

SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND ASSAULT ON FEMALE STUDENTS IN SOME TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS IN EKITI STATE: IMPACT ON EMOTIONAL STABILITY

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Abstract

The rate of sexual harassment against female students in Nigeria tertiary institutions is becoming increasingly worrisome. Sexual abuse is a universal public health problem that is experienced across all cultures, social class et cetera. However, this act has great impact on the emotional stability of these victims. But fear of stigmatisation and avoidance has hindered many victims from pressing charges against the culprits giving the crime a deeper root particularly in this part of the world. The objective of this study therefore is to examine the emotional stability or instability of students who have been sexually abused in some selected tertiary institutions in Ekiti State. Primary and secondary sources of data collection were applied in this study. The study made use of descriptive survey design with structured Likert scale questionnaire administered to 396 students randomly selected across three tertiary institutions in Ekiti State. The hypothesis of this study was analysed using simple linear regression as statistical technique with the aid of SPSS version 22.0 for Windows. The findings of the study showed that sexual harassment of female students exerts statistically significant negative effects on emotional stability of the victims. In conclusion, sexual harassment of whatever dimensions exerts severe consequences on mental health of victim. In the light of the lingering effects of the vice on the victim's mental health, counseling units should be established across all tertiary institutions with professional caregivers employed to provide listening ears to helpless victims as well as succor to their predicament.

Keywords: Sexual Harassment, Female Students, Tertiary Education, Emotional Trauma, Therapy.

Introduction

For a very long time, sexual harassment has been a serious problem faced by womenfolk at workplaces and other places including schools. Harassment and assault take different forms. It may be a case of sexual advances, physical or emotional (Alessandri *et al.*, 2018). It may as well be in direct request of sexual activities by gesture or words (Hejase, 2015). The issue has become the order of the day in our tertiary institutions as mainly make lecturers bask in the aura of their power to satisfy their lustful desires on female students with unspeakable impunity (Chowdhury *et al* 2019). These culprits often hide under the protection of their cliques to perpetuate the evil acts knowing that if such cases are reported, they would only be swept under the carpet by the authorities of the institutions. Things are however taking different turn now as the school authorities nationwide are seriously frowning at the act and

relentlessly clamping down the bad eggs among lecturers (Mushtaq *et al* 1978; Philips *et al*, 2019).

Though the issue of sexual harassment is not limited to the African continent, the menace seems to gain so much ground among the black race. This is, perhaps, due to the loose judicial system and poor management practices in our tertiary institutions (Young and Hegarty, 2019). More lecturers engage in the act simply because several others have made it scot-free without being punished by the law in the past (Sivertsen *et al.*, 2019). The school authorities have no established punitive mechanisms against perpetrators of the act, not even proven checks and balances to checkmate the vice or nip it at the bud. This poor system has enhanced the spread of the scourge like wildfire.

The impact of sexual harassment on the wellbeing of the victim is inexplicable. Schneider *et al* (1997) affirm that sexual harassment is increasingly recognized as a stressor with serious consequences for everyone in the society. A number of the victims experience both physical and emotional symptoms which adversely affect their perception, relationship and sense of reasoning (Crull, 1982; Schneider *et al.*, 1997). The cost of enduring sexual harassment especially in youths and young adults may be both physical and psychological which includes a range of manifestations like humiliation, degradation, shame, embarrassment, guilt, intimidation, frustration, a sense of hopelessness, depression, emotional breakdown to mention but a few. Effects of sexual harassment does not end with the immediate victim as it tends to ripple towards the family and society thereby affecting the economy at large (Suhaila, 2012).

