



Causes of Sexual Harassment in Tertiary Institutions in Nigeria

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Abstract: The problem of sexual harassment in the higher educational institutions in Nigeria has taken another dimension calling for a quick action. The situation is so bad in some higher educational institutions in Nigeria that a many students and staff have experienced one form of sexual harassment or the other. Sexual harassment has been a challenge in all levels of education especially in the higher educational institutions across Nigeria. This paper examined causes of sexual harassment in Nigerian tertiary institutions. Secondary data collected from both print and online publications were used for the paper. The paper concluded that lack of proper sexual harassment policy, poor implementation, academic power, culture of silence, indecent dressing and lack of confidential reporting mechanisms are major causes of persistence sexual harassment in Nigerian tertiary institutions.

Key words: Sexual harassment, Tertiary Institutions in Nigeria

Introduction

Tertiary education is the education final stage of education that handles the production of manpower for the social, economic and technological development of a country. Tertiary education is an organized education that deals with intensive teaching, research and provision of community services (Akin-Ibidiran, Ogunode & Ibidiran John 2022). National policy on Education 2013) sees tertiary education as the education given after Post Basic Education in institutions such as Universities and Inter-University Centres such as the Nigeria French Language Village, Nigeria Arabic Language Village, National Institute of Nigerian Languages, institutions such as Innovation Enterprise Institutions (IEIs), and Colleges of Education, Monotechnics, Polytechnics, and other specialized institutions such as Colleges of Agriculture, Schools of Health and Technology and the National Teachers' Institutes (NTI).

Tertiary institutions are micro section of the larger society. Tertiary institutions is an organized fraction of the whole society curved out for teaching programme, research and provision of community service. Tertiary institution can also be seen as a subset of the general society that is made of collection of different people, different culture, different life style and different value (Ogunode & Odo 2023). Societies globally have been known to have some peculiar social problem

and social issues. Social problems of most societies are migrated into the tertiary institutions because the societies and the tertiary institutions are inseparable to some extent. Globally, tertiary institutions are found in one social problem or the other. There are many cases of social issue like discrimination, racism, gender inequality and so on. In Nigeria, there are many social problems and social issues facing the tertiary institutions (Ogunode et al 2023). One of the persisting problem is the sexual harassment in the tertiary educational institutions in Nigeria.

Recent research has shed light on the distressing prevalence of gender-based violence experienced by female undergraduates within Nigerian Tertiary Institutions. This study has unveiled alarming statistics, highlighting the extent of the problem and its deeply concerning implications for the welfare, education, and prospects of young women across the nation (Ajibola, 2023).

To investigate the occurrence and perception of gender-based violence, a cross-sectional survey approach was used in our Research. The study concentrated on female undergraduates from various tertiary institutions across the six geopolitical zones of Nigeria and randomly sampled 160 students. In this survey, we asked some questions to know the different reported forms of violence prevalent in tertiary institutions, if students are aware of policies addressing cases of gender-based violence, who the perpetrators of gender-based violence are, what types of awareness are raised, and what done to curb the menace of gender-based violence in schools (Ajibola, 2023).

From the responses gathered, the survey showed that 34.2 per cent of respondents agree that sexual violence is the most prevalent, about 25.5 per cent agree that psychological violence is the most pervasive, and 21.7 per cent agree that physical violence is the most prevalent in tertiary institutions, respectively (Ajibola, 2023). Moreover, the recent suspension of a Dean at the University of Calabar, following multiple reports by female law students accusing him of sexual harassment, exemplifies the urgency of addressing the systemic issue of GBV within tertiary education institutions. Such incidents undermine the academic environment and perpetuate a culture of fear and vulnerability among female students, inhibiting their ability to learn and grow without the fear of harassment. It is imperatives to examine the causes of sexual harassment in institutions in Nigeria.

Purpose of the study

This purpose of this paper is to examine the causes of sexual harassment in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. The specific objective include;

1. To find out the causes of sexual harassment in tertiary institutions in Nigeria

Research Questions

The following research question was formulate to guide the paper;

1. What are the causes of sexual harassment in tertiary institutions in Nigeria?

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of a topic refers to the underlying concepts, theories, and ideas that guide the research or analysis of that topic. In the case of sexual harassment, there are several theoretical frameworks that can be applied:

1. Feminist Theory: This framework views sexual harassment as a manifestation of gender inequality and power imbalances. It emphasizes the social, cultural, and political factors that contribute to harassment and seeks to address broader issues of gender discrimination.

2. Social Learning Theory: This framework focuses on how individuals learn behaviors through observation and imitation. It suggests that individuals may learn and imitate sexually harassing behaviors if they are exposed to others engaging in such behavior.

3. Power and Control Theory: This framework posits that sexual harassment is fundamentally about power and control. It emphasizes the ways in which harassers use their position or authority to assert power over others and maintain dominance.

