

ASSESSING INCIDENTS OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT AMONG THE TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS IN LAGOS STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

The study was undertaken to assess the incidents of Sexual Harassment among the tertiary institutions in Lagos State, Nigeria. The participants in the study comprised 300 students (150 males and 150 females) and 90 (45 males and 45 females) members of staff, multi stage sampling technique was adopted. Tertiary institutions in Lagos State was stratified into 3 strata using the three major tertiary institutions (Universities, Polytechnics and Colleges of Education), 130 participants were randomly selected in each of the stratum. Incidents of Sexual Harassment Rating Scale (ISHRS) was developed and administered to the participants, three research questions were raised to guide the study, descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. Descriptive statistics was used for data analysis; there was high (75.6%) prevalence of Sexual harassment in major tertiary institutions in Lagos State. Findings revealed the Colleges of Education (90.8%) had the highest level of sexual harassment in major tertiary institutions in Lagos State followed by the University (84.6%) with the Polytechnic having the least (44.6%) level of sexual harassment. It was recommended that management of tertiary institutions should develop policy statements indicating intolerance of sexual harassment and also create an accessible procedure for complaints.

Keywords: Assessing, Incidence, Sexual harassment, Tertiary institutions

Introduction

In the past, Sex was regarded as sacred subject that was rarely discussed in public among African intergenerational lines precisely in Nigeria. However, the trends suddenly changes as a result of public enlightenment and recent inclusion of sex and sex education in the junior secondary school curriculum. This has brought a better dimension to the subject among the teenagers and adolescents. Despite sex education in various settings of human endeavour, sexual harassment has become a generational issue and this has led to a crime of immoral act which is punishable under the law (Moughalu, 2023). In Nigerian tertiary institutions, sexual harassment is a tropical issue as a result of the frequent complaints by students in different institutions of higher learning and this act has assumed a dangerous dimension in the tertiary educational system hence, this can no longer be ignored, otherwise the trends can jeopardize not only the future of education but that of the nation at large.

In 2018, a court in Osun, southwestern Nigeria, sentenced a University Lecturer Richard Iyiola Akindele to two years in prison for sexual harassment. At the time, this ruling was seen as a significant step towards combating sexual harassment on campuses in Nigeria but five years on, similar allegations surfaced at the University of Calabar, where law students accused their Dean, Cyril Ndifon, of sexual harassment. Despite his denial, the University authorities suspended him and a panel established by the institution concluded the charges were true. Ndifon is currently on trial for these allegations. There are numerous reports of university Lecturers demanding sex in return for favourable grades. However, the true scale of the problem is often obscured due to under reporting, fear of retaliation, stigma and the lack of safe reporting tools. A World Bank report found that 70% of female graduates in Nigeria have experienced sexual harassment, mostly from lecturers and classmates. In the past five years, at least 39 Lecturers have been indicted or dismissed for such misconduct. Several cases of this nature go unreported because victims fear victimisation and stigmatisation within the University (Linus, 2024).

Newman (2021) defines sexual harassment conduct consists of verbal or physical violation of sexual attempt imposed on the basis of sex, that denies limits or provides different treatment. Ayantola (2021) asserted that sexual harassment include: physical assaults, physical touching of any kind that is sexual in nature; direct or implied threats that submission to sexual advances capable of influencing employment, work status, promotion, grades or letters of recommendation or that rejection of sexual advances may produce a negative effect; subtle pressure for sexual activity, such as repeated, or unwanted staring, pattern of conduct that tends to bring discomfort/humiliation which may include comments of sexual nature or sexually exploits, jokes, statements, questions or antidotes; and a pattern of conduct, which may include unnecessary touching, patting, hugging or brushing against a person's clothing or body. In a similar definition, Ogunbameru (2022) sees sexual harassment as unwanted sexual advances, request for sexual favour or other verbal or physical conduct which makes submission to or rejection of such conduct either explicit or implicit basis for employment or academic decision affecting the individual. Almost all definitions indicate a general agreement that sexual harassment is all about a range of behaviours from physical assault to verbal innuendoes as well a verbal and physical threats. Kefas (2020) affirmed that sexual harassment usually has devastating effects on the victims which include poor academic performance, loss of self-confidence, negative health outcomes thereby making victims in some cases less productive. Makinde (2020) also concluded that sexual harassment makes the victims uncomfortable, undermines the integrity of the work or academic environment thereby prevents the victims of achieving their maximum potential as a result of feelings of being despondent, dirty, guilty, ashamed, unsafe and angry with their environment. Akpan (2022) also corroborated that such intimidating and hostile environment created as a result of sexual harassment prevents victims to attain maximum productivity.

