

## Sexual Harassment and Human Security in Higher Educational institutions in Nigeria

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### **Abstract**

*This paper explores sexual harassment and human security in higher institutions in Nigeria. Section (11) and (12) of the Sexual Harassment Bill of the Federal Government of Nigeria passed by the Senate in July, 2020 states the penalties for sexual harassment in Nigerian Tertiary institutions. The major focus of this paper was to find out the fundamental causes and consequences of sexual harassment on the victims and the learning environment, suggest the way forward to address the issue. Using the Feminism theory, and archival method of data collection, the paper discovered among others that the mission of higher institution as a system dedicated to knowledge production is seriously compromised when the male lecturers, through their incessant sexualized misuse of institutional authority, continually violate the intellectual freedom of female students with impunity. Secondly, that the scale of the threat is trivialized as a result of underreporting of such cases. The paper made the following recommendations based on the findings. 1. Female employees should be protected by legislation against such acts. 2. The management should educate and raise awareness among students and staff at all levels on how to recognize, prevent, and respond to sexual harassment.*

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## **1.Introduction**

Sexual harassment is increasingly reported as social problem of major concern among students and staff in educational institutions across the nation, and has been contributed and still contributing to social and psychological trauma on the victims. Sexual harassment is not new phenomenon in higher institutions globally, it has become an age long tradition that cannot easily be scraped. In various institutions of higher learning, at times the unrepentant evil perpetrators engage both male and female students in the evil act. The issue though, our own focus in the research is on higher institutions of learning but it spreads across every facet of life. In the various homes, house helps are not free, government and non-government establishments the same issue is rearing its ugly head. There are cases of sexual harassments from homes, churches, mosque, etc. To curb this evil act, Section (11) and (12) of the Sexual Harassment Bill of the Federal Government of Nigeria passed by the Senate in July, 2020 states the penalties for sexual harassment in Nigerian Tertiary Institutions as; (11) Any person who commits any of the offences or acts specified in clause 4(1),(2) and (3) of the bill is guilty of an offence of felony and shall, on conviction, be sentenced to an imprisonment term of up to 14 years but not less than 5 years, without option of a fine. (12) Any person who commits any of the offences or acts specified in clause 4(4),(5) and (6) of the Bill is guilty of an offence and shall be liable on conviction to imprisonment term of up to 5 years but not less than 2 years, without option of a fine.

In the opinions of Abdulahi (1997) and Idris et al. (2016) sexual harassment is currently sweeping through Nigeria's tertiary institutions like flood. For instance, Faith based universities, Omonijo et al (2013) had the same line of thought. Sexual harassment is a common form of violence act that can cause enduring psychological harm. Both women and men are at times the targets of such behaviour, but evidence has shown that sexual harassment is primarily aimed at women. It is approximated that 1 in 5 female university students experience some types of sexual assault in North America, but there is no nationally representative data on the scope of the problem in developing nations. The knowledge gap is significant, as experiencing sexual harassment can derail a woman's educational attainment. The University of Michigan defines sexual harassment as unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favours, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature when either:

- The act is made as a condition of an individual's employment, education, and living environment or participation in a University community.
- The acceptance or refusal of such conduct is used as a criterion in decisions affecting an individual's employment, education, living environment, or participation in a University community.
- The act unreasonably affects the individual's employment or academic performance or creates an intimidating, hostile or offensive environment for that individual's employment, education, living environment, or participation in a University community

Here are some of the conducts that constitute sexual harassment: Unwanted sexual statements such as sexual jokes, comments on physical attributes, spreading rumors about or rating others as to sexual activity or performance, talking about one's sexual activity in presence of others and displaying sexually explicit drawings, pictures or written materials. Unwanted sexual statements can be made in person orally, in writing, electronically (email, whatsapp, instant messaging, blogs, web pages, etc.) Unwanted personal attention: Letters, telephone calls, visits, pressure for sexual favors, pressure for unnecessary personal interaction and pressure for dates where a sexual or romantic intent appears evident but remains unwanted. Unwanted physical or sexual advances

touching, hugging, kissing, fondling, touching oneself sexually for others to view, sexual assault, intercourse or other sexual activity. These sexual activities are referred to as sexual harassment if the recipients did not accept it in good faith. If the conduct is based on agreement by both parties involved it is not sexual harassment.