4. Organizational Theory: This framework examines how organizational structures, policies, and cultures can either enable or deter sexual harassment. It explores factors such as work environment, power dynamics, and accountability mechanisms within institutions.

Literature Review

Sexual harassment is a form of anti-social practices that involves gender discrimination and unwelcomed sexual advances from both male and female. Sexual harassment is an act or actions that promotes unwelcomed sexual advances from both male and female. Sexual harassment is sexual advance from both male and female that are not socially and willingly accepted by the person. Forms of Sexual harassment includes; making conditions of employment or advancement dependent on sexual favors, either explicitly or implicitly, Physical acts of sexual assault, Requests for sexual favors., Verbal harassment of a sexual nature, including jokes referring to sexual acts or sexual orientation. Sexual harassment involve any form of unwanted verbal communication, non-verbal communication, or physical contact in any place.

According to Willness (2007), sexual harassment is a form of gender discrimination that involves unwelcomed sexual advances, requests for sexual favors and non-verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature. It can be further explained as educational discrimination consisting of unwelcomed verbal or physical conduct directed at a student because of her sex. It can be concluded that anyone who deliberately or repeatedly makes unwelcomed verbal comments, gestures or physical contact of a sexual nature is engaging in a sexual harassment. Sexual harassment is described as unwanted sexual advances, requests for sexual favours, and other verbal or physical conducts of a sexual nature, when submission to or rejection, explicitly or implicitly affects a person's employment or education, unreasonably interferes with a person's work or educational performance, or creates an intimidating, hostile or offensive working or learning environment (Omonijo, Uche, Nwadiafor and Rotimi, 2013).

The Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS, 2013) described the effects of sexual harassment in the following ways: The victims usually suffer the highest personal costs, although the perpetrators and even observers can also be harmed if harassment is allowed to go uncontrolled. Few people who have not experienced it personally understand the distress and even terror sexual harassment can cause. Most women experience it as an insult, that undermines their self-confidence and thus also their personal effectiveness. It may also undermine their trust in men and in people in authority. In the case of women who were sexually abused as children or as adults, another negative experience can cause serious psychological damage.

According to Okeke (2011), sexual harassment takes many dimensions. It ranges from sexual comments, jokes, gestures, touch and pinched in a sexual way. In all the cases, girls reported more serious and negative impacts on their school performance than the boys. These impacts included difficulty in concentration, fear, lowered self-esteem and lower grades. She went further to state that

sexual harassment has posed a tremendous challenge to African women both in the workplace and educational setting, and this problem has affected their effectiveness in their various academic fields.

In the view of Okeke (2011), female students in Nigerian colleges and universities have unique experiences of sexual harassment from male faculty, staff, and peers. Though sexual harassment is a global concept that affects virtually women of all races, ages, and colours, Nigerian women experience more elusive types of harassment. In other countries or cultures, sexual harassment is a behaviour that is generally unacceptable in any public setting. Nigerian society does not accept the concept of harassment and so does not perceive harassment as evil or a violation of women's right.

Also, Houreld (2006) found that 80% of women in Nigerian higher education institutions reported sexual harassment as their greatest challenge in the successful completion of their academic goals. Adedokun (2004) and Ejiogu and Onyene (2006) found that about 86% of male faculty and staff in the sampled universities in Nigeria have sexually harassed female students at one point in their teaching career. It is imperative to examine the causes of sexual harassment in tertiary institutions in Nigeria

Perpetrators of sexual harassment in educational institutions cut across all the stakeholders. Study by Ajibola, (2023) disclosed that perpetrators cut across male students, academic staff, administrative staff, security staff, intimate partners, and even male community members, including transport workers. The three types of sexual harassment according to Damore law (2020) include;

Verbal Sexual Harassment

Verbal sexual harassment involves saying anything of a sexual nature to someone who is an unwilling recipient. If someone else says something to you that is either explicitly sexual or sexually-suggestive, and if what they say makes you uncomfortable, then you may be a victim of sexual harassment. Examples of verbal sexual harassment include: Requesting sexual favors, Expressing a desire for sexual contact or conduct, Using sexually-explicit language, Telling sexual jokes, Commenting on a person's appearance AND Speaking in a sexual tone. Using sexually-suggestive nicknames or terms of endearment. Not every sexually-charged comment rises to the level of sexual harassment, and the perpetrator's intent can be a factor in some cases (e.g., if someone tells a sexual joke believing that it will be found funny, not offensive). However, there is a line that can be easily crossed; and, for individuals who feel that they have been victimized by verbal sexual harassment, it is important to consult with an attorney promptly.