Despite the overarching effects of the heinous crime on the victims and the society, only few cases are being reported (Anderson, 2016). Victims are afraid of reporting to appropriate authorities for fear of stigmatisation or victimisation (Mackinnon, 1979). It could be recalled that a lecturer in the department of management and accounting, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile Ife, Professor Richard Akindele was accused of involvement in sex-for- marks scandal against a female postgraduate student of the institution in September 2017 .The act was exposed by the covert audio recording of the conversation between the randy lecturer and the student where he demanded sex for five times for the student to be awarded marks. The case which was prosecuted by the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) gained global attention in November 2018 when the dismissed lecturer was arraigned in court. He was subsequently jailed for two years.

In June 2019, another lecturer in the Department of Accounting, Ekiti State University was also accused by a female undergraduate student for demanding sexual relationship for marks. In a trending video recording most of the incident, the accused lecturer was seen dragged naked by friends of the student. The case was vehemently reviewed by the disciplinary committee set up by the institution to establish the truth of the accusation. The lecturer was found guilty of the act and was dismissed by the university authority in November 2019. This is because the Nigerian University Commission (NUC) and several civil society groups have canvassed a rigorous clampdown on culprit of such crimes irrespective of status of these lecturers who practice this evil on vulnerable and new female students who are unfamiliar with the institutional system and environment. Such students only play along under minimal

coercion or enticement without bothering to report the menace which tends to go on and on because of the conditions at play (Sivertsen *et al.*, 2019). The victim in such situation languishes in emotional paralysis and may be enslaved for as long the slave master holds her mind in captivity. This is the more reason why sensitisation and awareness should be prioritised on campuses to readily liberate such victims (Anderson, 2016; Howald *et al.*, 2018).

Despite the worrisome rate of increase in reported cases of sexual harassment of female students particularly by lecturers in tertiary institutions across Nigeria, not much has been done empirically to investigate the menace in the country. Most studies on sexual harassment around the world either focus exclusively on harassment of career women by their clients (Gettman, 2003; Suhaila, 2012) or by co-workers at workplace (Hejase, 2015; Hersch, 2018; Howald *et al.*, 2018; Joshi and Nachison, 1996; Muhonen, 2016; Popovich, 1988; Sarpotdar, 2014). It is noteworthy that none of the studies in existing literature particularly addressed the effects of sexual harassment on emotional stability of female students of tertiary institutions especially in Nigeria, as observed from search results available from explored literature databases. This gap in literature has presented institutional and independent decision makers with difficulty in ascertaining the basic contributory factors to the heinous vice of sexual harassment among female students, how to effectively curtail the menace and avert its numerous consequences on the victims and society at large.

Considering the potential evil the issue of sexual harassment causes on the individual and society at large, it has become highly imperative to deeply explore the effect of this heinous act on emotional stability of the victims. This study was therefore carried out among selected female students of selected tertiary institutions in Ekiti State to primarily collect information pertaining to sexual harassment and emotional stability of the students.

Objectives of Study

- To examine the emotional stability or instability of students who have been sexually abused
- To proffer solution to issues of sexual harassment in tertiary institutions

Scope of study

The study is limited to only the tertiary institutions in Ekiti State. This covered students population from three citadels each representing Federal, State and Private cadre of institutions respectively. The institutions purposively selected based on student population as major criteria include Federal University, Oye-Ekiti, Ekiti State University and Afe Babalola University. Besides, the study covered the period between 2016 and 2019.

Methodology

The research employed descriptive survey design with the use of questionnaire as research instrument in order to investigate the effects of sexual harassment on emotional stability of female students in tertiary institutions in Ekiti State, Nigeria. The study data was directly sourced from random respondents (female students) across the selected tertiary institutions in Ekiti State with the aid of five-point Likert scale questionnaire.

The questionnaire and its scales were adapted from previous studies including Skoog and Ozdemir (2016), Fitzgerald *et al.*, (1995) for sexual harassment while the International

Personality Inventory (IPI) developed by Goldberg (1990) was extracted and adopted for emotional stability. The scale items were carefully reviewed while content was professionally modified in order to achieve content validity of the scale. The eventual questions retained on the scale bore direct relevance to emotional stability and sexual harassment. The structured questionnaire was categorised into three sections. Section “A” covered respondents’ demographic profile; section “B” carried data on sexual harassment while section “C” presented data pertaining to emotional stability.