Sexual harassment is a pervasive and debilitating issue that affects individual in various settings, including educational institutions. This incidence has been reported to be particularly high in tertiary institutions where students are vulnerable to exploitation and abuse by lecturers, staff, and fellow students. Despite efforts to address this menace, sexual harassment remains a significant problem in Nigerian tertiary institutions, with severe consequences for the physical, emotional, and academic well-being of students. The lack of effective implementation of policies, inadequate reporting mechanisms, and a culture of silence and impunity have significantly contributed to the persistence of this crime. On the basis of these challenges. This

paper therefore seeks to investigate the incidence of sexual harassment among the tertiary institutions in Lagos State, Nigeria.

Purpose of the Study

The General purpose of the study is to assess the incidence of sexual harassment among tertiary institutions in Lagos State, Nigeria. However, the specific objectives are as follows:

1. To ascertain the extent of sexual harassment among the tertiary institutions in Lagos State
2. To determine what percentage of sexual harassment by the types of tertiary institutions in Lagos State.
3. To assess the levels of sexual harassment by gender of individuals in tertiary Institutions in Lagos State.

Research Questions

The following research questions were raised and answered in the study.

- What is the extent of sexual harassment among the tertiary institutions in Lagos State?
- What is the percentage of sexual harassment by the types of tertiary institutions in Lagos State?
- What is the level of sexual harassment by gender of individuals in tertiary Institutions in Lagos State?

Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The population of the study comprises all the tertiary institutions in Lagos State. The sample of the study comprises 390 participants (300 students and 90 members of staff). There are three government Universities in Lagos State, two government Polytechnics and two government Colleges of Education, one tertiary institutions was randomly selected in each of the three major tertiary institutions in Lagos State (Universities, Polytechnics and Colleges of Education) and 100 students (50 male and 50 female) and 30 members of the staff (15 male and 15 female) were randomly selected in each of the three selected tertiary institutions. The researcher developed incidence of sexual harassment rating scale (ISHRS), the developed instrument was validated using test retest method after three weeks interval and reliability coefficients of 0.79 was obtained using correlation analysis and this was considered good for the study. The validated instrument was administered to the 390 participants and was retrieved, scored and subjected to descriptive analysis.

Results

- **Research Question 1: What is the extent of sexual harassment among the tertiary institutions in Lagos State?**

Table 1: Extent of sexual harassment in tertiary institutions

		Agreed		Disagreed	
		Number	%	Number	%
Students	300	230	76.7	70	23.3
Staff	90	65	72.2	25	27.8
Total	390	295	75.6	95	24.4

Table 1 indicates that 76.7% of tertiary institution students agreed that sexual harassment do occurs in tertiary institutions and 72.2% of the staff agreed on the same while 75.6 of all the participants confirmed the occurrence of sexual harassment in their various institutions.

Research Question 2: What is the percentage of sexual harassment by the types of tertiary institutions in Lagos State?

Table 2: Percentage of occurrence of sexual harassment by types of tertiary institutions in Lagos State.

Institution type	Agreed		Disagreed		Total
	Number	%	Number	%	
University	110	84.6	20	15.4	130
Polytechnics	58	44.6	72	55.4	130
Colleges of Education	118	90.8	12	9.2	130

The result shown in table 2 indicates the occurrence of sexual harassment based on the types of Institution. The highest response is from Colleges of Education with 90.8% agreed to the occurrence, followed by Universities which is 84.6% and the least is the Polytechnics with 44.6% agreed to the occurrence of sexual harassment.

