PERPETRATORS OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT EXPERIENCED BY ATHLETES IN SOUTHERN NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES

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ABSTRACT

Evidence in literature and reports showed that both male and female athletes are sexually harassed in their course of participating in sports. The purpose of the study was to find out the perpetrators of sexual harassment experienced by athletes in southern Nigerian universities. A cross-sectional survey design was employed for the study. A 22-item structured questionnaire was used to generate data from athletes $(N=1\ 214)$ which included males (n=789) and females (n=425) in federal (n=856)and state (n=358) universities. The data analysis was based on athletes who indicated that they have experienced one form of sexual harassment or the other. Percentage was used to analyze the data. Results showed that among the athletes who experienced gender harassment, 8.97% of them had it from the directors of sports, 34.31% from the coaches, 96.55% had it from fellow athletes and 4.33% from spectators. Among the athletes who experienced unwanted sexual attention, 2.57% had it from directors of sports, 29.52% from coaches, 86.35% from fellow athletes and 1.49% had it from spectators. For athletes who experienced sexual coercion, 3.15% had it from directors of sports, 23.16% from coaches, 79.74% had it from fellow athletes and 0.37% from spectators. It was recommended among other things that a sexual harassment intervention programme should be designed and mounted for all the perpetrators of sexual harassment on athletes with much attention to the athletes and coaches.

Key words: Perpetrators; Sexual harassment; Athletes; Southern Nigerian universities

INTRODUCTION

A social problem that pervades and violates the fundamental human rights of members of every social institution is sexual harassment. It is rare to see any social institution including sport that is harassment-free. Several cases of sexual harassment have been exposed in athletics and sport. For instance, a report by Klingaman (1997) that Coach Tarleton in Towson, Maryland pleaded guilty to fondling and kissing a 15 year old student athlete. Nickel (1998) reported that Coach Titus in Wisconsin was arrested on charges of touching a female student athlete inappropriately and propositioning a female student for sex. He also reported that Coach Pierce of Menomonie High School in Milwaukee, Wisconsin was sentenced to eight years in prison on a count charge of sexual assault of a 15 year old boy. Also, Coach Nyhus of Barneveld High School in Wisconsin was accused and sentenced to two years in prison and 20 years of probation for sexually assaulting a 14 year old girl.

Sexual harassment, according to Brackenridge and Fasting (2006), refers to behaviour directed towards an individual or group of individuals that involves sexualised, verbal, nonverbal or physical behaviour, whether intended or unintended, legal or illegal, that is based upon an abuse of power and trust and that is considered by the victim or a bystander to be unwanted or coerced. Elendu (2009) defined sexual harassment as any unwanted sexual behaviour(s) directed to an athlete or group of athletes from the same or opposite sex. In athletic settings, sexual harassment refers to any behaviour of a sexual nature which is directly or indirectly directed to a sport participant or group of sport participants in the course of participation in sport, which the recipient considers to be unwanted, unwelcome, offensive, intimidating, insulting, malicious and degrading. The three empirically tested and confirmed categories of sexual harassment by Gelfand et al. (1995), which are gender harassment, unwanted sexual attention and sexual coercion were used for the study. According to them, gender harassment covers a range of verbal and non-verbal behaviours aimed not at getting sexual co-operation, but at denigrating, insulting, or conveying hostility towards men and women. Unwanted sexual attention covers a range of verbal and non-verbal behaviour of a sexual nature that is unwanted, unreciprocated and offensive, but with no implication of job related losses or benefits. They further explain that sexual coercion attempts to get sexual cooperation by bribes or threats. The categorisation by Gelfand et al. (1995) was adopted for this study because according to them it was generaliseable across settings, job types and cultures and athletic settings are not an exception.

Most empirical studies (Adamolekun, 1989; Holman, 1995; O'Connell, 1997; Gettman, 2003; Hayden, 2003; Martin, 2003; Okoro & Obozokhai, 2005) have been conducted on the incidence and prevalence of sexual harassment in workplaces and athletic settings with little attention to the perpetrators. Fasting (2005) reported that sexual harassment can affect more than the targeted person. She further explained that a team member, who witnesses repeated incidents, even if it is not directed at him or her, may be considered a victim of sexual harassment as well. Timmerman and Bajema (1997) reported that the victim of sexual harassment is one who is directly or indirectly affected by the behaviour. Likewise, in this study a victim of sexual harassment is an athlete who directly or indirectly receives an unwanted conduct of a sexual nature, finds the behaviour offensive and is affected by it.