Sexual harassment as empirical concept

The discourse of sexual harassment was acknowledged as a phenomenon as far back as the 1970s and several studies have focused on the topic in relation to several other linked constructs as determinants (Crull, 1982; McDonald, 2012; Popovich, 1988). Extant literatures indicate that issue of sexual harassment goes beyond directing erotic intentions towards the opposite sex within the workplace, academic environment or the society (Anderson, 2016; Hersch, 2018). However, studies show that this kind of harassment mainly aims to derogate and dominate the victim based on gender rather than to have sexual relation (Berdahl, 2007; Mackinnon, 1979). Some researchers make a distinction between sexual harassment and sex-based harassment in order to emphasize the sexist rather than sexual motives that lie behind the behaviour (Schneider *et al.*, 1997).

Even as there is no standard definition for sexual harassment, several scholars have described the act in different grammar. Kapila (2017) describes it as outright use of power, control and domination over the opposite sex. Mackinnon (1979) defines sexual harassment as unwanted sexually oriented behaviour resulting out of unequal power relations at workplace with attendant serious consequences on the employment and performance of women at the workplace. Gender harassment has been defined as verbal and nonverbal behaviours that convey insult, hostile and degrading attitudes towards the opposite sex (Fitzgerald, Gelfand, and Drasgow, 1995).

Though researchers like Dekker and Barling (1998) stressed that sexual harassment has immense impact on the organisation and the society, the authors pointed out that the assault is not exclusive to women alone. In a lot of organisations, including tertiary institutions, men are constantly subjected to sexual assault by their female superiors (Popovich, 1988). Male assault often arises in circumstances when the female is the superior or handler of benefits like the case of supervisor-student relationship in tertiary institutions.

Whatever the nature of sexual harassment in the society today, the victims often find it difficult to report such cases for fear of victimisation (Howald *et al.*, 2018; Quick and Mcfadyen, 2017). This has come to be because of how the society labels survivors of sexual assault. Rather than recognise with such victims of circumstance, people tend to excommunicate them making reflection of the incidence bite even harder on the mind (Boyle, 2017). It was posited that victimization history of a sexual assault victim also has consequences for how a person defines oneself in response to the vice while engaging in sexual activity with an adult before age 14 makes re-identification as a victim four times more likely (Boyle, 2017; Joshi and Nachison, 1996). This association suggests that early and/or repeat victimization may affect how a person perceives herself in relation to a consequent victimization (Mushtaq *et al.*, 2015).

Exposure to sexual harassment has been found to be related to poorer health, well-being and work-related aspects such as job-dissatisfaction (Fitzgerald *et al.*, 1995; Hersch, 2018; Littleton *et al.*, 2018; McDonald, 2012). When it comes to antecedents, the stressful work environment has been pointed out as a common predictor of workplace harassment (Dekker and Barling, 1998). According to earlier studies, women more often report ill effects on health than men do and this seems to apply even among university students (Littleton *et al.*, 2018; Muhonen, 2016). Likewise, evidence abounds that women who have been exposed to sexual harassment show negative academic and social performance in one way or the other (Leskinen, Cortina, and Kabat, 2011).

Emotional Stability and Tertiary Education

In today's academic environment, students are frequently faced with diverse stressors during their academic pursuit. A number of these stressors directly attack their emotional wellbeing and mental balance. Emotional stability is the process in which the personality is continuously striving for greater sense of emotional health, both intra-physically and intra-personally (Goldberg, 1990; Littleton *et al.*, 2018). It has been emphasized that the emotionally stable individual has the capacity to withstand delay in satisfaction of needs, ability to tolerate a reasonable amount of frustration, belief in long term planning and is capable of delaying or revising his expectations in terms of demands of the situations (Smitson, 1974).

