

## Combating Sexual Harassment in Ivory Tower in Nigeria: Mixed feelings

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**Abstract:** *Sexual harassment is widespread among university students in Nigeria. However, unlike other sexual violent crimes, incidences of sexual harassment in Nigerian universities are underreported. While it is challenging to assess the extent of such abuse, its impacts on victims are far-reaching. This study evaluates institutional efforts in combating sexual harassment in institutions of higher learning in Nigeria. Data for this study was collected using the descriptive qualitative approach comprising both the semi-structured interview and document analysis. Findings (among others) indicate that the absence of a comprehensive law that criminalises sexual harassment in institutions of higher learning in Nigeria is a major setback to the campaigns against the menace. The study also found that while asymmetric power-relations exist between students and lecturers, sexual harassment also thrives on a transactional basis. Moreover, there are structural factors within the university system that engender sexual harassment. From the findings of the study, it is evident that measures at combating sexual harassment in institutions of higher learning have not been successful. Moreover, the academic setting itself poses discrete challenges and threats to learners who challenge the menace in the ivory tower. Therefore, combating this phenomenon will necessitate an all-inclusive approach that transcends the enactment of law.*

**Keywords:** Sexual harassment, female learners, higher institution, Nigeri

### Introduction

From time-immemorial, institutions of higher education are not just designated as citadels of learning, they are also considered as social establishments where societal values and ethos, are inculcated and upheld (Alexandra, 2018). However, in recent times, they seem not to be the ivory towers of the past but showgrounds for sexual harassment and victimisation (Joseph, 2015). Internationally, complaints on sexual harassment surfaced in the 1980s and its frequency have increased over the years (Joseph, 2015; AAUW Educational Foundation, 2011). While sexual harassment pervades universities and other educational institutions across the globe, it is assuming critical dimensions in Nigeria (Joseph, 2015; Imonikhe, Aluede & Idogho, 2011; Okwu, 2006; Ladebo, 2003).

In recent times, sexual harassment is widespread in Nigerian universities (Idris, Adaja, Audu & Aye, 2016). Though it is challenging to provide accurate statistics on the extent of the crime due to its under-reporting, anecdotal reports show that it is rampant (Joseph, 2015; Okeke, 2011; Owoaja, 2010). Studies have shown that sexual harassment in Nigerian universities takes varying forms, the prominent ones are in the form of

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male lecturers to female students, male lecturers to female lecturers, and male students to female students (Imonikhe, et al, 2011; Ogunbameru, 2006). A report on sexual harassment in Nigerian tertiary institutions showed that 69.8% of female graduates were reported to have been sexually harassed by their male classmates and lecturers while in school. 32.2% of them reported that they received sexual requests in exchange for academic favours, while 29.4% of them experienced unwanted sexual touching (Otekunrin, Makinde & Adepoju, 2017). However, this study focuses on male lecturers to female students' dealings. The rationale stems from the findings of previous studies that held that while the menace affects both male and female students, but it is the female students that suffer much of the brunt, and the most victimised (Saeed, 2017; Omonijo, Uche, Nwadior & Rotimi, 2013). However, despite its prevalence in the country, it is often repudiated or trivialised (Otekunrin, et al, 2017).

Several complaints on sexual harassment have been received from female students – especially from those who have had recurring encounters with randy lecturers (Idris et al, 2016; Okeyo, 2014; Owoaja, 2010). Much of these complaints have been publicised in the media (electronic, print and social) and by civil society (Makinde, 2018; Familugba, 2016). For instance, in April 2018, a Professor in one of the foremost universities in Nigeria was alleged to have sexually harassed a female student (Alexandra, 2018; Lawal, 2018). Their recorded conversations leaked to the media and became a subject of national debate. There are pockets of similar incidences in other universities in the country (Makinde, 2016). While the public is calling for the expulsion and prosecution of these academics, there are relatively few others (especially their colleagues) who have contrary views on the incidences – indicating they were politically motivated (Aluko, 2018). Regardless of how the pendulum swings, sexual harassment of female students is a gross violation of human rights, and a crime. Hence, there is the need to address this problem!

