

CURTAILING SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN TECHNICAL AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Sexual harassment is not peculiar to Nigerians alone, it appears to have established itself as a norm in the society today. Considering its high incidence in our tertiary Institutions, places of employment and places of worship. It has become a contemporary challenge in our higher institutions of learning; hence the need to draw the attention of the public to the cankerworm that is now one of the biggest threats to the development of education and academic excellence in our society. In a bid to curtail the wave of sexual harassment and its concomitant effect; this paperwork is armed at identifying forms of sexual harassments; the multiplying effects on victims and suggesting possible solutions to the problem of sexual harassment.

Keywords: Sexual Harassment, Tertiary Institution, Policy Statement, Mental Re-orientation and Quid Pro Quo.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Sexual harassment in the Nigerian tertiary institutions is not a new phenomenon. Over the years, it has increasingly received widespread attention in the media, consequently resulting in a dramatic increase in public awareness. There has also been several research works carried out to address issues relating to sexual harassment in tertiary institutions.

Sexual harassment is one of the many social vices plaguing our higher institutions of learning as well as the society at large. Hence, there is need to draw the attention of the public to cankerworm that is silently eroding academic excellence in our tertiary institutions. The school system has the responsibility to ensure that it creates a safe and conducive environment for learning for all of its students

This paper examines sexual harassment from a solution focused perspective. It specifically focuses on the definition of sexual harassment, the forms of sexual harassment in tertiary institutions, the effects of sexual harassment on victims; and also offers strategies to curtail sexual harassment in institutions of leaning.

Tertiary Institution

Tertiary Institution, more commonly referred to as post-secondary education, refers to the third place of learning after graduating from high school or secondary school in the Nigerian context. Nigeria is one of the countries with many tertiary institutions in the world. These institutions include universities, polytechnics, monotecnics and colleges of education. Tertiary Institutions have come a long way, in building, guiding and growing intellectuals and reputable leaders who are equipped to drive the change and innovation required for economic growth and development through their intellectual prowess.

Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment is an unwelcome sexual behaviour that is offensive, humiliating or intimidating. It can be written, verbal or physical, and can happen in person or online.

Within the context of an academic environment, sexual harassment can be regarded as enforcing through bullying [or coercion](#), unwelcomed sexual advances, requests for sexual favours, and other verbal or physical sexual advances conduct in exchange for employment, academic performance or better living condition.

It is a very demeaning and inappropriate act, particularly because the perpetrators are authority figures and models to the students who are most often their victims.

Menon et al. (2011) described Sexual Harassment 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.

Sexual Harassment can take the following forms:

- touching, grabbing or making other physical contact with you without your consent
- making comments to you that have a sexual meaning
- asking you for sex or sexual favours
- leering and staring at you
- displaying rude and offensive material so that you or others can see it
- making sexual gestures or suggestive body movements towards you
- cracking sexual jokes and comments around or to you
- insulting you with sexual comments
- Committing a criminal offence against you, such as making an obscene phone call, indecently exposing themselves or sexually assaulting you.

TYPES OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT

There are two key categories of sexual harassment which are "*quid pro quo*" and a *hostile environment*.

Quid Pro Quo

Quid pro quo literally means "this for that" in Latin. Other similar interpretations are: "give and take", "tit for tat", "you scratch my back, and I'll scratch your back." *Quid pro quo* sexual harassment happens when it is stated or implied that an academic performance of a student depends upon whether the student consent to conduct a sexual act.

Hostile Environment

A hostile environment sexual harassment occurs when an unwanted sexual conducts creates an intimidating, threatening or hostile working or learning environment or its severe, persistence or pervasiveness affects a person's ability to participate in or benefit from an academia program or activity. The learning environment is considered hostile, when a staff, does or says something discriminatory that unreasonably interferes with an individual's educational experience or creates an intimidating environment.

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, Menon et al. (2011).