Latcheva (2017) argues that in the European Union member states, between 45 and 55 percent of women corresponding to 100 million women have experienced exposure to sexual harassment during their working lives. In the developed nations especially the United States and the United Kingdom, there is a high level of awareness of the problem of sexual harassment and women willingness to report such. However, despite this high level of awareness, scholars have observed that the majority of women who are abused by such acts that fits legal meaning of sexual harassment and who are traumatized by the experience do not see what has happened to them as sexual harassment (Paludi and Barrickman 1991).

The United Nations Security Management System (UNSMS) Policy on gender consideration in security management was developed to raise awareness and guide security decision makers in evaluating and addressing security related threats, risks and vulnerability of all United Nations personnel, especially those vulnerable. Rape and other forms of sexual abuse has done great harm to our society and the way forward is very thin. The victims of rape are psychologically and emotionally drained and may continue in that condition till they die. Many people had entered their graves very early during the act or due to trauma associated with it. It is heartbreaking that this evil act is rampant in our various institutions of higher learning among staff and students. Many of these evil doers use their office space as chalet. What a disgrace to humanity? The students may yield to the request of the staff because they have no other option to solve their problems. Some staff may go to the extent of asking the victim to pay for hotel accommodation with her money. This money being extorted from the victim is the pocket money given by the parents of the victim from their sweat. Some academic staff engage in such in order to award high marks to the victims.

In line with the opinion of Taveares and Wodon (2018) Nine out of ten of the world's countries have laws against sexual harassment in working life today, but almost six out of the ten lack adequate laws against sexual harassment in higher education.

The problem on the part of academic staff awarding unmerited marks to the victims tells a lot on the human security. When these victims get jobs, may be through 'I ma mmadu', that is where everyone share in the problem. Hence, it is no longer individual problem but social problem. Assuming the victim is a medical doctor or a nurse, many patients will be dying in his/her hand because he is a quack. The security implication of the evil act is that our lives are no longer secured. Apart from doctors and nurses what about those that find themselves in Government? Sorry should be the name of that nation because the resources to run the government is not secured and will be misused and mismanaged. This is not deliberate but they did not get the proper training in that area because they preferred shortcuts than hard work.

Security means that girls, young women and vulnerable groups can all feel safe, without fear of danger that could cause them physical, psychological and material harm. And anything with the potential to cause harm would be controlled to protect the life, health and wellbeing of people and the community.

Sexual harassment at work and in educational institutions is seldom ignored and unreported, due to myriad sensitivities in many parts of the world. Major reasons for not reporting include: (i) the belief that the behaviour was not serious, (ii) Believing that it is easier to keep quiet or quit rather than face the discomfort of confrontation, and (iii) an inability to prove the claim with evidence.

The 2018 World Bank Groups Women, Business and the Law data shows that in 59 countries, 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. Sexual harassment can be more prevalent in fields of study and jobs where there is an unequal sex ratio and large power differences between women and men.

In the opinion of Ginfre and William (1994) in (Yusuf 2008) on the reluctance of women to report their experience of sexual harassment in their workplace. To them, these include that, many still do not recognize that sexual harassment is an actionable offence; victims may be reluctant to come forward with complaints fearing they will not believe, that their charges will not be taken seriously or that they will be subjected to reprisal; it may be difficult to differentiate between harassment and joking on job. Russel (1984) and Sheffield (1987) opined that in the broadest sense feminists regard sexual violence as a means of reinforcing male power

In some educational institutional, the level of awareness of this ugly conduct is very slim and some of the victims do not even understand what had happened to them not to talk of opening up to the institution's management.