Partly driven by the findings of previous studies (Ogunbameru, 2006; Reena & Saheab, 2012; Joubert, 2009; Vohlídalová, 2015), and recurring media reports on the spate of the phenomenon, combating sexual harassment is at the vanguard of safety and security efforts at universities and other educational institutions in different parts of the world. In a bid to address this menace, many countries have been formulating and implementing policies, laws, and code of conduct (Vohlídalová, 2015; Reena & Saheab, 2012; Joubert, 2009; Vohlídalová, 2015). While efforts are being made at combating the menace in other parts of the world (Makinde, 2016, AAUW Educational Foundation, 2011), little is known about the institutional measures that have been adopted by universities in order to address sexual harassment, especially of female students in Nigerian universities.

Based on the aforementioned, some questions beg for answers: why has sexual harassment persisted in Nigerian Universities? Are there measures put in place to combat sexual harassment in Nigerian universities, and how effective are they? This study evaluates institutional efforts in combating sexual harassment in Nigerian universities. Using a sample of 30 respondents from an in-depth interview with both students and academic staffs of the University of Abuja (UNIABUJA) Nigeria, the article evaluates institutional efforts in combating sexual harassment in higher institutions of learning in Nigeria. Drawing on

these data, this study explores if there are existing institutional policy on sexual harassment in University of Abuja, and assesses (if there is) its effectiveness. It is expected that findings from this study will contribute to the persistent debate on sexual harassment of students in Nigerian universities, bridge the gap in literatures, especially on why the incidence has persisted, and measures that can be adopted to combat it.

### **Conceptualising sexual harassment in institutions of higher learning**

Like most socio-criminological constructs, defining sexual harassment is perplexing! The complexity surrounding its definition is partly nuanced by the wide range of heterogeneous behaviours, meanings, interpretations and misconceptions that are frequently attributed to it. It is also essentially due to the varying institutional milieu and context within which it is carried-out. The forces and factors that engender the crime also vary from one country to another. There is also the dichotomy between lexical and legal definitions of this socio-criminological construct. Hence, it is relatively very difficult to come across any definition that establish clear-cut demarcations on which behaviours ought to be considered as sexual harassment (Gillaner Gadin, 2011). However, considering the milieu within which this study was conducted, the author prefers the definition offered by Ogunbameru (2006). Sexual harassment was defined by Ogunbameru (2006:3) as *any abnormal sexual overtures, proposals, approaches, moves by any individual occupying a superior, inferior, advantaged, disadvantaged position to seek sexual favours (either overtly or covertly) which makes a submission or rejection explicitly or implicitly a basis for the enhancement of academic performance.*

In relative terms, this definition assists in dispelling the over-sensationalised perception of male lecturers as the harasser and female students as the harassed. It considers the harassment of male lecturers by female students. Moreover, some of the nouns and adverbs used, such as 'sexual overtures', 'superior', 'inferior', 'advantaged', 'disadvantaged', 'overtly' and 'covertly' help to clarify some existing controversies in relation to the social construct. For instance, going by the definition, the harasser or the harassed does not necessarily have to be a person occupying an advantaged or superior position. Female students who are often perceived as the inferior or disadvantaged or the harassed may possess certain privileges or powers that can compel male lecturers to succumb to their antics. These powers are relative. Female students may possess spiritual power, which is manifested sometimes in the form of seduction (Ogunbameru, 2006). However, this cannot be scientifically proven (Ogunbameru, 2006).

Furthermore, from the above definition, it is evident that male lecturers could use their superior, or advantaged position to verbally or physically pressurise female students for sexual favour in order to influence their grade. Such superior position could be used by male lecturers to negotiate for sexual pleasure. This they do, using the weaponry of both the 'pen' and 'the score sheet' as lifelines to good grades to a cooperative female student (Ogunbameru, 2006).

Conversely, however, female students in higher institutions of learning could sometimes capitalise on their superior or advantaged privileges to hoodwink lecturers to obtain or secure undeserved scores (Ogwu, 2016). This is another form of asymmetric power relation between the female students and their male lecturers. Hence, there is a power relations in sexual harassment debate, and in most cases, this power relation is asymmetrical (Ogunbameru, 2006). The asymmetrical nature of this power is like a pendulum that could swing either way. Female students are likely to be more powerful than male lecturers when they have in their possession what the latter desires, or are in need of, and deny them of such (Ogunbameru, 2006). However, in much of these power-relation tussles, it is the female students that are usually at the disadvantaged position.