SEXUAL HARASSMENT WITHIN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS

Sexual harassment permeates all levels of education – down to nursery school. Sexual harassment has been in existence in the school system for several years. Hence, sexual harassment is not an emerging trend in Nigerian tertiary institutions. Studies have shown 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 severely under sourced (Beninger, 2013; Lynch, 2013 and Sharma, 2013).

In one survey of female graduates in Nigeria's higher institutions, at least 69.8 per cent said they had been sexually harassed by their lecturers and male classmates. It added that about two-thirds experienced the non-physical sexual harassment (in the form of sexual comments and requests to do something sexual in exchange for academic favours); 48.2 per cent experienced physical sexual abuse. But statistics only scratches the surface of the ugly practice. *Lawal I. (2018)*

Another survey of female undergraduates with a focus on experiences of sexual harassment while in their various tertiary institutions in Nigeria higher institution revealed that the majority (69.8%) of the respondents had been sexually harassed, with the main perpetrators being male classmates and lecturers. About two-thirds experienced the non-physical type of sexual harassment; 48.2% experienced the physical type. Non-physical harassment included sexual comments (57.8%) and requests to do something sexual in exchange for academic favours (32.2%). Physical forms of sexual harassment included unwanted sexual touching (29.4%) and being intentionally brushed against in a sexual way (28.9%). *Owoaje, E.T & Olusola-Taiwo, O. (2011)*

The increasingly wide spread use of social media in Nigeria, has given more women a platform to be more outspoken on their experiences with sexual harassment. Social media trends such as the #MeToo movement where victims share their experiences with sexual harassment has further revealed the prevalence of sexual assault in our institutions and shone light on its silent culture.

EFFECTS OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT

The effects of sexual harassment can be profound, and can range from uncomfortable to severe distress. If unchecked, female students would carry physical, emotional and mental scars that will affect their academic performance and likely their future relationships with the opposite sex which can last for a short or long time.

For victims, being sexually harassed can have demoralizing effects on Physical well-being, Psychological health and education. Psychological effects include: depression, denial, anxiety, shock, anger, frustration, fear, irritability, insecurity, embarrassment, shame, guilt, self-blame, isolation. Physiological effects include: headaches, lethargy, weight fluctuations, nightmares, panic reactions, sexual problems. Effects on education: include absenteeism, withdrawal from school, drop in academic performance due to stress. *North Michigan University (2019)*,

Sexual harassment can also generate a "ripple effect" of negative impact on the overall development of Nigeria itself as a nation in achieving sustainable development.

The issue of sexual harassment is a threat to achieving the girl child education. It has created non conducive and unsafe learning environment for the female students which has promoted slow and uneven progress towards attaining gender equality of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) that it is detrimental to sustainable development. Therefore, it is pertinent to note that sexual harassment is a threatening social phenomenon in the 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. *Mohammed (2017)*

CURTAILING SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN NIGERIAN INSTITUTIONS

The main reason for the continuous perpetuation of this cruel act is the existence of weak mechanisms and redress in tertiary institutions. Unfortunately, sexual harassment weakens the integrity of the ivory towers.

The primary responsibility of curtailing incidences of sexual harassment in tertiary institutions falls on the leaders of these institutions who have the will to rid their campuses of sexual harassment. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the management of all the tertiary institutions in Nigeria to reduce the occurrences of sexual harassment to the lowest possible rate in order to create an environment that is conducive for female students.

2.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 Conclusions

Considering the current rape cases being discussed on media, there is no better time than now for higher institutions to check within and evaluate their current policies and also put corrective and remedial measures in place to curtail this menace. Not only does sexual harassment affects the victims physiologically and psychologically, its ripple effect on sustainable economic development cannot be overlooked. Sexual harassment is a threat to attaining gender equality of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) which is detrimental to sustainable development.