Stability is not equal to the fixed nature of psychological qualities and immobility of psychological mechanisms. Development of a personality's psychological stability is the result of interaction between cognitive (intellectual), emotional and behavioural fields of the mind (Joshi and Nachison, 1996). It is an integrated complex of adaptive processes, which provides coherence and stability of performing the main personality qualities and implies sufficient flexibility of their structure (Young and Hegarty, 2019).

Theoretical Framework

This study examined a number of theories relevant to the construct relationship in a bid to explaining the linkage between sexual harassment and emotional stability of students in tertiary institutions, particularly in Ekiti State. The explored theories include; sex role spill over theory, socio-cultural theory and organisational theory.

Sex Role Spill over Theory

Sex roll spill over theory was propounded by Gutek (1985) who stated that women in male dominated work place also experience sex spill over but in different kind sex role and work role are practically identical. These women are treated similarly to other (female) work role occupants who are unaware that their treatment is based on sex role because of this they think the treatment they receive is a function of their job. The job itself is sexualized. This theory is based on the proposition of irrelevant gender-based role expectations that individuals bring to the workplace in guiding their interactions with women. Men hold role perceptions of women based on their traditional role in our culture. When women take jobs outside of these traditional areas to work in the male dominated workplace, men rely on these gender-based expectations when interacting with women therefore, perceiving women in their gender role well over and above their work role. The result of the inappropriate expected role is male

behaviour which is perceived to be sexually harassing. On the other hand, in the female dominated workplace, sex role and work role tend to overlap. Hence, higher level of sexual inappropriate behaviour is not reported. Therefore, men are more likely to sexualize their experiences, including work experiences, and are therefore, more likely to make sexual remarks or engage in sexualized behaviour, thus accounting for the fact that women experience more sexual harassment than men (Gutek and Morasch 1982). This sex spill over theory reveals that women are exposed to sexual harassment at functional places like the work places or schools.

Organizational Theory

Proponents of this theory proposed that one of the central concepts that helps to explain sexual harassment is power (Cleveland and Kurst, 1993). This theory proposes that sexual harassment results from the opportunities presented by power and authority relations which derive from hierarchical structures of organizations (Gruber, 1992). The structural and environmental conditions found at the workplace provide opportunities for harassment or implicitly encourage harassment on the basis of workplace norms, gender bias and imbedded power relations between men and women. Men have traditionally held the organizational power inherent in management and supervisory positions, whereas women are likely to be employed in subordinate positions. Since work organizations are characterized by vertical stratification, individuals can use their power and position to extort sexual gratification from their subordinates. Thus, relating sexual harassment to aspects of structure of the workplace that provide asymmetrical relations between supervisors and subordinates. Therefore, this perspective emphasizes that the structure of organizational hierarchy invests power in certain individuals over others that can lead to abuse. In essence, sexual harassment is all about expression of male power over women that sustain patriarchal relations.

Sources and Collection of Data

Population of this study comprised of female students from selected tertiary institutions in Ekiti State. The respondents were randomly selected from the target population of the study. Population of the study covered the number of students extracted from the registry of the various tertiary institutions in Ekiti State. This covered student population from three citadels each representing Federal, State and Private cadre of institutions respectively. The institutions purposively selected based on student population as major criteria include Federal University, Oye-Ekiti, Ekiti State University and Afe Babalola University. The student population from the institutions was presented in Table 1. The total student population for the study therefore stood at 45,300. This figure covered 11,800 students from Federal University, Oye-Ekiti, 25,000 students from Ekiti State University and 8,500 students from Afe Babalola University.

Table 1: Study Population by institution

| Institution | Cadre | Student Population |
|---------------------------------|---------------------|--------------------|
| Federal University, Oye-Ekiti | Federal institution | 11,800 |
| Ekiti State University | State institution | 25,000 |
| Afe Babalola University | Private institution | 8,500 |
| Total Student Population | | 45,300 |

Source: Institution Registry, 2019

A total sample of 396 respondents (female students) generated from the total population with the aid of Yamane (1973) formula was chosen for this study using random sampling method. This formula was adopted because of its reputation for presenting an unbiased sample from a large population.