Research Question 3: What is the level of sexual harassment by gender of individuals in tertiary institutions in Lagos state?

Table 3: Level of sexual harassment by gender

	University		Colleges of Education		Polytechnics		Total
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	
Male students	38	76	30	60	25	50	93(62.%)
Female students	38	76	43	86	18	36	99(66%)
Male staff	04	26.7	05	33.3	03	20	12(26.7%)
Female staff	08	53.3	09	60	08	53.3	25(55.5%)
Total Agreed(229)	88	67.7	87	66.9	54	41.5	

The result shown in table 3 indicates that 229 representing 58.7% out of the 390 participants agreed that sexual harassment is prevalent in their tertiary institutions. 62% of male students agreed that sexual harassment across types of institutions while 66% of the female students agreed to the same, only 26.7% of the male staff agreed that prevalence of sexual harassment often occur in tertiary institutions but high percentage of 55.5% among female staff agreed to prevalence of sexual harassment in tertiary institutions in Lagos State.

Discussion

Research Question 1: what is the extent of sexual harassment among the tertiary institutions in Lagos State? It was evident that 75.6% of the participants concurred to the prevalence of sexual harassment in tertiary institutions in Lagos State with few percentages of 24.4% had contrary submission. This revelation aligned with the findings of Newman (2021) who states that high prevalence of sexual harassment exists in senior secondary schools. The findings of Ogunbamerun (2022) slightly differs, but agreed that sexual harassment prevalence is of high magnitude of 55.5% among female staff of the tertiary institutions.

Research Question 2: What is the percentage of sexual harassment by the types of tertiary institutions in Lagos State?

It was revealed that Colleges of Education had 90.8% in agreement to the occurrence of sexual harassment, followed by the university with 84.6% while polytechnic had the lowest percentage of 44.6%. This finding concurred with the findings of Akpan (2022) which states that Universities and Colleges of Education ranks high in sexual harassment and further submitted that the polytechnic had the least, he adduced his submission to the fact that there is gender imbalance in the polytechnics with male predominantly had higher population than female counterparts. Lewis (2024), however found contrary view and stated that sexual harassment prevalence in tertiary institutions is higher in polytechnic institutions due to higher ratio of male to their male counterparts.

Research Questions 3: What is the level of sexual harassment by gender of individuals in tertiary Institutions in Lagos State?

Table 3 shows that 124 of female participants representing 54.1% of all the female participants reported being harassed at their various institutions, while only 45.9% of the male participants agreed that there is prevalence of sexual harassment in tertiary institutions in Lagos State. The female students had the highest prevalence of sexual harassment with 99 percent while the male staff had the lowest sexual prevalence of 26.7%, this revelation is in alignment with findings of Makinde (2020) who found that significant percentage of female participants have experienced sexual harassment. Ibiwole (2021) also corroborated the findings of Makinde (2020) that prevalence of sexual harassment is of high level among female students compared to male counterparts.

The findings also revealed high prevalence of sexual harassment of 55.5% among the female staff compared to 26.7% among the male staff counterparts. These findings concurred with the submission of Linus (2024) who opined that female irrespective of their status are vulnerable to sexual harassment.

Conclusion

In the light of preceding discussions, the following conclusions are made;

1. There was a high (75.6%) prevalence of sexual harassment in major tertiary institutions in Lagos State.
2. The Colleges of Educations (90.8%) had the highest level of sexual harassment in Lagos State tertiary institutions followed by the University (84.6%) with the Polytechnic having the least (44.6%) level of sexual harassment.
3. Female participants and female staff participants had significant high percentage of 54.1% and 55.5% respectively while the male counterparts had 45.9% and 26.7% for male participants and male staff participants respectively.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are put forward for consideration.

1. The Management of tertiary institutions should develop policy statement indicating intolerance for sexual harassment and also create an accessible grievance procedure for victims.
2. The counseling Centre of every tertiary institution should be fortified for conducive guidance and counseling especially at the Colleges of Education and the Universities.
3. Female students and staff should be re-orientated on self-esteem, confidence and competence in every of their responsibilities.

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