Non-Verbal Sexual Harassment

Non-verbal sexual harassment is any form of unwanted sexual communication or conduct that involves something other than verbal speech but falls short of physical sexual contact. This includes sending emails and text messages that are sexually explicit or otherwise sexual in nature, as well as acts such as: Exposing oneself, Blocking a hallway or doorway, Blowing kisses or winking, Showing sexually-explicit videos and Staring, following, or stalking. A single act of non-verbal sexual harassment will not necessarily give rise to a legal claim – although it is a possibility, depending on the circumstances involved. If you have any evidence (e.g., an email or text message), you should keep it to share with your attorney; and, if anyone saw what happened, he or she could serve as an important witness in your sexual harassment case as well.

Physical Sexual Contact

Unwanted physical contact is considered either sexual harassment or sexual assault, depending on the severity of the encounter. Examples of physical contact that can constitute sexual harassment, or that can blur the line between sexual harassment and sexual assault, include: Any form of unwanted touching, Patting, grabbing, rubbing, or pinching and Hugging or kissing.

Methodology

This paper examined causes of sexual harassment in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. Secondary data from different sources were employed for the paper. The paper employed content analysis to analyze all literatures collected. Only those relevant to the topic were systematically selected. Exploratory method was adopted in the analysis. To ensure the reliability and validity of the study, multiple secondary sources were used to minimize the risk of error. The secondary data were collected directly from textbooks, journals, articles, newspapers and other local and international publications on sexual harassment in tertiary institutions.

Discussion on Causes of Sexual Harassment in Tertiary Institutions in Nigeria

Lack of Proper Sexual Harassment Policy

The causes of sexual harassment in tertiary institutions in Nigeria can be linked to lack of sexual harassment policy or law in some tertiary institutions. Premium times' findings of (2020) revealed that many Nigerian higher institutions only have scanty policy documents which make provisions to fight against sexual offences on their campuses. Policy documents on sexual harassment define the rules of engagement between lecturers, university administrators and students of the university. A survey by World Bank Group women Business and law (2028) revealed that 70 per cent of female graduates from Nigerian tertiary institutions have been sexually harassed in school, with the main perpetrators being classmates and lecturers. The report also disclosed that "There are no laws on sexual harassment in the workplace. In 123 countries, there are no laws on sexual harassment in education. In Africa, 36 of the 47 countries with data do not have laws penalizing sexual harassment in this area." Funmi Ayeni, (2020) the Director of Research, M&E and Learning at Stand To End Rape Initiative (STER), blamed school authorities for not having potent policies on how to combat sexual harassments on their campuses. She said: "lack of comprehensive knowledge on the nature and impact of sexual harassment, the lack of clearly defined policies that prohibit sexual harassment and procedures that outline reporting practices and disciplinary measures, the power differential between students and faculty members/staff and the absence of adequate resources to support the implementation of effective policy processes are factors responsible for the prevalence of sexual harassment in tertiary institutions."

Poor Implementation

Another causes of sexual harassment in tertiary institutions in Nigeria is poor implementation of sexual harassment or laws by institutions that as such laws in place. Premium time (2020) findings across over 20 Nigerian universities, polytechnics and colleges of education revealed that many of the higher institutions in the country have either scanty or no policy documents on sexual harassment. Although few of them have such but hardly implement the policies, Premium time report that institutions such as the University of Ibadan, University of PortHarcourt, Federal University of Agriculture Abeokuta, University of Calabar, Federal University of Technology, University of Ilorin, Federal University of Technology, Minna, National Open University of Nigeria, University of Lagos and Bayero University of Kano have detailed sexual harassment policies, students say there are no proper implementation of the policies. Students across the aforementioned universities told our correspondent that the sexual harassment policies are only written on papers, they are hardly implemented.

Academic Power

The causes of sexual harassment in tertiary institutions in Nigeria can also be linked to academic power. Academic power in such of power over marking of students scripts by the lecturers,

Supervision of projects and power of allocating facilities in tertiary institutions. Funmi Ayeni, (2020) explained how authorities take advantage of the terrible conditions of schools to extort and harass students sexually. She said: “So, we have someone who is a Dean or Sub-dean who has access to whether you get accommodation or not, he has access to your exam script and result and basically everything that has to do with you in school and that really puts female students at a terribly disadvantaged position. That also means they are your mercy and that power often is abused. “So when that power is abused we have sex for grade culture, sex for hostel, sexual harassment and sometimes even rape. These are the things that put female students at a huge disadvantage.