For the purpose of this study, both descriptive and inferential statistics were employed to analyse the data. Descriptive statistics like frequency tables and statistical charts were used to present student's demographic information such as age, level, and marital status among others.

Analysis of sourced data was by simple linear regression analysis using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22.0 for Windows. The justification for choosing simple linear regression as inferential analysis tool premised on its reputation for returning output with high degree of accuracy, simplicity of iteration and suitability for predicting relationship between continuous variables.

Study Results and Findings

Reliability and Validity Test

Cronbach alpha test was employed to examine the reliability and internal consistency of the research instrument of the study as this remains one of the most accurate method for measuring reliability of instrument scale. Cronbach alpha with output value for any scale higher than the standard threshold of 0.7 was considered reliable and useable (Nunnally, 1978).

Table 2: Reliability of Variables

| Constructs | n | No. of Items | Cronbach's Alpha |
|--|-----|--------------|------------------|
| Sexual harassment | 396 | 7 | 0.850 |
| Emotional stability | 396 | 10 | 0.753 |
| Total Cronbach's Alpha for Instrument = 0.815 | | | |

Source: SPSS Reliability Analysis Output, 2019

Table 2 showed the results of reliability test conducted on the scales adapted for this study. The 17-item scale, comprising of 2 constructs (variables) has an overall alpha value (α) of 0.815 which surpassed the standard threshold of 0.7 establishing adequacy of the instrument in

achieving desired objectives (Nunnally, 1978). From the results, sexual harassment returned higher reliability coefficient of 0.850 while 10-item-scale emotional stability recorded lower reliability coefficient of 0.753 as indicated on Table 2.

Distribution of Questionnaire

Allocation and Return of Questionnaire

Table 3 described the distribution of questionnaires administered to respondents of this study. Out of a total of 396 administered questionnaires, 383 (indicating 97% return rate) were returned while 13 or 3% were not returned. The researcher therefore made use of the 383 returned questionnaires for analyses purpose.

Table 3: Number of Questionnaire Distributed, Returned and Percentage

| S/N | Institution | No. Distributed | No. Returned | % Returned |
|-------|-------------------------------|-----------------|--------------|------------|
| 1 | Federal University, Oye-Ekiti | 103 | 99 | 96.12 |
| 2 | Ekiti State University | 219 | 212 | 96.80 |
| 3 | Afe Babalola University | 74 | 72 | 97.30 |
| Total | | 396 | 383 | 96.72 |

Source: Author's Field Survey, 2019

Testing of Hypotheses

Regression Analysis of Supply Chain Design and Customers' Satisfaction

Ho: *Sexual harassment and assault on female students in tertiary institutions of Ekiti State does not significantly affect emotional stability.*

Ha: *Sexual harassment and assault on female students in tertiary institutions of Ekiti State significantly affect emotional stability.*

Interpreting regression analysis of sexual harassment against emotional stability from the results on Table 4, the computed value of $R = -0.479$ indicated a fairly negative relationship between the outcome and predictor variables of this study. Likewise, it would be observed from the result of coefficient of determination that sexual harassment was responsible for 24.5% ($R^2 = 0.245$) of variance in emotional stability of students. The regression model showed no trace of multi co-linearity as observed from the Variance inflation factor of 1.000 (Field, 2013). Following this results, the alternative hypothesis of the study was accepted as sexual harassment was found to be statistically significant ($B = -0.441$; $t = 11.479$; $p < 0.05$). The model function could be written as: $ES = 2.012 + 0.441*SA + e$; meaning that for every 1% increase in sexual harassment, there existed 44.1% decrease in emotional stability.

