, likewise about 40.1% confirms to having had experience of inappropriate or offensive comments made about their body by either a lecturer, staff or student. Almost half (44.7%) of the respondents had experience sexual gestures been made at them in the institution while 25.4% had been given money in the past to seduce them into having sex. About 41.1% of the respondents affirms to their sexual organ been looked at without their knowledge while more than half (58.4%) confirms other individuals brushing their body against theirs an unwelcomed manner. Less than half (43.1%) of the respondents revealed that people had often told sexual jokes or stories that were insulting or offensive to them while about 40.1% also concur to a lecturer, staff or student made inappropriate or offensive comments about someone else's body or appearance in the institution. Only 27.2% of the respondents had a lecturer, staff or student continued to ask them to go out, have drinks or have sex even though they reject (See Table 2)

Table 2. Prevalence of sexual harassment among respondents $N=394$

S/N	Statements for Consideration	YES	NO
		F (%)	F (%)
1	Have you ever been sexually harassed in this institution?	154(39.1)	240(60.9)
2	Does sexual harassment occur in this institution?	278(70.6)	116(29.4)
3	Have any of your close friends been harassed in this institution?	153(38.8)	241(61.2)
4	Have you ever been sexually harassed in exchange for a good grade / pass mark in this institution?	78(19.8)	316(80.2)
5	Has a lecturer, staff or student ever made inappropriate or offensive comments about your body or appearance in this institution?	158(40.1)	236(59.9)
6	People make sexual gestures at you in this institution?	176(44.7)	218(55.3)
7	Has someone attempted to give you money to seduce you into having sex?	100(25.4)	294(74.6)
8	Has someone attempted to view, see or look at your sexual organ without your knowledge?	162(41.1)	232(58.9)
9	Has someone brushed his/her body against your own in an unwelcomed manner?	230(58.4)	164(41.6)
10	Has anyone told sexual jokes or stories that were insulting or offensive to you in this institution?	170(43.1)	224(56.9)
11	Has a lecturer, staff or student ever made inappropriate or offensive comments about someone else's body or appearance in this institution?	158(40.1)	236(59.9)
12	Has a lecturer, staff or student continued to ask you to go out, have drinks or have sex even though you said, "No"?	107(27.2)	287(72.8)

The respondent's level of knowledge regarding sexual harassment was measured on a 5-points rating scale with a mean score of 3.90 ± 0.866 translated to level of knowledge prevalence of 78%. Indicating good knowledge on sexual harassment. Prevalence of sexual harassment was measured on a 12-points rating scale showed a mean score of 4.88 ± 3.194 translated to a prevalence of sexual harassment of 40.67%. (See Table 3)

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics of Composite Scores in this Study

Variables	Reference Point Scale Measure	Respondents in this study, $N=394$			Prevalence performance (%)
		\bar{x}	S.E	$\pm SD$	
Knowledge	5	3.90	0.044	0.866	78
Prevalence	12	4.88	0.161	3.194	40.67

4. Discussion

The demographic characteristics; with emphasis to age of respondents indicates that the perpetrators may be dealing with under age due to the age bracket constituted in this study, in contrast perpetration of non-consensual sex conducted by Olaleye and Ajuwon (2012) revealed that their respondents were between the ages of 16-35 years, with the most abused to be within age bracket 21-25 years. The disparities in prevalence might be as a result of the study location because this study was done among Babcock university students, a faith-based private tertiary institution where they are mostly young people compared to their counterpart in public institutions while the other study was conducted among students of The Polytechnic Ibadan. Subsequently, there were more female respondents than male which is similar to the findings of Bastiani, Romito and Saurel-Cubizolles (2018) among Italian university students which might be as a result of female gender dominating the world's population.