Increase awareness requires good practices that suggest strategies such as posting harassment policies and resources in easily accessible locations such as the intranet, email communications, and messages in cafeterias even in bathrooms. Employ edutainment approaches to promote changes in attitudes and behaviour among students, including radio, TV or online awareness campaigns. This is a cost-effective and powerful strategy for changing norms and behaviors that can be adapted for use in tertiary education institutions. Eliminating all forms of violence at work and in education is not only the right thing to do from a human and labour rights perspective, but it also is the smart thing to do for employers and educational institutions in terms of workplace efficiency and productivity. Equally paramount is the fact that sexual harassment is one of the leading causes of high turnover and absenteeism at school and workplace. (Merkin, and Shah, 2014) in (Eliana, nd )

In Nigeria, 70 percent of female graduates from a sample of tertiary institutions reported having been sexually harassed, with the main perpetrators being classmates and Lecturers. The effects experienced by victims were depression and perceived insecurity on campuses. (Owoye, and Olusola – Taiwo, 2010) in (Eliana, nd)

## **2. Conceptual Clarification**

### **Sexual Harassment**

Sexual harassment is seen as any unwelcome sexual advances, request for sexual favours, and unwelcome verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature that interferes with the academic or work effectiveness of the target. It is often imposed upon a person in an unequal power relationship through the abuse of authority and may involve an implied reward or threat of deprivation. (The Wharton School, nd)

Sexual harassment can consist of repeated or singular acts that cause the victim(s) to feel uncomfortable and unsafe. It can be verbal, visual or physical. It refers to sexual suggestive remarks, or obscene or insulting sounds. It includes unwelcome and offensive names or terms of endearment such as 'honey bun' or 'boobsy'. The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission Guidelines (nd) define sexual harassment as unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favours, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature constitute sexual harassment when this conduct explicitly or implicitly affects an individual's employment, unreasonably interferes

with an individual's work performance, or creates an intimidating, hostile or offensive work environment.

Sexual harassment is part of the continuum of different forms of actual and potential forms of gender-based violence residing in higher education systems, ranging from bullying and sexist jargon to sexual abuse and rape. (SWG GRI, 2020)

Association of Women for Dignity of Women and Men Action and Research (2024) sees sexual harassment as any behaviour of sexual nature that affects the, which is considered as unwanted, unacceptable, inappropriate and offensive to the person, and that creates an intimidating, hostile, unstable or offensive work environment. Sexual harassment is defined by law and includes request for sexual favours, sexual advances or other sexual conduct when any of the following is true, submission is made either explicitly or implicitly, a term in condition of a person's employment or academic advancement or submission to or rejection of such conduct is used as a condition affecting academic or employment. The conduct has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with a person's ability to work or perform academic or employment decision, creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive working, learning, or social environment. According to Stanko (1988), sexual harassment is unwanted sexual attention. Its behavioural forms includes visual (leering), verbal, (sexual teasing, jokes, comments or questions); unwanted pressures for sexual favour or date; unwanted touching or pinching. Unwanted pressure for sexual favours: with implied threats of job related consequences for non-cooperation; physical assault, rape. To Sheffield (1987:180), sexual harassment as, any deliberate, repeated or unwelcome verbal comments, gestures or physical contacts of a sexual nature

Husband (1992) in Yusuf (2008) sees sexual harassment as socially constructed depending on the personal and situational characteristics of the individual making the judgment. He argued that behavior is likely to be labelled harassment when there are physical advances, unequal power relations, elicits negative response and is being perceived as being appropriate.