### **Literature review**

Sexual harassment is a pervasive problem in university campuses across the globe (Kayuni, 2009). From the comprehensive work of Paludi (1990) on sexual harassment in institutions of higher learning in the United States, spectrums of studies have been conducted on the menace in other climes. Findings from most of these studies indicate that female students in universities experienced high rate of sexual harassment perpetrated by lecturers, athletic coaches, and fellow students (Perkins & Warner, 2017; Eller, 2016; Hill & Silver, 2005). For instance, Hill and Silva (2005) found that nearly two-third of U.S. college students have experienced some forms of sexual harassment. In another study, the Association of American Universities found that 11.7% of the students across 27 universities have experienced some form of non-consensual sexual contacts by physical force and threats of physical force (Cantor & Fisher, 2015).

Researchers have attributed sexual harassment of female students in institutions of higher learning to power differentials between students and lecturers (Ogunbameru, 2006; Hill & Silver, 2005). Such dynamics are often construed to be structured in an asymmetric manner, engendered by a system that is populated by male lecturers. In contrast, however, the author of this article argues that beyond such sensationalised assumption, more often than not, in practice, power relations in a heterosexual relationship between students and lecturers are symmetrically shaped in practice. Bolstering this position, Elle (2016) argued that power relations between female students and male lecturers are transactional. Female students frequently get entangled with male lecturers in order to meet end needs. Male lecturers are seen by female students as gatekeepers to a range of scarce resources (Eller, 2016). Therefore, such scenario contradicts the broader assumption of the relational power in a sexual harassment discourse as asymmetric.

While several studies on sexual harassment in Nigeria have focused on spectrums of aspects of the menace, with little or no study on institutional response or efforts in combating the phenomenon in Nigerian Universities, hence, the need for this study. The goal of this study is to not just to redress these gaps, but to also advocate for urgent measures to be taken in order to address the menace in ivory towers in Nigeria.

### **Factors engendering sexual harassment in institutions of higher learning in Nigeria**

As earlier mentioned, sexual harassment is prevalent in Nigerian universities. However, just like any other crime, several factors contribute to the prevalence of sexual harassment in these institutions. From a study conducted by Adedokun (2005) on sexual harassment in Lagos State University, a combination of lack of academic integrity, as well as wrong perception of female students' mode of dressing were identified as major factors that contribute to sexual harassment in the university.

In another study, Okoroafor, et al (2014) found gender stereotype, oppression of women, the patriarchal construct of manhood, communal pressure to secrecy, as well as the lack of specific policies that addresses the problem of sexual harassment as some of the age-long factors that contribute to the prevalence of the menace in Nigerian universities. Bolstering this finding, Okeke (2011) opined that incidences of sexual harassment of female students sometimes point to the patriarchal configuration of many African societies, and universities. Women who raise issues of sexual harassment are often labelled as trouble-makers (Amukugo, 2017). *Quid pro quo*, sexual harassment in the form of sex in exchange for marks at tertiary institutions diminishes the fundamental rights of victims and impedes on their educational achievements (Amukugo, 2017).

The effects of sexual harassment are far-reaching, much of which take a toll on victims education resulting in poor academic performance, incessant absenteeism from school, to mention a few (Hand & Sanchez, 2001; Chesire, 2004). Furthermore, sexual harassment has serious implication for the individual victims, and institutions of learning as a whole. It can affect female students' psychological and physical well-being, as well as their academic achievement (Hunt, et al., 2007). Sexual harassment causes irritation, frustration, anxiety, stress, and trauma on the individual victims (Taiwo, et al., 2014). Moreover, a study by Edwin (2006) indicates that sexual harassment can make students avoid school, experience low academic performance, diminish their interest in education or co-curriculum activities, and lowers their dedication to academic life. Studies have also shown that the consequences of sexual harassment even at low levels for the victims could include impaired psychological well-being, such as lowered self-esteem, nervousness, irritability and anger (Okeke, 2011; Ogwu, 2016; Ladebo, 2003). Female students who experienced harassment may exhibit a form of 'job withdrawal' behaviour in terms of changing their major subjects' choices, altering career plans, or avoiding a threatening situation (Okeke, 2011; Ogunbameru, 2006).

