

## ORIGINAL RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Sexual Assault against Female Nigerian Students

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## Abstract

Sexual assault is a common social disorder among students in our tertiary institutions. This study ascertains the extent and effect of sexual assault among Nigerian students. Two hundred and Sixty Eight structured questionnaires were distributed to randomly selected students in 4 tertiary institutions, information on socio demography, sexual history and consequences of their exposure were obtained for analysis and interpretation. Thirty seven (13.8%) of the respondents were sexually assaulted as a student and 19 (7.1%) were assaulted by their lecturers and fellow students, Younger age at coitarche, history of forced coitarche, marriage, coitarche with relations and unknown persons, significantly influenced subsequent risks of sexual assault. Improve security, moral behaviours enforcing dress code and stiffer penalties were suggested ways to prevent sexual assault among the students. Sexual assault is still a common finding in our institutions; effort should be made by all stake holders to prevent this social embarrassment (*Afr. J. Reprod. Health* 2010; 14[3]: 189-193).

## Résumé

**Violence sexuelle contre les étudiantes Nigériennes.** La violence sexuelle est un désordre social commun chez les étudiants dans nos institutions tertiaires. Cette étude vérifie l'ampleur et l'effet de la violence sexuelle chez les étudiants nigériens. Deux cent soixante-huit questionnaires structurés ont été distribués aux étudiantes qui ont été sélectionnées au hasard dans quatre institutions tertiaires. Nous avons collecté, analysé et interprété les données sur la socio-démographie, le passé sexuel et les conséquences de leur exposition. Trente-sept (13,8%) des interviewées ont été sexuellement agressées en tant qu'étudiantes et 19(7,1%) ont été agressées par leurs professeurs et leurs condisciples. Le fait d'avoir eu des rapports sexuels à un plus jeune âge, une histoire d'avoir eu un rapport sexuel forcé, le mariage, des rapports sexuels avec des relations et avec des inconnus, ont influencé de manière importante, les risques de la violence sexuelle. Comme manière de prévenir la violence sexuelle à venir parmi les étudiants, nous avons suggéré l'amélioration de la sécurité, du comportement, la mise en application d'un code vestimentaire et des pénalisations plus strictes. La violence sexuelle est toujours commune dans nos institutions. Il faut que tous les intéressés fassent l'effort pour prévenir cet embarras social (*Afr. J. Reprod. Health* 2010; 14[3]: 189-193).

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Key words: Sexual assault, female, students, Nigeria, tertiary institutions.

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## Introduction

Sexual assault is any sexual act performed by one person on another without the persons consent and it includes genital, oral or anal penetration by a part of the accused body or by an object<sup>1</sup>. It may result from force, the threat of force either on the victim or another person, or the victim's inability to give appropriate consent<sup>1,2</sup>. Sexual assault have been described or categorised based on personal relationship as marital, acquaintance, incest and date rape, or legally in terms of age as statutory rape and child sexual abuse<sup>1</sup>. It is a serious violent crime that has no place in any ideal society and no one can justify its prevalence in any community that thrive on mutual trust particularly our tertiary institutions<sup>3</sup>. Our

universities and other tertiary institution are by conception knowledge dissemination centres where knowledge is both brought in and taken out by students as well as teachers and it further inculcate moral values that will influence positive behaviour change to the students in the course of the training<sup>4</sup>. These are the attributes that qualifies student for award of certificates which at graduation ceremonies summarised as found 'worthy both in character and learning'. Equally, not only positive knowledge but negative knowledge and experiences are consciously or subconsciously distributed in both directions which manifest with immoral behaviours as sexual assault. Sexual assault is becoming a common occurrence among students; the vulnerable group were the weak female students which both

the lecturers and fellow male students take undue advantage to abuse. This was facilitated by the degree of freedom of social interaction among young men and women encouraged by the learning environment and lack of parental supervision because they are away from home. In Nigeria, random observation lend credence to higher prevalence of sexual assault in our higher institutions of learning than found in any stratum of our society<sup>5</sup>. True incidences are not accurate because most cases of sexual assault are under-reported by the victims for fear of stigmatisation and reject among colleagues and the society. The females victims were mostly blame for the act, while the culprits are usually left unpunished. Common factors speculated as favouring sexual assault in our institutions are indecent dressing by the females with resultant display of sensual body parts (like breasts, navel and buttocks) through tight and transparent wears popularly referred to as "sexual flashpoints"<sup>2</sup>. This often prompted school authorities to decree against indecent dressings by formulating code of conduct to guide female students. Other reports have implicated insecurity, decay in societal values compounded by violent tendencies among students in form of cult activities and lacklustre attitudes of school authorities toward the culprits who perpetuate such indecent behaviours.