Sexual harassment is unwelcome sexual advances, request for sexual favours or other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature (OAU Gender Policy, 2009). According to Russell (1984), sexual harassment is repeated or unwanted sexual advances, remarks or behaviours that are offensive to the recipient and cause discomfort or interference with performance in academic or job performance. Sexual harassment constitutes an infringement on a person's rights to personal privacy and a practical form of exploitation imposed on someone not in a vantage position to defend himself or herself (Gallop, 1997). What constitute sexual harassment are continuum of indecent behaviours which range from unwanted touch, verbal intimidation, unwanted kiss, deception, rape, attempted rape, continuous staring, abnormal sexual overtures, frequent commentary on appearance by opposite sex and persistent emphasizing of sexuality in all context (Reskin and Padavic, 1994). In the same vein, Ogunbameru (2006) recognized 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 an explicit or implicit basis for employment or academic decision affecting the individual. Also, Onuma (1984) and Popoola (2007) viewed sexual harassment not only in terms of male-female exploitation of a power relationship but also in terms of power exploitation of any person in authority over another person who cannot refuse sexual demand without the risk of reprisal. In this paper, sexual harassment is any act of unwanted touch or verbal statement that pertains to sex. The paper therefore adopts the above definitions in its analysis of sexual harassment.

### **Haman Security**

Human security as a security perspective fits into the broader fields of social construction and liberalism, established in newer times as an opposition to realism's view of international politics emphasizing the individual as a referent object complementary to that of the state (Burgess and Jonas 2012) in (Yetunde ,2019). Human security as it is known today is basically centered on the individual's perception of threats and security and varies according to different social contexts (Burgess and Jonas, 2012). Theoretically, it stretches from scholars focusing on violent threats to individuals and communities that need immediate intervention capability,, to scholars who emphasis a broader definition that includes human rights abuses, poverty and underdevelopment (Burgess and Jonas, 2012) in (Yetunde 2010)

Some feminist approaches have focused mostly on the violence against women and that the existence of a violent and oppressive patriarchy is taken for granted (Shephard, 2008:37). Shephard says that theorizing women within this perspective has focused on addressing violence perpetrated against individuals who are socially identified as women, perpetrated as a consequence of his identity by men towards women. (Shepard, 2008:38).

Human security can be seen as one of the foundational conditions of being human, including both the sustainable protection and provision of material conditions for meeting the embodied needs of people, and the protection of the variable existential conditions for maintaining a dignified life. With this definition, it then makes sense that the core focus of human security endeavours should be on the most vulnerable. It makes sense that risk management should be most responsive to immediate events or processes that have both an extensive and intensive impact on producing material and existential vulnerabilities of people in general or a category of persons across a particular locale. (James, 2014)

### **Theoretical Framework**

This paper adopted feminist theory as its theoretical framework of analysis. Mary Wollstonecraft is widely known as one of the foundational figures in feminist theory. Her influential work, "A Vindication of the Rights of Women," was published in 1792. Wollstonecraft's work is particularly significant for its articulation of arguments for women's rights and equality

Feminist theory examines how gender shapes individuals' lives and social structures, advocating for gender equality and challenging patriarchy. It seeks to understand and address gender- based inequalities and discrimination in various aspects of life, in politics, economics and social norms. Protagonists in feminist theory are often those who challenge these inequalities and advocate for change. The key tenets include the belief in the importance of live experience, need for social justice and eliminating patriarchal structures

Feminism counters traditional philosophy with new ways of addressing issues affecting humanity, calling for the replacement of the presiding patriarchal order with a system that emphasizes equal rights, justice, and fairness. Most feminists agree on five basic principles which are as follow: increasing equality, expanding human choice, eliminating gender stratification, ending sexual abuse, and promoting sexual freedom. Feminist theory sets an agenda for action, the purpose of which is justice and equality for women everywhere and, of course, also for men and children to whom they are inextricably linked. Simply put, feminism is about all gender having equal rights and opportunities. It is about respecting diverse women's experiences, identities, knowledge and strengths, and striving to empower all women to realize their full rights and enjoy them. Feminism is a perspective as well as action/advocacy against subordination of women in society. According to Bunwaree (2010), feminism is a movement as well as a theoretical orientation. Feminism represents the realization that women are dominated, suppressed and marginalized, that something

is amiss about the way women are treated, something that is there but difficult to pinpoint. Thus Betty (1963) described it as a problem without a name. Interestingly, in higher education in Nigeria, it is this problem that Morley (2000) referred to as the hidden transcript.