### **Response to sexual harassment in institutions of higher learning: international and local perspective**

The need to protect women from sexual harassment and other forms of gender based violence and discrimination engendered the international community to introduce legal standards at the international level. For instance, the United Nations General Assembly Resolution 48/104 on the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (DEVAW) defines violence against women to include sexual

harassment, which is prohibited at work, in educational institutions, and elsewhere (Article 2(b)). It also encourages the development of Penal, Civil or other administrative sanction, as well as preventative approaches against women (Art 4(d-f)). The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) directs State parties to take appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in all fields, specifically including equality under the law, in governance and politics, the workplace, education, healthcare, and in other areas of public and social life (Art 7-16).

Moreover, in the Beijing Platform for Action, Paragraph 178 recognises sexual harassment as a form of violence against women and as a form of discrimination, and calls on multiple actions including government, employers, unions, and civil society to ensure that government enact and enforce laws on sexual harassment and that employers develop anti-harassment policies and prevention strategies. Other international standards such as the International Labour Organisation (ILO) Convention (No. 111) of 1958 and (No. 169) of 1958 confirmed that sexual harassment is a form of gender discrimination and prohibits sexual harassment in the work place (which include educational institutions).

As specified in the UN Handbook for legislation on violence against women, the UN Division for the Advancement of Women identified several key areas that legislations on sexual harassment should address (United Nations, 2010). In section 3-4, the UN Handbook specifies that such legislation should:

- Criminalise sexual harassment;
- Recognise sexual harassment as a form of discrimination;
- Recognise sexual harassment as a violation of women's rights with health and safety consequences;
- Recognise that harassment occurs in both vertical (such as between teacher and student or between manager and employee) and horizontal power relationships (such as between employees at the same level);
- Provide effective criminal, civil, and administrative remedies for victims;
- Address harassment in multiple sectors including public places, employment (formal and informal sectors), education, housing, commercial transactions, provision of benefits and services, and sporting activities - (United Nations, 2010).

Nigeria is a signatory to some of these international standards and had ratified them, yet incidences of sexual harassment, and other forms of discrimination against women still persist in the country. Section 42(1) of 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (As amended) made provisions for the prohibition of discrimination against a Nigerian citizen on the basis of sex. However, the provision is limited in scope and relatively selective. One major limitation of this provision is that it specifically provides protection against "any law in force in Nigeria or any executive or administrative action of the government".

This suggests that the provision only covers people from discrimination against laws and executive actions of government but does not protect against discrimination from other sources such as from individuals, organisations / institutions or workplace policies or practices that are discriminatory (Okongwu, 2017).

As nuanced by physio-social and psychological and unethical conducts in academic environment, it is regrettable however, that in Nigeria there is no federal legislation dedicated to combating this phenomenon. While there is bill at the National Assembly on the prohibition of sexual harassment in higher institutions in Nigeria, it is yet to be passed into law. Specifically, in 2006, the Sexual Harassment Prohibition Bill was sponsored to the National Assembly, and deliberated upon, but it is yet to be implemented (Olukayode, 2017). Without implementation it is impossible for law enforcement agencies and other relevant stakeholders to effectively prosecute this crime.

The provisions of the bill were targeted at protecting students in the Nigerian Educational Institutions who fall victim to sexual harassment by lecturers and educators who use their fiduciary position of authority, dependency and trust to exploit despondent students (Olukayode, 2017). While this start seems to be an encouraging step at stemming the malfeasance of sexual harassment in higher institutions of learning in the country, critics have argued that the law is limited in scope (Olukayode, 2017). Specifically, it excludes secondary school students (Olukayode, 2017).

However, the government of Lagos State seems to have responded to the challenges by including in its Criminal Law Code, a section on prohibition of harassment. The Code described harassment as unwelcomed sexual advances, requests for sexual favour and other visual, verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature which when submitted to or rejected:

(a) implicitly or explicitly affects a person's employment or education opportunity or unreasonably interferes with the person's work or educational performance; (b) implicitly or explicitly suggests that submission to or rejection of the conduct will be a factor in academic or employment decisions; or (c) create an intimidating, hostile or offensive learning or working environment. The punishment for transgressors is three (3) years imprisonment. (Lagos State Criminal Code Law, 2011, s.262).