Hastings Institute (2003) noted that a victim of sexual harassment may be male or female; the harasser may be of the same or opposite sex of the victim and the harasser may be a manager, supervisor, co-worker, or subordinate. It can be deduced from Hastings Institute (2003) that sports participants irrespective of class, could be a victim and/or perpetrator of sexual harassment on sport participants especially athletes.

Sexual harassment can be perpetrated by anyone irrespective of gender, socio-economic class, age, occupation, race and ethnicity, level of education, marital status, rank or position, among others. Brackenridge (1997) noted that harassers could be parents, coaches, social service providers, or officials from sport clubs. The National Association for Sport and Physical Education (2000) has earlier buttressed that sexual harassment besides occurring between coaches and athletes, can occur between athletic directors and athletes; coaches and assistant coaches; athletic directors and coaches and athletes and athletes. In athletic settings, sport participants comprising athletes, coaches, officials, spectators and fans are potential

victims and perpetrators of sexual harassment. This simply means that athletes can be sexually harassed by fellow athletes, sport administrators, officials, fans and spectators. At the same time, sport administrators can be sexually harassed by athletes, fellow sport administrators, officials, spectators and fans. It is also worthy to note that the spectators and fans can equally be sexually harassed by the athletes, officials, sport administrators, fellow fans and spectators. There is unequal power distribution among the sport participants. The power imbalance in sport exposes athletes who appear to have less power to suffer sexual harassment more than any other category of sport participants. This could be why more attention is always focused on athletes, as most sexually harassing behaviours are directed at them.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Studies (Sabo, 1994; Martin, 2003) have suggested that sexual harassment in universities deserves attention and the need exists to formulate and implement policies and procedures to prevent it and protect student athletes. Sev'er (1995) stated that sexual harassment rarely goes away without some form of intervention. Brackenridge and Fasting (2006) pointed out that everyone in sport shares the responsibility to identify and prevent sexual harassment and abuse and to develop a culture of dignity, respect and safety in sport. There is no doubt that there is a need for intervention programmes aimed at preventing the perpetration of sexual harassment on student athletes. However, the perpetrators need to be identified because for the intervention programme to be effective, it must be directed towards the perpetrators. The categories of potential perpetrators as identified in the literature, which were explored in this study are "Director of Sport (DS)" "Coaches (C)" "Athletes (A)" and "Spectators (S)". These categories were adopted as they cover all the participants in university athletic settings. Hence, the purpose of the study was to find the perpetrators of sexual harassment experienced by athletes in southern Nigerian universities.

Research Questions

- 1. Who are the perpetrators of gender harassment experienced by athletes in southern Nigerian universities?
- 2. Who are the perpetrators of unwanted sexual attention experienced by the athletes?
- 3. Who are the perpetrators of sexual coercion experienced by athletes in southern Nigerian universities?

Methods

A cross-sectional survey design was employed for the study. The population for the study was 3 408 athletes. A sample size of 1 214 athletes (789 males and 425 females; 856 above 25 years and 358 less than 25 years; 927 undergraduates and 287 postgraduates; 232 married and 982 unmarried) were selected for the study. The multi-stage sampling procedure was used for sample selection. Firstly, a simple random sampling technique without replacement was used to select 15 out of 28 southern Nigerian universities. Secondly, a proportionate stratified random sampling technique was used to select 50% of the athletes in each of the selected universities. Finally, a simple random sampling technique without replacement was also used to select the athletes. Data collection was done using a 22-item structured questionnaire which was validated by seven experts to ascertain its content and face validity.

The experts are in the fields of Physical Education, Sociology and Anthropology, Psychology and Measurement and Evaluation at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. The questionnaire alongside with the research questions and instrument validation evaluation guide were given to the experts to comment on the face and construct validity of the instrument. The questionnaire comprised of section A, which generated personal data (age, gender, marital status and level of education) of the respondents and section B contained 18 questions on sexually harassing behaviours experienced by the athletes with the potential perpetrators (director of sport, coaches, athletes, spectators) for each participant to indicate by ticking ($\sqrt{}$) in the appropriate box as applicable to him or her. With 20 copies of the questionnaire administered to the University of Abuja (a northern university) athletes, and the subsequent application of the split-half method, the questionnaire had an overall reliability co-efficient of .8267, which was established using the Pearson product moment correlation in conjunction with the Spearman-Brown correction statistic. Furthermore, the subsections reliability coefficients of .7627 for gender harassment, .8520 for unwanted sexual attention and .9071 for sexual coercion were established using the Cronbach alpha statistic. At the end, 1 214 questionnaires were administered to the athletes. Only 975 questionnaires were returned, giving a return rate of 80.31%. Nine hundred and forty-six (946) questionnaires were properly filled out and finally used for analysis. Descriptive statistics in the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) were used to analyze the data. Percentages of each item were calculated based on the number (frequency) of athletes that experienced each item as represented by "F" in each table.