This study was undertaken to determine the prevalence, factors responsible and likely recommendations from their own perspective for prevention of sexual assault among female students in tertiary institutions in Maiduguri, Borno state.

## Materials and Methods

The subjects were randomly selected female students in four tertiary institutions namely University of Maiduguri, Ramat Polytechnic, Borno state school of nursing and midwifery and School of nursing university of Maiduguri Teaching Hospital. Three hundred and sixty eight self administered questionnaires were distributed to randomly selected students in these institutions and information pertaining to their socio demography, sexual history including sexual debut and sexual assault, culprits involved, actions taken towards prevention of the act and likely recommendations made to relevant stakeholders on how to curtail this social nuisance.

### Study Area

Maiduguri metropolitan is the capital of Borno state with an estimated population of 4.6million according to the 2008 census. The accommodating nature of the Kanuris (the predominant tribe in the state) and the ever existing peaceful business environment in the state capital attracts many Nigerian tribes from all over country to pursue their economic and edu-

cational needs. This scenario made Maiduguri more of a cosmopolitan city rather than a regional or tribal state capital. The study population of students in the selected tertiary institutions also reflects the cosmopolitan nature of the state in which almost all tribes and ethnic nationalities were found cordially and mutually pursuing their educational endeavours peacefully. What encourages parents to seek for admissions in these tertiary institutions for their children is also the non dogmatic nature of the authorities in those institutions that allow for unhindered competition for admission space. The three federal institutions (University of Maiduguri, School of nursing University of Maiduguri teaching hospital and Ramat Polytechnic Maiduguri) among the four were more of mini Nigeria state rather than a state or regional local institution. Data was analysed using SPSS package version 11 and Chi square was used for test of significance.

## Results

Total of 268 students spread among 4 tertiary institutions responded to the questionnaires with the age range 16 – 49 years and a mean of 23.4 years. Table 1 illustrates the first sexual and sexual assault history. About 40% of the respondents had their sexual debut before 24 years and in 15 (5.6%) had their first sexual experience before 15 years of age, while only 1 (0.4%) had her first sexual debut above 30 years of age. Corresponding level of education at coitarche occurred in 73 (27.2%) of the students at tertiary level and 49 (18.3%) had theirs while at secondary schools. Among 47 (17.5%) their coitarche was not consensual and their first sexual partners were their husbands in 29.1%, boyfriend in 17.6%, lecturers in 1.5% and the first sexual partners were relation and unknown person among 6 (2.2%) students each. Table 2 explained the small subset of the respondents 37 (13.8%) were assaulted as a students, with 19 (7.1%) assaulted by their lecturers and fellow students, while 18 (6.7%) were sexually assaulted by some one outside their training institutions. The assault was committed at the culprit's venue in 83.8% and 7 (18.9%) occurred at a neutral place as shown on Table 2. Fifteen (40.5%) of the students were assaulted 2- 4 times but only 7 (18.9%) of the victim were assaulted by the same person more than once. More than 60% of those assaulted made some attempts to resist, but 27% did nothing to stop their culprits from the assault. Less than half (46%) reported their ordeal to friends, school authority and parents, while about 54% refuse to report the incident to anyone, majority of these claim they are either shy, afraid and/or forgive their culprits. Physical and psychosexual effects experienced by the victims range from dyspareunia, lack of libido, depression, guilt and afraid of sex. Surprisingly 8 (21.6%) of those that suffered some