The above initiative may produce positive outcomes if replicated in other States of the federation. The Lagos State Law Protects the academic, secondary school students, as well as those harassed at work place (Olukayode, 2017). At present, incidences of sexual harassment are becoming more threatening to sustainable work commitment and academic performance in Nigerian institutions of higher learning. As such, it stakes are getting higher as a pernicious complex menace that is devoid of any personal status, educational attainment, religious background or development of any nation. In the Nigerian educational domain, the aggregate of sexual harassment in the universities is of high magnitude (Yebisi & Olukayode, 2017).

Sexual harassment is not just a violation of human dignity and equality guaranteed to human beings in every civilised social system, it is also a violation of right to life and peaceful existence guaranteed by the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (Chapter 4 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of

Nigeria, 1999 as amended). In addition to national legislations, part of the provisions of the UN standards against sexual harassment recommend the introduction of policies and procedures that aimed at preventing and eradicating sexual harassment in institutions of higher education. To this end, scholars have suggested different criteria for policy on sexual harassment in ivory tower (Joubert, 2009; Wetzel & Brown, 2000). For instance, as part of the criteria, Wetzel & Brown (2000) recommend that for an effective policy outcome on sexual harassment, it should (among others) clearly indicate that sexual harassment is a violation of the law. Also, it must comprehensively define the meaning of sexual harassment, and clearly list all the sanctions and punishments against perpetrators (Wetzel & Brown, 2000). Lastly, these scholars argued that such policy must be well disseminated to all university community members, including teachers, students and non-academic staffs. Such policy should also be subjected to regular review and evaluation (Joubert, 2009; Wetzel & Brown, 2000).

In other countries, sexual harassment in educational institutions was addressed by enacting educational laws, code of conduct, as well as local policies and disciplinary codes (Teodoros, 2016; Reena & Saheab, 2012). In addition to the formulation of these policies, different institutions were set-up to implement the policies (Teodoros, 2016; Joubert, 2009). Countries like United States of America (USA), Pakistan, Ghana, Kenya and South Africa, have existing policies on sexual harassment in educational institutions (Teodoros, 2016; Joseph, 2015; Joubert, 2009; US Department of Education, 2008). In the US, for example, under Title IX of the Educational Amendments Act of 1972, higher educational institutions are mandated to develop policies in order to address claims of sexual harassment against students (Teodoros, 2016; US Department of Education, 2008). Similarly, the government of Pakistan also introduced a policy on the protection against sexual harassment of women at workplace in 2010 in 128 public sectors, including higher educational institutions (Teodoros, 2016; Joseph, 2015). According to Joseph (2015), one major reason behind the adoption of the policy is to protect students from threats, violent and hostile behaviours, or be forced by male lecturers to have sex in exchange for grades (Joseph, 2015). However, in most of these countries, the implementation of the policy frameworks on sexual harassment in educational settings has been the elusive (Teodoros, 2016; Joseph, 2015). In conformity to the above, it is imperative for policy documents on sexual harassment well implemented and for structures to set-up for its enforcement.

## **Methodology**

This study utilised a descriptive qualitative research approach. The rationale behind the selection of this approach was based on the fact that it deals with the examination of views, attitudes and experiences of respondents. Moreover, the goal of the study was to explore the effectiveness of institutional policies, and how to combat incidences of sexual harassment of female students in institutions of higher learning, the researcher was persuaded that such objectives can best be achieved through interviews. Similarly, the



purpose of conducting interviews in this study was to find out the views, and experiences of the participants about sexual harassment.

A purposive sampling technique was utilised. The rationale for adopting this sampling technique was premised on the basis that the researchers were aware of persons within the university that can provide valuable information, experiences and opinions in relation to the problem under consideration. Specifically, thirty (30) persons were interviewed: Five (5) academic staff; 5 non-academic staff. In addition, twenty (20) students, three (3) of whom are Executives of the University's Students' Union Government. Ethical issues were upheld during data collection. Participants were informed about the goal of the study and their consent sought before the researcher could proceed with the interview. Face-to-face interview was held with each respondents, and questions posed to the respondents were not generic.