RESULTS

Data answering the research questions are presented in Tables 1 to 3.

Research Question 1: Who are the perpetrators of gender harassment experienced by athletes in southern Nigerian universities?

Table 1 shows that 574 (98.45%) athletes experienced sexist jokes from fellow athletes and 341 (58.49%) of them experienced it from the coaches. Also, 276 (98.22%) athletes experienced the display and distribution of sexual material to them from fellow athletes, and none of them experienced it from directors of sport and coaches. For those who experienced sexually suggestive comments about their body, 506 (94.4%) athletes had it from athletes, 121 (22.57%) from coaches and 66 (12.31%) from directors of sport. Among the athletes who were treated differently because of their gender, 215 (95.13%) had it from athletes, 127(56.19%) from coaches, 37(16.37%) from directors of sport and none (0.00%) from the spectators.

			DS		С		Α		S	
	Items	F	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
1	Directing sexist jokes to athletes	583	42	7.2	341	58.49	574	98.45	24	4.12
2	Displaying and distribution of sexual materials to athletes	281	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	276	98.22	13	4.63
3	Sexually suggestive comments about athlete's body	536	66	12.31	121	22.57	506	94.4	46	8.58
4	Being treated differently because of athlete's gender	226	37	16.37	127	56.19	215	95.13	0	0.00
	Cluster percentage			8.97		34.31		96.55		4.33

TABLE 1: PERPETRATORS OF GENDER HARASSMENT EXPERIENCED BY THE ATHLETES

Note: DS= Director of Sports; C= Coaches; A= Athletes; S= Spectators

Research Question 2: Who are the perpetrators of unwanted sexual attention experienced by the athletes?

Table 2 reveals that among athletes who experienced sexualised name-callings directed to them, 268 (57.14%) had it from coaches and 451 (96.16%) of them experienced it from fellow athletes. The table shows that 198 (52.66%) athletes experienced sexual rumours spread about them from coaches and 274 (72.87%) of them indicated that they had it from fellow athletes. Among the athletes who experienced talk about sex all the time in their presence, 406 (98.54%) had it from fellow athletes and none of them experienced it from the directors of sport and spectators respectively. Again, among the athletes who experienced pressure for sex, 144 (92.31%) indicated that they had it from fellow athletes, 96 (61.54%) had it from coaches and none experienced it from the spectators. Data in Table 2 show that 244 (80.26%) athletes experienced pressure for a date or relationship with people who refuse to take "no" for an answer from fellow athletes and 118 (38.82%) of them experienced it from the coaches. Among the athletes who experienced their clothing pulled in a sexual way, none (0.00%) had it from the directors of sport and spectators. However, 237 (82.01%) of them experienced it from fellow athletes. It is evident that 261 (81.31%) athletes experienced sexual gestures directed to them from fellow athletes and only 2 (0.62%) athletes had it from the spectators. Among the athletes who experienced attempts from someone to establish a romantic relationship with them, none (0.00%) had it from the directors of sport and spectators, while 247 (84.59%) had it from fellow athletes. Table 2 shows that 172 (89.12%) experienced sexually offensive messages and or calls sent to them from fellow athletes.

			DS		С		Α		S	
	Item	F	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
1	Directing sexualized name-callings to athletes.	469	0	0.00	268	57.14	451	96.16	17	3.62
2	Spreading sexual rumours about athletes.	376	0	0.00	198	52.66	274	72.87	9	2.39
3	Talking about sex all the time in athlete's presence.	412	0	0.00	113	27.43	406	98.54	0	0.00
4	Pressuring athletes for sex.	156	4	2.56	96	61.54	144	92.31	0	0.00
5	Pressuring athletes for a date or relationship refusing to take "No" for an answer.	304	56	18.42	118	38.82	244	80.26	16	5.26
6	Pulling athlete's clothing in a sexual way.	289	0	0.00	61	21.11	237	82.01	0	0.00
7	Directing sexual gestures to athletes	321	7	2.18	76	26.67	261	81.31	2	0.62
8	Attempt to establish romantic relationship with athlete.	292	0	0.00	76	26.03	247	84.59	0	0.00
9	Sending sexually offensive messages and or calls to athletes.	193	0	0.00	22	11.40	172	89.12	3	1.55
	Cluster percentage			2.57		29.52		86.35		1.49

TABLE 2: PERPETRATORS OF UNWANTED SEXUAL ATTENTION EXPERIENCED BY THE ATHLETES

Note: DS= Director of Sports; C= Coaches; A= Athletes; S= Spectators

Research Question 3: Who are the perpetrators of sexual coercion experienced by athletes in southern Nigerian universities?