### **Application of the Theory to the Study.**

This theory is relevant to this study, the social organization of the Nigerian society is based on patriarchal principles which sees the men as superior to women. The paper argues that sexual harassment thrives in Nigerian higher institutions as a manifestation of broader societal inequalities and gendered power imbalance. It highlights the sexual harassment as a form of discrimination that targets women and its prevalence on campuses reflects the unequal status of women and men in society.

The part this oppression plays in women's lives generally is that this oppression and subordination culminate into inferior social status for women. As noted by Acker (2010), the divide between reproduction and production constitutes the gendered under-structure of societies' institutions. This Marxian, liberal, radical, socialist to black and postmodernist feminism, they all agree on one thing; that women are subjugated and marginalized and that this should be changed in order to enable women enjoy full citizenship and realize their potentials.

Connells (1987) cited in Acker,( 2010) calls hegemonic masculinity which pervades many institutional areas including academia. It is still this same patriarchal orientation that makes it almost impossible for the female victims of sexual harassment to report or complain because of fear of stigma- a situation which one can tag the act of blaming the victim. The issue of blaming the victim instils in them fear, guilt and anger.

The feminist position is, as adopted in this paper advocates for clearly defined and strong punitive measures for the perpetrators of this evil against women. Mejuini (2013) observed that the teaching-learning process in higher education, and religion, taught and learned through formal and informal education constitutes the hidden curriculum and that these work together with other socialization processes within and outside the formal school system to determine the persons that women become. This is to say that much of what happens in the higher education are brought in from the patriarchal social pattern of the Nigerian society.

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### **Sexual Harassment and Human Security**

Sexual harassment is important security issue and can be seen as a unique proxy to human security as it affects individual level, it is an outcome of social relations and impacts on freedom from fear, want and dignity. It has consequences such as homicide and suicide, injury and shock, disability and sleeping disorders, reproductive problems and emotional and psychological problems such as increased gender inequalities.

Numerous studies have documented links between sexual harassment and declines in psychological and professional well-being. Research has demonstrated that women's experiences of sexual harassment are attributed to reductions in their professional, psychological and physical health. (Cortina and Berdahl 2008). Some research also shows that sexual harassment has stronger relationships with women's well-being than other job- related stressors, which emphasizes just how relevant this issue is in educational and work settings (Fitzgerald et al. 1997). The more regularly women are sexually abused or harassed in a context, the more they think about leaving. The overall effects of sexual harassment is a loss of talent, which is costly to science, social sciences, arts etc. Sexual harassment is associated with reduced productivity and performance for the target (Barling, Rogers, and Kelloway 2001; Magley, Waldo, et al. 1999; USMSPB 1995; Woodzicka and LaFrance 2005). Many studies suggest that when organizational commitment

declines, so do targets' performance and work productivity. One unique experiment demonstrated that women's verbal performance suffered as a result of subtle sexual harassment (Woodzicka and LaFrance 2005). Additionally, research has shown that it is not just targets' performance but also workgroup or team productivity that is undercut by sexual harassment experiences. Workgroup productivity is often examined based on respondents' perceptions of how well their workgroup performs quality work together (Willness, Steel, and Lee 2007).