### **Research site**

This study was carried out in University of Abuja (UNIABUJA), Abuja Nigeria. The institution is situated in the country's Federal Capital Territory (FCT). It has ten faculties and offered diploma, degree, post-graduate and distance learning programmes. As at the time the study was conducted, it has an enrolment of over 20000 students, which makes it one of the largest universities in Nigeria (UNIABUJA, na). The researcher considered the institution as a suitable site for the study based on media reports and complaints on sexual harassment of female students in universities across the country (Familugba, 2016; Makinde, 2016) and anecdotal accounts of students studying at the university known to the first author.

### **Results**

As earlier indicated, a qualitative approach was adopted for the study. Hence, the analyses in this section are based on the views of the respondents interviewed for the study. The views of respondents are indicated by an "R" and a number. For analysis purposes, themes were generated from the resonating views of the respondents.

#### **Personal and vicarious Experiences of sexual harassment**

One of the goals of this study was to establish whether respondents have experienced any form of sexual harassment on campus. The question was not generic. 5 out of the total respondents have experienced some forms of sexual harassment from a male lecturer or know someone that had been sexually harassed by male lectures on campus:

*I have once been a victim, but I was lucky. I know two of my course-mates that were also victims, but you know they won't want to go into details. (R4)*

*I am a man, these things affect the female students most. But in the student union secretariat here, we have received several petitions on female students who were sexually harassed by male lecturers and even by their colleagues on campus? (R11)*

*In the first place, what is harassment? When a lecturer asked a student out, do you call that harassment? Or when a female student deliberate wear provocative attire to a lecturers office for consultation what do you call that? It depends on the angle you are looking at it. As far as I concerned, there is no harassment, it is just a game, you either win or loose... (R7)*

*...a lot of female students, irrespective of their performance level would have at one point in time or the other been sexually harassed by male lecturers. Some course-mates affirmed they had to sleep with lecturers to pass their courses... (R8)*

### **Absence of an effective institutional policy / legal framework and response mechanism**

The existence and viability of a swift institutional policy or legal framework and response mechanism is fundamental in order to minimise, prevent or eradicate incidences of sexual harassment in higher institutions of learning. In relation to University of Abuja, interviews conducted with 25 out 30 respondents indicate that there is no existing institutional policy or legal mechanism to checkmate the perpetrators of sexual harassment. This implication is that such gap will likely exacerbate the magnitude and prevalence of the problem. Moreover, in the absence of a structure and effective institutional response mechanism, perpetrators are likely to go unpunished. When asked if they are aware of any institutional policy or legal framework in place in relation to sexual harassment, selections of their responses are:

*In the first place, it is hard for to believe a policy on sexual harassment is in place in this university because lecturers have turn themselves to semi-gods; they do whatever they like with students and get away with it. On this campus, its either you sort or you face the music as students. (R1).*

*Well, there might be, but as a staff I have not come across any policy document on sexual harassment in UNIABUJA. (R12)*

*Am not sure actually; but I do not think there is a comprehensive policy on sexual harassment in UNIABUJA. However, there is a code of conduct for staff of this institution. (R3)*

*No there is no specific institutional policy on sexual harassment in UNIABUJA (R4)*

*Yes there is, the thing is its not made open to the public but it does exists. (R5)*

*Well, it depends on the context and the gravity of the offense; but I am not aware of anyone that has been sanctioned for sexual harassment in the university. (R18)*

*I am not aware of anyone that has been sanctioned on sexual harassment on this campus. As a student unionist in this institution, once incidences of such are reported to us and you inform the authority, they have a way of covering up for their colleagues, and also try to pacify the victim and the student union government... (R4)*

*Yes some lecturers that were found guilty of such act were sometimes called to order or issued queries, but for prosecution, I do not think so... (R5)*

*Yeah, some of the lecturers would ask you politely for a date, while some will deliberately mark you down or fail you outrightly because they know you will need to pass their courses or have encounter with them in order to graduate from the system. Sometimes, the pressure become unbearable such that you would just want to give them what they want for you to pass (R8)*

In the absence of a comprehensive policy framework on sexual harassment, perpetrators will continue to operate with relative impunity. Even when committees are set up, the absence of such policy framework weakens the credibility of such committees.