Data in Table 3 reveal that among the athletes who experienced benefits being offered to them as incentives to engage in sexual relationship with them, 197 (67.01%) had it from fellow athletes, whereas 83 (28.23%) experienced it from the coaches. One hundred and thirty-four (67.68%) athletes experienced threats with negative consequences for refusing to engage in a sexual relationship, 134 (67.68%) athletes indicated that they had it from fellow athletes, 76 (38.38%) of them encountered it from the coaches and none (0.00%) of them experienced it from the spectators. Among those who experienced forceful attempts to touch or fondle their bodies, 213 (83.20%) athletes had it from other athletes, none (0.00%) from the spectators and 68 (26.56%) encountered it from the coaches. Also, 77 (88.51%) athletes experienced attempted rape or forceful sexual intercourse from fellow athletes, 13 (14.94%) from the coaches and 3 (3.45%) of them experienced it from the directors of sport. Moreover, among athletes who experienced rape or forceful sexual intercourse, none of them had it from the directors of sport and spectators, whereas 12 (92.31%) of them had it from fellow athletes, with only 1 (7.69%) athlete affirming to have experienced it from the coach.

			DS		С		Α		S	
	Item	F	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
1	Offering benefits as incentives to engage in sexual relationship with athlete.	294	26	8.84	83	28.23	197	67.01	2	0.68
2	Threatening athlete with negative consequences for refusing to engage in sexual relationship.	198	3	1.52	76	38.38	134	67.68	0	0.00
3	Forceful attempts to touch or fondle athlete's body.	256	5	1.95	68	26.56	213	83.20	0	0.00
4	Attempted rape or forceful sexual intercourse on athlete	87	3	3.45	13	14.94	77	88.51	1	1.15
5	Rape or forceful sexual intercourse on athlete.	13	0	0.00	1	7.69	12	92.31	0	0.00
	Cluster percentage			3.15		23.16		79.74		0.37

TABLE 3: PERPETRATORS OF SEXUAL COERCION EXPERIENCED BY THE ATHLETES

Note: DS= Director of Sports; C= Coaches; A= Athletes; S= Spectators

Major Findings

- 1. Gender harassment experienced by athletes in southern Nigerian universities was mostly perpetrated by athletes (96.55%), followed by the coaches (34.31%), directors of sport (8.97%) and spectators (4.33%).
- 2. Unwanted sexual attention experienced by the athletes was mostly perpetrated by athletes (86.35%), followed by the coaches (29.52%), directors of sport (2.57%) and spectators (1.49%).
- 3. Sexual coercion experienced by southern Nigerian universities athletes was mostly perpetrated by the athletes (79.74%), followed by the coaches (23.16%), directors of sport (3.15%) and spectators (0.37%).

DISCUSSION

It is clear from the study that fellow athletes were mostly the perpetrators of gender harassment experienced by southern Nigerian universities athletes. The finding was not surprising as athletes spend most of their time with fellow athletes during training, camping and competition than every other sport participant. However, it is agonising and disgusting that athletes are the source of embarrassment, humiliation and unhappiness to fellow athletes through gender harassment. In support of the finding, Fedgin and Hanegby (2000) and Gunduz *et al.* (2006) reported that teammates among other people are the harassers of sportspersons. Furthermore, the finding corroborates with Brackenridge and Cert's (2000) report that the harassers are usually sportsmen.

The finding that fellow athletes were mostly the perpetrators of unwanted sexual attention experienced by southern Nigerian universities athletes did not deviate from Hayden's (2003) report that most often the majority of perpetrators of sexual harassment on athletes were male athletes. The finding is not in any way a surprise because the athletes socialise more among themselves than any other group and are also likely to develop emotional feelings, possibly

sexual interest directed at fellow athletes.