The result of this study indicated that majority of the respondents had a high level of knowledge regarding SH, a figure comparable to that observed in a study by Menon, Sanjobo, Lwatula, Nkumbula, Zgambo, Musepa et al. (2014). This could be attributed to the fact that sexual harassment occurs on campus and most people might have experienced or come across or heard about someone that had experienced it. More than three quarter of the

respondents affirms that SH can take place anywhere, a victim or perpetrator can be any gender, can have psychological effect on the victim and perpetrator does not have to be an opposite gender. Our findings are constant with existing literature where it was observed that majority of their respondents agreed that SH can occur anywhere and does not have to be an opposite gender (Arya & Arya, 2019; Bendixen & Kennair, 2017; Espelage, Hong, Rinehart, & Doshi, 2016; Gewirtz-Meydan & Finkelhor, 2019); the perpetrator can be any gender and relatively someone the victim knows (AAUW, 2011). Similarly, it was also reported that the physiological effect of SH on victim is enormous which include their desire to discontinue their schooling while for others it increased their fear of being withdrawn especially if their peers or parents came to hear of any incident (Bendixen & Kennair, 2017; Goodman et al., 2020). The similarities observed in these results shows that SH is a menace that has eaten deep into our society both in the developed and developing countries making the young and old aware of its prevalence

Too often, these negative emotional effects take a toll on students' education, resulting in decreased productivity and increased absenteeism from school. Additionally, more than half of the respondents disagreed that a person's age determines if he/she would be sexually harassed, likewise, several literatures have proven it to be accurate that no matter how old or young you are, there is a likelihood that you can be sexually harassed (Plummer, 2006; Schaeffer, Leventhal, & Asnes, 2011; Mezie-Okoye & Alamina, 2014; Gaba, 2010).

Majority of the respondents affirms that SH occur in this institution while one quarter attest that they or their close friends had been harassed before as observed by a research among female undergraduate students in Port-Harcourt (Imonikhe, Aluede, & Idogho, 2012). Few of the respondents further confirms that they have been sexually harassed in exchange for good grade in the past. The finding also supports the views from researches that opined sex in exchange for grades are found in tertiary institutions of Nigeria (Oni, Tshitangano, & Akinsola, 2019; Dastile, 2004). Consistent with previous studies (Sharma, 2013; Olaleye, & Ajuwon, 2012; Bastiani, Romito, & Saurel-Cubizolles, 2018; Ogunbameru, 2006; Effa, Okokon, Nwagbara, & Bello, 2012; Kullima et al., 2010), the results of this study revealed the common forms of sexual harassment experienced by the students. These includes inappropriate or offensive comments about their body or appearance, unwanted sexual gestures, attempted viewing of sexual organ, unnecessary body contact, sex-related jokes, sex-related comments about peoples' appearance and constant pressure on sexual advances. The implication of this is that it weakens the educational system and continually traumatize the victims, thereby having an impact on their quality of life.

The prevalence of SH found in this study was 40.67% which compares favourably with what was obtained in Calabar at 44% (Iliyasu et al., 2011) and Port-Harcourt at 46.7% (Alexander, 2012) where the location is in the Southern part of Nigeria, while in the Northern Nigeria the prevalence was much lower, 13.8% in Maiduguri (Menick, 2002) and 22.2% in Kano (Rivers, 2002). These differences could be due to cultural and religious differences, the effectiveness of sharia laws in those states or victims do not report the abusers. Prevalence from studies in some African countries varied between 16% in Cameroun to 67% in Botswana (Yohannes, 2007), though methodologies used for these studies were different.

5. Conclusion

The need for policies enactment cannot be overemphasized to deal with sexual harassment in the identified institution if not yet in place. It is concluded based on the findings of this study that if the trend of SH is not addressed as a matter of urgency, it may negatively affect students' quality of education which might dampen the future of the students' especially women which consequently has dangerous economic effect considering the role of women in nation building.

5.1 Recommendations

A more detailed study using qualitative approaches may be needed to understand the difficulties in mental health of the victims of sexual harassment.

Competing Interest Statement

The authors declare that there are no competing or potential conflicts of interest.

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