

## **The Health Implication of Sexual Abuse on Female Students in Nigeria: A Case Study of Selected tertiary Institutions in Maiduguri, Borno State**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Sexual violence is a common phenomenon and occurs worldwide with pernicious consequences particularly when it occurs to the young. Based on this, this study which takes the case of three tertiary institutions in Maiduguri, aims at determining the prevailing rate of rape, sexual harassment, and associated health implication in Nigeria. Cross sectional descriptive research design is adopted for the study. The population comprises all the female students in all the tertiary institutions in Maiduguri, Borno State. Purposive sampling technique is used to select three tertiary institutions in Maiduguri. Simple random sampling is used to select three hundred female students from the three institutions. The mean age of the respondents is 21.8 years. Most of the respondents are single. Prevailing rate of rape is found to be relatively high, among young women who reported to have been raped. It is further gathered that majority of the students who have experienced sexual harassment never reported the culprits who are mostly lecturers. Also, report of rape is not found to correlate positively with the GHQ score of the respondents. In conclusion, the prevalence of rape and sexual harassment in Maiduguri is significantly high and is mainly perpetrated by known people to the victims. In view of these, policy should be formulated to address the issues of sexual harassment in schools and counselling services focusing on sexual harassment should be integrated into school health services.*

**Keywords:** *Female students, health implication, sexual abuse, sexual harassment*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Discussion about sexual matters is very much restricted within social space in most Muslim communities where strict cultural and religious observances serve as a lead to the expression of sexuality as well as the intermingling between the different sexes (Bullough V. and Bullough B., 1994). The fear of women being corrupted or as potential

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source for corrupting society is a major consideration in the patriarchal Muslim society where family honour is closely tied to the chastity of its women and girls (United Nations Report of the Special Rapporteur, 2000). The enforcement of acceptable female sexual behaviour can be extreme in many circumstances leading to violence against women and even occasionally, loss of life through a phenomenon known as honour killings (Feldner, 2000).

Sexual harassment against women occurs in all communities world-wide and appears to be an important source of distress among women and girls (Kullima, Kawuwa, Audu, Mairiga, and Bukar, 2010; Adeleke, Olowookere, Hassan, Komolafe and Asekun-Olarinmoye, 2012; Mohammed and Hashish 2015; Gruber and Finerine 2015; Ezechi, Adesolamusa, David, Wapmuk, Gbajabiamila, Eugeniaidigbe, Ezeobi, Ohihoin and Ujah, 2016). The lack of openness about sexual matters may worsen the situation through reducing help seeking behaviour for the victims of sexual abuse (Amoateng-Boahen, 2015). When women become afraid to step forward to tell their experiences, a state of denial of the existence of the problem of sexual harassment prevails and as a result no solution is possible on a communal scale to tackle the problem in a manner that it deserves. In addition, many of the victims are also constrained to report their experience for fear of further discrimination (Schaefer, 1989; Haralambos and Holborn, 2000).

There are three types of harassers; the predatory harassers, who derive a sadistic gratification; the dominance harassers who search for boost of ego and the strategic harassers who seek to use the act as tool for gaining competitive material advantage (Langelan, 1993). Whichever the source of harassment the consequences are profound both at the individual and societal level (Manohar and Kirpal, 1997). Women as a group suffer immense economic loss running to millions of dollars and the society suffers the consequences of this loss as well as that due to diminished productivity which result from sexual harassment (Paludi and Barickman, 1991).

Lately, the phenomenon of sexual harassment has been receiving a lot of public attention; from an issue of concern to feminism, it has become an issue of concern to different groups and institutions (Rowe, 1996). This is also partly because of increasing societal sensitivity towards the welfare of the vulnerable and weak. Studies detailing the prevalence of sexual harassment in work place and schools across cultures reveal a high incidence (Fitzgerald, 1993). Nigerian women share a similar experience of sexual harassment in the work place as their counterparts in the West. In a study conducted among civil servants in Ibadan about 25- 63% of the women interviewed reported being sexually molested (Yusuf, 2008). There are quite a few but growing numbers of critics of the huge debate about the rise in the statistics about sexual harassment, false allegations and biased interview techniques in studies on the subject among other factors were responsible for the high reports (O'Donohue, and Bowers, 2006). Others blame the victim for over sexualized dressing and hence probably deserving of the abuse (Kathleen, 2008; Swift, 2010). Studies on sexual harassment among women within Nigeria are limited to description of the extent of the problem (Akhiwu, Umanah, Oluhetto, 2013; Omonijo, Uche, Nwadiafor, and Rotimi, 2013; Badejoko, Anyabolu,

Badejoko, Ijarotimi, Kuti and Adejuyigbe, 2014). Psychological disturbance which attends the experience of sexual harassment has not however, been well studied. In a predominantly Muslim dominated environment, few studies have been carried out on sexual abuse, particularly on the health related outcome of people who have been victims of sexual harassment. This is significant when we consider the effect of unsubstantiated public perceptions, regarding sexual exploitation and permissiveness in western style schools, in undermining female education. An inquiry into the enormity of the problem and what may be responsible will empower our community on ways to reduce it and probably assist in improving girl child education. This study, therefore aims at determining the prevailing rate of rape, sexual harassment, and associated health implication on female students in Maiduguri, Borno State, Nigeria.