Culture of Silence

Culture of silence in the tertiary institutions is another major causes of sexual harassment in tertiary institutions in Nigeria The culture of silence refer to a situation were victims of sexual harassment keep quiet and refuse to report to any legal authorities. Culture of silence implies a social force that prevent a victim of a sexual harassment to expose the harassers by reporting the case to authority. The culture of silence is the chain that has kept many women under the bondage of sexual and domestic violence. From time, women have been groomed to be silent and bear the pain of violence perpetuated against them. Okon (2018) observed that culture of silence is the attitude that equates masculinity to sexual dominance. These things, regardless of how random they seem are contributing factors to the culture of silence. They give entitlement to the perpetrators of these crimes and again play a humongous role in the number of assaults that go unreported. Creating a stigma of shame for survivors who want to share their stories contributes to the number of victims who remain silenced and add a private and very misplaced shame to their suffering. The unfortunate reality is that we live in a society where sexual abuse has been normalised, it is important that collective voices against the culture of silence outweigh everyone else. As a society we must learn that anyone can be a victim and anyone can be a perpetrator, we must learn to stop condoning our own collective silence, which gives power to abusers,” she added.

Faith and Ada represent many Nigerian women and girls who have been abused domestically and sexually by people they trusted the most. The culture of silence is the societal prison that many Nigerian women find themselves trapped in. Human Rights Watch (2001) reported that the government and school authorities in Nigeria were found to be silent about the sexual harassment experienced by female students in the country. A study by Ajibola, (2023) indicated that 92.5 per cent of respondents said they have never reported any case of gender-based violence and (7.5%) who reported and never got action or justice against perpetrators is a pointer to a culture of silence.

Indecent Dressing

Tertiary institutions globally is faced with the problems of social issues emanating from students. One of these social problem is the problem of indecent dressing. Many tertiary institutions in Nigeria are daily facing the problem of indecent dressing (Sarkinfa, & Rabo, 2022; Ogunode et al 2023). (Onyike, 2019) maintained that educational institutions of learning in Nigeria have been bedeviled with indecent dressing particularly by female students. Most girls go bare, display their navels and boobs and wearing whatever to display size and shape of their private parts. It appears now that to be fashionable, one has to become half nude, dressed in sleeveless/see-through tops without bra. Sarkinfa & Kyari, (2022) and Ogwo (2022) noted that it is without any iota of doubt to say that these provocative manner of dressing common especially among our female students is giving rise to the high rate of sexual harassment noticeable on campus. That is not to make excuses for the culprits but just looking at the other side to the coin. Ndukwe (2022) observed there is actually no reason why tertiary institutions should toy with indecent dressing which trigger sexual harassment. Female dress to expose their breasts, navels, buttocks, etc; and the male counterparts

who dress to expose their chests, muscles, and pants. ICIR indicated that the survey focused on six institutions including University of Lagos, Lagos State University, Yaba College of Technology, Lagos State Polytechnic, Federal College of Education Akoka, and Adeniran Ogunsanya College of Education Ijanikin. A total number of 1,642 respondents, all aged 18 years and older, were interviewed. The findings revealed that 63 percent of polled students said inappropriate and indecent dressing is a leading factor to rape and sexual harassment on campuses. According to a survey by the International Center for Investigative Reporting (ICIR) in 2019 conducted across six tertiary institutions in Lagos State most students believed that indecent dressing is responsible for prevalence in rape and sexual abuse on campuses. A study by Eduproject (2020) indicated that poverty (55%), provocative dressing (20%), and lust from male lecturers (12%) were the main reasons for sexual harassment in educational institutions in Nigeria.

Lack of Confidential Reporting Mechanisms

Most tertiary institutions in Nigeria do not have confidential reporting mechanisms, support services, and awareness campaigns aimed at preventing and addressing sexual harassment on campuses. The nonexistence of these confidential reporting mechanisms as contribute to more sexual harassment cases in Nigerian tertiary institutions. Ogunrotimi (2023) disclosed that sexual harassment on campuses and sexual violence are mainly attributed to lack of a comprehensive anti-sexual harassment policy, lack of confidentiality-driven reporting channels and poor institutional response.

Findings

After critical analysis of data available in this paper, the paper discovered that lack of proper sexual harassment policy, poor implementation, academic power, culture of silence, indecent dressing and lack of confidential reporting mechanisms are major causes of persistence sexual harassment in Nigerian tertiary institutions.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper discussed causes of sexual harassment in Nigerian tertiary institutions. The paper concluded that lack of proper sexual harassment policy, poor implementation, academic power, culture of silence, indecent dressing are major causes of persistence sexual harassment in Nigerian tertiary institutions.

Based on tis findings, the paper hereby recommended the following:

1. The President of Nigeria should ascent to Sexual Harassment Bill passed by the Nigerian Senate in July 2020.
2. Tertiary institutions in Nigeria should develop sexual harassment policies and ensure effective implementation. Tertiary institutions should also develop clear policies and procedures that define and prohibit sexual harassment in educational environments and specify the process through which students can seek remedial actions when such incidents occur. Schools should also develop and widely disseminate comprehensive information on students' rights and resources.

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