**Table 1.** First sexual and sexual assault history.

	number of student's	(%)
<b>Age at coitarhe</b>		
10- 15	15	5.6
16- 19	34	12.7
20- 24	57	21.3
25- 29	14	5.2
>30	1	.4
No response	147	54.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>268</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Level of education at coitarche</b>		
Primary	3	1.1
Secondary	49	18.3
Tertiary	73	27.2
No response	143	53.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>268</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Forced coitarche</b>		
Yes	47	17.5
No	82	30.6
No response	141	51.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>268</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>First sexual partner</b>		
Boy friend	47	17.5
Relation	6	2.2
Husband	78	29.1
Lecturer	4	1.5
Unknown	6	2.2
Not applicable	127	47.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>268</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Number of times assaulted</b>		
1	30	63.8
2	13	27.6
3	2	4.3
4	2	4.3
<b>No of times assaulted by same person</b>		
1	35	74.5
2	10	21.3
3	1	2.1
4	1	2.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>*Place of assault N =47 but with multiple responses</b>		
At persons place	38	80.9
At your own place	19	40.4
Neutral place	5	10.6

\*Multiple response.

psychosexual effects claimed excessive craving for sex, while on the other hand 21.6% expressed an outright hatred for any sexual relationship as illustrated on Table 3. Table 4 explains the relationship between first sexual history and sexual assault. Young age at coitarche and as a student and history

**Table 2.** History of Sexual assault as a student.

	number of student's	(%)
<b>Assault as a student (N = 268)</b>		
No	231	86.2
Some one outside	18	6.7
Lecturer	14	5.2
Fellow student	5	1.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>268</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>*Place of assault as a student (N = 37)</b>		
At persons place	31	83.8
At your own place	19	51.4
Neutral place	7	18.9
<b>No. of times assaulted as student</b>		
1	22	59.5
2	10	27
3	3	8.1
4	2	5.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>No of times assaulted by same person as a student</b>		
1	30	80.1
2	5	13.5
3	1	2.7
4	1	2.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>100</b>

\*Multiple response

**Table 3.** Students reaction to being sexually assaulted (N= 37)

	number	(%)
<b>*Effort made to resist</b>		
Shouted for help	19	51.4
Struggled	12	32.4
Told him to stop it	18	48.6
Did nothing	10	27.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>59</b>	
<b>Reporting of the incident</b>		
Yes	17	46
No	20	54
<b>Total</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>*To whom reported</b>		
School authority	3	8.1
Friend	14	37.8
Did not	20	54.1
Parents	3	8.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>40</b>	
<b>*Why refuse to report (N= 20)</b>		
Shy	13	65.0
Afraid	10	50.0
Forgive	11	55.0
<b>*Physical/psychological effect (N=37)</b>		
Guilt	21	56.8
Afraid	17	46.0

Depress	27	73.0
Excessive craving for sex	8	21.6
<b>*Psychosexual effect (N=37)</b>		
Dyspareunia	18	48.6
Lack of libido	13	35.1
Afraid of sex	13	35.1
Do not enjoy sex	6	16.2
Hatred for sex	8	21.6
No effect	25	67.6

\*Multiple responses.

**Table 4.** Relationship between sexual assault and sexual/social history.

<b>Sexual assault</b>		
<b>Age at coitarche</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
10 – 15	11	4
16- 19	16	14
20- 24	13	39
>30	0	1
	<b>X<sup>2</sup> = 14.54</b>	<b>P= 0.002</b>
<b>Age Sex. Ass. as student</b>		
<20	5	2
20-24	34	27
25-29	8	29
30 +	7	17
	<b>X<sup>2</sup> = 51.045</b>	<b>P= 0.000</b>
<b>Education at coitarche</b>		
Primary	2	1
Secondary	25	20
Tertiary	20	48
	<b>X<sup>2</sup> = 8.55</b>	<b>P= 0.01</b>
<b>Marital status</b>		
Single	40	30
Married	13	44
Widow	1	1
	<b>X<sup>2</sup> = 74.865</b>	<b>P= 0.000</b>
<b>Forced coitarche</b>		
Yes	26	8
No	19	63
	<b>X<sup>2</sup> = 29.569</b>	<b>P= 0.004</b>
<b>First sexual partner</b>		
Boy friend	23	22
Husband	14	47
Lecturer	1	3
Relation	6	0
Unknown	5	1
	<b>X<sup>2</sup> = 35.980</b>	<b>P= 0.000</b>
<b>Duration of study</b>		
<1	4	7
1- 3	40	50
4- 5	10	18
	<b>X<sup>2</sup> = 0.82</b>	<b>P= 0.66</b>

of forced coitarche significantly associated with risks of sexual assault,  $X^2 = 14.54$   $P = 0.002$ ,  $X^2 = 51.045$ ,  $P = 0.000$  and  $X^2 = 29.569$ ,  $P = 0.004$  respectively.