2.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **A clear and comprehensive policy statement on sexual harassment** which should be effectively communicated to all stakeholders including faculty and students. A policy statement on sexual harassment is a documented message from the management to all staff and students expressing the institution's policy, and commitment to prevent and eradicate sexual harassment in order to create a positive and conducive working environment in the organization. The policy statement should come from the top management to ensure its acceptance and compliance. The policy should include at least the following elements:
 - a) **A clear definition of sexual harassment.** A detailed definition is necessary to ensure that faculties as well as the management have a clear idea of conducts that constitute sexual harassment. The main objective of the definition is to make individuals in the institution fully aware of certain conducts and attitudes that can be regarded as unwelcome and offensive to others, and therefore prohibit such conducts in the institution.
 - b) **A complaints/grievance procedure.** Due to the sensitive and personal nature of sexual harassment complaints, the management should put together a separate complaint procedure to deal specifically with sexual harassments related complaints. A complaint procedure should provide for measures to protect victims from further embarrassment in the course of reporting and investigation into the complaint. A complaint procedure should contain at least:
 - a step-by-step procedure for reporting and processing of a complaint with a suitable time limit for each step;
 - an investigation procedure;
 - and an appeal procedure to enable dissatisfied party to appeal against the outcome of an investigation to a higher authority
 - c) **Disciplinary rules and penalties** against the perpetrator and against those who make false accusation. To ensure that the policy and mechanism to prevent sexual harassment is effective, it is essential that offenders be disciplined. The disciplinary rules should set out the penalties to which the offender will be liable if the offence is committed. The nature and type of penalty should depend upon the severity of the offence. To deter false and fabricated accusation against any person, the rule should also set out disciplinary penalties against those who make such accusations.
 - d) **Protective and remedial measures** for the victim. To encourage victims to report sexual harassment, there should be adequate measures to ensure maximum confidentiality so as to minimise embarrassment to the victim especially at the time of reporting and in the course of investigation into the complaint
2. **Prevention is the most effective instrument** that tertiary institutions can use to combat sexual harassment in tertiary institutions. It is not sufficient to simply develop an institutional policy and preventive mechanism on

sexual harassment, the dissemination of the policy among the stakeholders is quite important. This can be done through communication, education and training.

Promotional and educational programmes should be put in place to communicate the institution's policy on sexual harassment and to raise awareness on sexual harassment and its adverse consequences within the learning community. In addition to the need for communication, the institution should provide a programme by which faculties and students can be educated in the area of sexual harassment. The institution should relate issues on how to deal with them as and when they arise. The need for training is particularly more important for those who have been assigned to function as disciplinary panels and counsellors.

3. **Partnerships and Collaborations.** No culture change or education initiative can be implemented successfully, anyway in a silo. These efforts require partnerships and collaboration. Partner with external organizations such as the Mirabel centre. The Mirabel Centre is a Sexual Assault Referral Centre located in Lagos, Nigeria and established to provide holistic and high quality medical and psychological services to survivors of sexual assault and rape.
4. **New students' on boarding course.** New intakes of students at the Tertiary Institutions should also be mandated to complete a general class on sexual harassment during their first semester of school.
5. **The Need for a Mental Re-Orientation:** An effective and lasting solution to this problem is a massive re-orientation of the Nigerian citizenry starting from the family units to the schools, churches and also the media. This way, proper social values such as decent dressing and sexual discretion can be encouraged.
6. Regardless of who is involved as the harasser, it is important that we call out inappropriate behaviours witnessed in the work place. If there are more people calling out inappropriate behaviours, then it is more likely that it would have the effect of shaming intending harassers into checking their behaviours.
7. Policies regarding sexual harassment should be clearly articulated and visible all over the institution to stand as a reminder that sexual harassment of any form will not be tolerated. If all these are done, the high incidence of sexual harassment would be reduced to a level and many people especially the parents will heave a sigh of relief. Ultimately it is up to all of us to come together to change the culture of pervasive sexual harassment in Nigeria, especially in the workplace.

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