The impact that sexual harassment has on students at all levels of educational system, from secondary school to higher education, is remarkably similar to the impact it has in the workplace. The research on students in secondary school who have experienced harassment shows that they report lowered motivation to attend classes, exhibit greater truancy, pay less attention in class, receive lower grades on assignments and in their overall grade point average, and seriously consider changing schools (Duffy, Wareham, Walsh, 2004; Lee et al .1996) . Even, worse, sexually harassed students have reported dropping classes, changing advisors, changing supervisors and even dropping out of school just to avoid hostile environments (Huerta et al 2006; Fitzgerald, 1990). The women who remain in school tend to suffer academically (Huerta et al; Reilly, Lott and Gallogly 1986). If women feel that the academic environment is hostile toward them, they may not participate in informal activities that could enhance their experiences and result in academic advancement (Dansky and Kilpatrick 1997). Sexual harassment may have impact on students' self-esteem (Barickman, Paludi, and Rabinowitz 1992)

Using the administrator Research Campus Climate Collaborator (ARC3) survey, Rosenthal, Smith, and Freyd (2016) found that consistent with studies on other populations of targets, sexual harassment experiences by graduate students were associated with posttraumatic symptoms for both men and women. Female students who have indicated that they had experienced sexual harassment also reported a diminishing sense of safety on campus. The university of Texas analysis of the ARC3 data suggests that across academic disciplines women who experienced sexual harassment from faculty/staff reported significantly worse physical and mental health outcomes.

Researchers measure health and well –being based on standard psychology research scales that include multiple questions (eg symptoms of anxiety and depression) appropriate for a general population. Many studies of this topic appeared in the clinical and psychiatric literatures, and these are some of their findings: The more often women experience sexual harassment, the more they report symptoms of depression, stress and anxiety and generally impaired psychological well-being. (Bergman and Drasgow 2003 and others). Other negative consequences of sexual harassment include Negative mood, fear, self –blame, lowered self-esteem, anger, disgust, lowered satisfaction with life in general.

In studies on sexual harassment in higher education from various states, issues are in the foreground, such as unwanted pregnancies or HIV, for instance, Morley (2011), pointed out that demands from male teachers for sexual services from female students in order for them to receive a valid examination certificate from their studies.

The effect can range from physical harm to long term emotional distress to death. Sexual violence has a long lasting effects on survivors and their families. Rape and sexual assault can result in unwanted pregnancies, complications during pregnancy and birth, and sexually transmitted diseases including HIV. It creates environment of fear and intimidation that can lead to long term feelings of anxiety and depression. Exposure to sexual harassments in higher education leads to physical, psychological and professional consequences for individuals. For instance, anger, stress, irritation, discomfort, feeling of powerlessness and degradation. Evidence based research confirms



more specifically that sexual harassment in higher education can lead to depression (Martin-Storey and August 2016; Selkie et al 2015, anxiety (Richman et al 1999); Schneider, Swan and Fitzgerald 1997), post –traumatic stress disorder (Henning et al 2017) , physical pain (Chan et al 2008), unwanted pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases (Philpart et al 2009) impaired career opportunities (Henning et al 2017) reduced job motivations (Barling et al 1996; Chan et al 2008; Harrned et al 2002) and more .

From the opinions, observations and findings of these scholars on sexual harassment and human security, we can rightly adduce that sexual harassment has inflicted the victims with injuries that can never be forgotten in their life time. Evil is evil and evil can never beget good. In totality sexual harassment is evil and is inimical to human security in the higher institutions in Nigeria and the entire globe.

### 3.The Way Forward

1. Female employees should be protected by legislation against such acts.
2. The management should educate and raise awareness among students and staff at all levels on how to recognize, prevent, and respond to sexual harassment.
3. Higher education institutions might also consider the integration of sexual harassment content into the organization’s major trainings, including orientation programs, to enable students and staff be aware upon entry
4. Posting harassment policies in easy accessible locations such as the intranet, email communications.

### 4. Conclusion

This paper has examined sexual harassment and human security in higher educational institutions in Nigeria. We presented the scholars’ definitions of sexual harassment and human security. We adopted the feminist theory as our theoretical framework of analysis .We went further to examine the effects of sexual harassment on the victims and the learning environment. Lastly, we presented reasons for under- reporting of sexual assaults in higher educational institutions in Nigeria and suggested the ways to curb the incidences of sexual harassment in higher educational institutions in Nigeria

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