There is significant difference in incidence of sexual assault among married students ( $X^2 = 74.865$ ,  $P = 0.000$ ), compared to those assaulted unmarried. First sexual relationships with unknown persons and relations also has strong associations with sexual assault than husband and boy friends ( $X^2 = 35.980$ ,  $P = 0.000$ ).

The duration of stay as a student in their respective institutions is not statistically significant as also shown on Table 4. The respondents in their own context proffer some common recommendations which were open ended, but summarised to capture their responses as a group. Recommendations to their friends, school authority and governments aim at preventing sexual assault range from decent moral behaviours, enforce dressing codes at schools, and improve the security situations in our campuses and separate schools for boys and girls. Similar recommendations such as soliciting for legislation against sexual assault improve moral teachings during religious preaching's and advocating for stiffer penalties for culprits were the expectations from religious groups and women organisations to help prevent sexual assault among students.

## Discussion

This study reveal a sexual assault prevalence rate of 13.8% among the student though there was observed high non response to some of the sensitive questions, the finding was however similar to earlier reports<sup>6,7,8,9</sup>. Younger age at coitarche and age group less than 25 was observed to have strong relationship with risks of sexual assault this might not be unconnected with dominant male behaviour which tend to take undue advantage of this vulnerable age group. This was collaborated by Briskin et al<sup>10</sup>. From the findings, majority of the sexual assault were committed by someone known to the victim, either lecturer, relation or boy friend this is also in agreement with the reports of the US Justice Department<sup>6,11,12</sup>, and the sexual assault mostly (83.8%) took place in the culprits place. This study also revealed substantial (more than half) under-reporting of cases by victims to appropriate authorities which is in conformity with earlier reports<sup>2,6,13</sup>. This underreporting may not be unconnected with the victim's fear of possible ostracisation and stigmatization by the community as morally deficient and social outcast though she was not the offender. This was similar to earlier observation made by Elegbeye<sup>2</sup>. This study did not established any significance influence of duration of study on the risk of sexual assault, however this is in contrast to findings of Humphrey and White<sup>14</sup> that show increasing trend from 24 - 31% from first year through the fourth year of study. Common psychological effects observed in this study were guilt and depression which was also observed by earlier findings<sup>1,2</sup>.

**Table 5.** Students suggestions on how to prevent sexual assault

	Number	(%)
<b>Recommendations to friends</b>		
Avoid/don't trust men	116	43.3
Decent behaviour/dressing	44	16.4
Report culprits	3	1.2
Early marriage	33	12.3
Self discipline/control	15	5.6
No response	57	21.3
<b>To school authority</b>		
Improve security	37	13.8
Punish culprits	70	26.1
Enforce dressing code	90	33.6
Teach moral education	36	13.4
Separate men/women schools	35	13.1
<b>Recommendation to government</b>		
Enforce stiffer penalties	69	25.7
Assist other stakeholders to fight societal immorality	66	24.6
Separate schools for men/women	81	30.2
Improve security	52	19.4
<b>Recommendation to women group</b>		
Advocate for steeper penalties	57	21.3
Encourage women empowerment	92	34.3
Seek for legislation against assault	69	25.7
Encourage reporting of assault	50	18.7
<b>Recommendation to religious group</b>		
Preach more of moral behaviours	85	31.7
Encourage schools religious group to preach against assault	100	37.3
Solicit for introduction of moral behaviour into school curriculum	83	31.0

Based on this findings of common factors responsible for sexual assault among the student subsequently recommended the following suggestions to curtailed sexual assault, these are enforce dress codes, punishment of offenders, sex education and awareness and stopping of indecent dressings by the female students (Table 5). Similar recommendations have been proffered to the relevant stakeholders (friends, school authority, Government, women and religious groups) in addition to improving security and advocating for legislation against sexual assault were perceived as important steps toward preventing sexual assault among the students.

## Conclusion

Sexual assault is still a common finding in our institutions. Effort should be made by those in position of authority (government and school authority) to improve and guarantee security in our tertiary institu-

tions to realise its statutory role. Efforts should be made to encourage working with men on gender issues and women empowerment which will go a long way towards minimising sexual assaults. And the students on their part should observe a good moral conduct both in behaviour and appearance and also be assertive take control of themselves when an attempt is made to assault them.

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