It is not surprising that fellow athletes are mostly the perpetrators of sexual coercion experienced by southern Nigerian universities athletes. During competitions athletes train and camp together irrespective of their gender. Some of the athletes are adolescents and some of them are in early adulthood. Due to a strong sexual drive at this stage of human development, the athletes are sexually active, thereby making them to coerce themselves into sex on any slightest opportunity. The finding shares with earlier studies (Fedgin & Hanegby, 2000; Gunduz *et al.*, 2006) that teammates among other people are the harassers of sportspersons.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It was concluded that apart from athletes who were mostly the perpetrators of gender harassment, unwanted sexual attention and sexual coercion on southern Nigerian universities athletes, coaches, directors of sport and spectators were also involved. In order to prevent the athletes from experiencing these forms of sexual harassment from sports participants, the following recommendations are suggested:

- 1. A sexual harassment intervention programme should be designed and mounted in southern Nigerian universities.
- 2. While mounting the intervention programme, attention and efforts should be directed to all the perpetrators especially the athletes and coaches.
- 3. Moral education should be integrated into the athletic settings of southern Nigerian universities.
- 4. Workshops, seminars and symposia against sexual harassment should be organised for sport participants especially the athletes and coaches. These programmes should discourage sexual perpetration.
- 5. Serious punitive measures should be mapped out and taken on the perpetrators of sexual harassment.
- 6. Anti-sexual harassment campaigns should be taken with the assistance of the media. This will ensure that the message gets to every member of society.
- 7. The social and moral life of the athletes and coaches should be established before admitting any athlete and recruiting coaches into the university athletic team.
- 8. Athletes and coaches should be made to sign an undertaking of good moral conduct annually.
- 9. Athletes should collect an attestation letter of good behaviour from their parents or guardians.

In addition, to overcome sexual harassment at university level, the university should employ the following strategies: an anti-sexual harassment policy; an education programme; a sexual harassment complaint system; a support system; and a monitoring network and evaluation.

- a. The university authorities should formulate policy prohibiting sexual harassment of athletes. In specific terms, the policy:
- should be approved by all authorities involved in university sports
- should be clear and widely communicated to participants of university sports
- should be easily understood by participants of university sports
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- should involve consultations with university athletes
- should apply to all involved in university sports
- should be reviewed on regular basis by all involved in university sports
- should specify what constitutes sexual harassment to university athletes and the ranges of the consequences or punishment for violations
- should specify sexual harassment complaint procedures for university athletes
- should provide support systems for athletes who are sexually harassed
- b. The universities should match the sexual harassment prevention programme with a comprehensive education programme. The education programme:
- should employ role plays on sexual harassment
- should open debates on sexual harassment of university athletes
- should provide resources on what constitute sexual harassment to athletes in departmental, faculty and university libraries for the consumption of the university community
- should incorporate sexual harassment of athletes in the university's general studies for all the students as a means of sensitising the students on what constitutes sexual harassment
- should provide video scenarios that discourage sexual harassment of athletes
- should provide for focus group discussions on sexual harassment disseminated by the mass media
- Flyers, posters and educational pamphlets about sexual harassment should be developed and distributed to the members of the public. A day should be mapped out for anti-sexual harassment campaign with T-shirts bearing anti-sexual harassment slogans worn by all the students. Strategic bill boards with anti-sexual harassment slogans around the sports settings should be provided
- Research on sexual harassment of athletes should regularly be conducted, published and made available to the public by the university
- c. There should be a complaint system set up by the university. The university:
- should provide an accessible independent sexual harassment complaint unit for harassed athlete(s)
- should ensure proper filing of sexual harassment complaints by athlete(s)
- should ensure proper handling of sexual harassment complaints by athlete(s)
- should ensure that members of the sexual harassment complaint unit should be professionals of high integrity
- d. A support system should be provided by the university for sexually harassed athletes. The support system:
- should safeguard the privacy of sexually harassed athlete(s)
- should ensure speedy, fair and confidential investigation of reported case(s) of sexual harassment of athlete(s)
- should ensure the security of sexually harassed athlete(s)
- should provide confidential counselling for sexually harassed athlete(s)
- should provide compensation to sexually harassed athlete(s) by the perpetrator(s)
- e. The universities should establish a monitoring network especially in or around the university athletic settings. The universities should:

- mount surveillance cameras around its sport settings
- create a task force to gather information about sexual harassment of athletes
- install adequate lightning around and in its sport settings
- clear the bushes and all hide outs around and in its sport settings
- have adequate security teams to patrol around and in sport settings
- constitute sexual harassment policies and an implementation and monitoring team especially for sport
- f. There should be regular evaluation of sexual harassment experiences among athletes by the universities. Sexual harassment forms should be provided regularly to the athletes by university and sincerely completed by the athletes.

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