*Some of the perpetrators are well known to students, and their colleagues. Many of them have been engaged in such misconducts for years and they have been getting away with it; so where are the structures or mechanisms that were established? (R24)*

### **Lack of institutional structure / reporting system**

An effective and well established complaint reporting system is pivotal to a successful anti-sexual harassment campaigns in higher institutions (Joubert, 2009). To this end, respondents were asked if there are structures within the university where students can report incidences of sexual harassment. From the data collected, 24 out of 30 respondents indicated that there is no existing reporting system. 2 out of the remaining respondents indicated that there are, while the remaining 4 were indifferent:

*Yeah, students who are harassed by any lecturer could report to the dean of student affairs. (R1)*

*Trust me..., there is none. What gut would a student have to report his/her lecturer in a Nigerian University? Most likely, that student would have grown grey hairs before graduating from the system. (R3).*

*This is the north, it is very difficult for you to find any student that will want to report his/ her lecturer concerning sexual harassment, because they know nothing will be done about it (R4).*

*I don't think there is any structure in place that is known to any student where they can report sexual harassment. Even if there is any, you know these lecturers cover-up for themselves; even if you report, they are going to sweep it under the carpet (R5).*

### **Contributory factors to sexual harassment in your university?**

*Apart from the positions of scholars in literature on the contributory factors to incidences of sexual harassment in educational institutions which are largely broad and generic, the researchers were interested in specific ones that are peculiar to the institution under consideration. The following themes were generated from the data collected:*

#### *The culture of silence / patriarchy*

*Like I said earlier on, this is north, you don't raise such issue. It is very difficult for female students to expose or embarrass their lecturers (male), even when they are pained because of their experience, they just find it hard to report... (R3).*

*These lecturers believe that it very difficult for any student to report them, because they know their colleagues will conceal it... (R7)*

*Such I say it is the way our society is structured. Men generally see women as object of sexual satisfaction... (R11)*

*Who wants to report? To whom? We know the problem is pervasive on this campus and that colleagues are culprit, but it is like a taboo to raise such issue. The fear of reprisal and revictimisation sometimes deter students from reporting... (R9).*

*The desperation of student*

*Corruption is not just about the abuse of office...some our students are notoriously corrupt. They neither punctual in class nor do they sit for exams. If they are male students they can sort, but most female students prefer the other route...so who is to be blamed? They tell lecturers to ask for anything... (R21)*

*Wearing of Provocative dresses*

*...students themselves are the cause. Some of them wear clothes that reveal their sensitive body part...even when the institution prescribe certain dress code for them they are reluctant to comply... (R8)*

*Lack of political and institutional will to address the menace*

*...why should it take the national assembly years to pass the anti-sexual harassment bill...it has linger till date (R8).*

**Power-relation in sexual harassment incidences**

There are divergent conclusions from previous studies regarding the power-relations in sexual harassment incidences in universities. While some studies found that power relations between students and lecturers are asymmetrical (Amukugo, 2017; Okeke, 2011; Ogunbameru, 2006), others indicated that it is contractual (Eller, 2016; Hill & Silver, 2005). Such controversy was assessed by the researchers from the respondents' perspective. From data collected, 18 out of 30 respondents reported that it is based on asymmetric power relations, while the remaining 12 believe it is sometimes based on contractual relationship:

*Most male lecturers, especially professors are perceived to be very powerful and influential. Students are usually afraid to even clash with them because they can frustrate you. Such professors can do anything and get away with it. Moreover, they have network, so if you report one, you are likely to get punished by another... (R13)*

*...no power relation there. This thing is give and take. Some of these girls come to us half naked...so what do you call that? (R26)*

**State response to sexual harassment**

Based on the aforementioned, the researchers were interested generating suggestions from the respondents on measures that can be adopted to combat sexual harassment in Nigerian universities.