Table 4: - Regression Analysis of Sexual Harassment on Emotional Stability

| Independent Variable: Sexual Harassment | Dependent Variable: Emotional Stability | | | | | | |
|--|---|------------|---------------------------|--------|----------------|-------------------------|-------|
| | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients | T | Sig. (p-value) | Collinearity Statistics | |
| | B | Std. Error | Beta | | | Tol | VIF |
| (Constant) | 2.012 | .183 | | 11.792 | .000 | | |
| Sexual Harassment | -.441 | .041 | .527 | 11.479 | .000 | 1.000 | 1.000 |
| Model Summary: R = -.479; R ² = 0.245; Adjusted R ² = 0.258; F = 131.422; DW = 1.332 where DW = Durbin-Watson, Tol = Tolerance, VIF = Variance Inflation Factor | | | | | | | |

Source: Author's Regression Output, 2019

Discussions and Societal Implications

Influence of Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment has been a serious menace in tertiary institutions of Nigeria for a very long time. Though management and board of most institutions as well as the umbrella bodies of these citadels of learning are making concerted efforts to curb the vice, limited knowledge of its effects on the victims has somehow hindered the effort. Sexual harassment as predictor variable from the regression output showed moderate negative correlation with emotional stability as revealed by the model summary (R² = 24.5%). The implication of this is that sexual harassment of a female student creates negative effects on her emotional stability. Unchecked sequence of sexual harassment on young female student tends to derail her perception of the society, the justice system and her self-worth. This trend adversely redefines the orientation of the victim, hampers trust level and association with others. This makes it imperative to appropriately reintegrate victims of sexual harassment into the society after provision of professional assistance.

The findings of this study were in consonance with those of previous researchers on the subject matter (Boyle, 2017; Muhonen, 2016; Mushtaq *et al.*, 2015; Phillips *et al.*, 2019; Schneider *et al.*, 1997; Sivertsen *et al.*, 2019; Suhaila, 2012). Schneider *et al.* (1997) posit that sexual harassment exerts immense psychological effects on the victims at the workplace and the home front and schools. The author state that low level but repeated sexual harassment creates significant negative emotional consequences for the victim. Likewise, Mushtaq *et al.* (2015) report similar outcome on the discourse. The authors report that sexual harassment is directly responsible for mental health issues such as depression, anxiety and stress among women. (Boyle, 2017) also supports the results in his study by illuminating the relationships between sexual assault, stigmatized identities, and mental health while addressing sociological questions about the cultural meanings and disruption of identities through traumatic interactions. Following the statistical output of the variable relationship (B = -.441; t = 11.479; p < 0.05) the alternative hypothesis (**H_{a1}**) was accepted while the null hypothesis (**H₀₁**) was rejected.

Conclusion

It would be observed from the findings of the study that sexual harassment creates obvious impact on emotional stability of the victim as evident from the analysed responses of the cross-examined students of selected tertiary institutions in Ekiti State. The statistically significant relationship between the constructs shows a fair but negative interaction between sexual harassment and emotional stability. This implies that the higher the level of sexual harassment experienced by a female student, the lower the rating of her emotional stability.

It could therefore be concluded that sexual harassment of whatever dimension exerts severe consequences on the mental health particularly emotional stability of the victim. No matter how mild the form of such sexual abuse, it suppresses the victim's self-confidence as well her level of trust in the opposite sex thereby hindering interpersonal relationships. If unchecked, the effects of this dastardly act may linger for a lifetime.

Recommendations

- The following recommendations were drawn from the findings of this study:
Authorities of tertiary institutions in Ekiti State and Nigeria as a whole should endeavour to promulgate laws that out rightly criminalizes sexual harassment and slam culprits of such crime with serious punishment to serve as deterrent to others.
- Also, in light of the lingering effects of the vice on the victim's mental health, counselling units should be established across all tertiary institutions with professional caregivers employed to provide listening ears to helpless victims as well as succour to their predicament.

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