Selected views are:

*Pressure should be mounted on the National Assembly to pass the anti-sexual harassment bill into law. Then UNIABUJA and other educational institutions across the country, irrespective of the tier should be compelled to develop and include some of the provisions of this law into their institutional policy... (R5)*

*UNIABUJA should establish a viable reporting system and a dedicated department where students who are sexually harassed by lecturers could lodge a complaint... (R7)*

*Randy lecturers that are reported or exposed through the media should be investigated, and if found guilty dismissed and prosecuted... (R8).*

## **Discussions**

The study reveals that several female students in UNIABUJA have experienced sexual harassment, and male lecturers were indicated as the leading culprits in most the encounters. This confirms previous findings that sexual harassment is prevalent in Nigeria Universities and that male lecturers are the main perpetrators (Okeke, 2011; Ogwu, 2016; Ogunbameru, 2006).

it is also evident from the findings that beyond the sensationalised perception that power-relation between students and lecturers are asymmetrical, there are contractual relationships between female students and male lecturers in the university under consideration. Contractual basis of relational power between students and lecturers engender sexual harassment. This finding lends credence to the study conducted by Ogunbameru (2006) on the nature of power-relation that exist between students and lecturers in Nigerian universities. Moreover, while there might be evidences of contractual relationship, findings from previous studies have shown that such relationships are at large products of certain structural imbalances or inequalities in the socio-economic setting of the country at large (Okwu, 2016; Okeke, 2011; Ogunbameru, 2006). Such inequalities can sometimes make even the good performing female students turn blind eyes or willingly consent to the slightest overtures of her lecturers (male). This type of situation makes it very different to cast aspersion on the lecturers alone. Moreover, provocative attires worn by female students to lecture theatre or classrooms were opined to have forced many male lecturers to lusts after female students.

The study also found that there is no existing legal or institutional framework to combat sexual harassment in the university. Moreover, findings further indicate that there is comprehensive legislation that addresses sexual harassment in Nigerian universities and other educational institutions across the country even at the national level. From a broader perspective, weak or absence of national and institutional response mechanism will engender the escalation of crime, including sexual harassment. Previous studies conducted in Nigeria and in other climes lend credence to this finding (Bezabeh, 2016; Taiwo, et al, 2014; Arulogun, et al, 2013).

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

This article sought to evaluate institutional efforts in combating sexual harassment in higher institutions of learning (university) in Nigeria. The objective of the study has been achieved. It is evident from the findings that sexual harassment of female students has persisted in the university under consideration. While concerted efforts have been made by relevant stakeholders, including parents, Civil society and the media, at ensuring that male lecturers who sexually harassed female students are brought to justice, such

anticipated end is yet to be fully actualised. Fundamentally, there is no existing comprehensive legislation on sexual harassment in institutions of higher learning in Nigeria. While a bill has been sponsored to that end, the delay in its enactment is a major set-back to the campaigns against the menace in Nigerian universities. Such delay will also undoubtedly affect the prosecution of sexual harassment cases, including the efforts of law enforcement agencies in combating the menace. Hence, the bill should be enacted.

Furthermore, the study indicates that while most incidences of sexual harassment of female students in Nigerian universities are essentially products of asymmetric power-relations between male lecturers and female students, findings also suggest that some of such relationships were built on contractual basis. However, such relationships are often entered into in a bid to meet certain pressing needs, which by extension is a reflection of the broader socio-economic and political milieu that engender vulnerability in the country.

The study also established that sexual harassment is a violation of the fundamental human rights of female learners in Nigerian universities and also poses a serious challenge to the realisation of gender equality and sustainable development. It also weakens the reputation and integrity of our ivory towers. While a speedy passage of the anti-sexual harassment bill into law will in no little way help to ameliorate the problem, it is just a means to an end. Effective response to the anti-social and academic menace transcends the enactment of laws, but requires a collaborative effort of all relevant stakeholders, including parents, academics, civil society and policy makers. The State should also address the precipitating factors that render female students vulnerable to sexual harassment, and sometimes compel them to accept sexual overtures from male lecturers.

Based on the aforementioned, it is recommended that the State first fast-track the process of ensuring the anti-sexual harassment bill is passed into law and implemented. All universities and other higher institutions of learning be compelled to adapt the provisions of the proposed anti-sexual harassment bill to their respective institutions in a bid to formulate appropriate policies that will criminalise sexual harassment, and ensure all persons on campus, especially female students are protected from sexual harassment. Indecent dress patterns should be discouraged and possibly banned on campuses, while efforts should be made at embracing culturally acceptable dresses on campuses. If all these measures are adhered to, it will go a long way in ensuring that the menace is reduced and possibly combated in Nigerian institutions of higher learning.

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