## METHOD

Cross sectional descriptive research design is adopted for the study. The population comprises all the female students in all the tertiary institutions in Maiduguri, Borno State. Purposive sampling technique is used to select three tertiary institutions in Maiduguri. the Ramat Polytechnic, the College for Legal and Islamic Studies and the School of Health Technology. Simple random sampling is used to select 300 female students out of the 365 who consented to participate in the study from the three institutions.

Permission to conduct the study was obtained from the schools' authority. Consent was sought and obtained from the students after utmost confidentiality was assured to the respondents. Thereafter, final year female students were seated comfortably in the class and the aim of the study was explained. The copies of questionnaire were distributed for self administration. A paper basket was placed on the podium for submission of completed copies of questionnaire to enhance confidentiality. Others who needed more privacy were encouraged to take the questionnaire to the hostel for completion. The respondents were encouraged to come forward for psychological assistance, particularly those who have experienced rape; the few that presented themselves were referred to a group of specialist (including the researchers). The schools authorities were alerted to the findings particularly of rape with the view to stimulating policy change towards addressing the right of the victims of sexual abuse. The instruments used for the collection of data are structured questionnaire for assessing sexual harassment in the previous 6 month and the 12-item General Health questionnaire (GHQ-12). The validity of the GHQ-12 has been reported to be comparable with that of the longer versions of GHQ in identification of minor psychiatric disorders (Goldberg, and William, 1988). A cut off point of 2/3 has been suggested for community studies in this environment (Abiodun, and Parakoyi, 1992). The copies of questionnaire were sorted to determine usable ones and the data were then entered into the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS version 15). Descriptive statistics were used in determining percentage, proportion and averages.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Most of the respondents (89.7%) were single. At least 57% of the respondents are Muslims by way of their religious orientation. There seems to be a high prevalence of sexual harassment within the last six months in the tertiary educational institutions studied with 57.6% of the respondents reporting at least one form of sexual harassment (table 1). Although the respondents report that 42.4% of boyfriends and classmates were the source of sexual harassment, teachers alone committed 32.5% of the sexual harassments. Relatives accounted for 6.3% of experience of sexual harassment over the six months under study, while others constituted 18.8% (table 2).

There are various forms of sexual harassment by which the victims are subjected to. These include the use of obscene words, fondling and rape. Majority of the respondents who had the experience of sexual harassment in the last six months say, they have been subjected to obscene and offensive languages, suggestive words with 50% response rate. Fondling was reported by 34%; while rape was reported by 11% of the cases. It was observed that there was poor reporting of the incidents of sexual harassment by the students. Majority (65.4%) of them had the experience and never reported to anybody at home or in school (table 3). The most likely category of harasser to go unreported was found to be the teacher.

The percentage of those who met the criteria for illness among the respondents was 35.8% whereas 63.6% did not meet the criteria (table 4). This study was similar to the findings of previous study that found high prevalence of sexual molestation among civil servants in Ibadan, Nigeria (Yusuf, 2008). The teachers were found to be the single most important source of molestation of the female students. This may be due to the superior position of authority which the teachers have over the students. This finding is in conformity with results of previous studies which report a relatively higher rate of molestation from superiors at the work place and at school (Yusuf, 2008; Omonijo, et al. 2013). The high proportion of harassment attributed to boyfriends and class mates is suggestive of the dependency of girls on boys to read and carry out assignments, which ultimately places them at a position of disadvantage that the boys may be tempted to exploit.

The proportion reported having been raped in the past 6 months compared to none in the other studies conducted among civil servants (Goldberg and William, 1988) suggests the relatively weaker positions the female students are compared to the mature civil servants who may know how best to protect themselves from predatory male sexual behaviours.

**Table 1:** Demographic Characteristics and Prevalence of sexual harassment among the respondents

Variables	N	%
Age Mean age (21.8) yrs; SD 9.3		
<b>Marital Status:</b>		
Single	269	89.7
Married	31	10.3
<b>Religion:</b>		
Islam	171	57
Christianity	129	43
Prevalence of sexual harassment	190	57.6

**Table 2:** Category of men Involved in the harassment

Category	N	%
Boyfriend/classmate	127	42.4
Teacher	98	32.5
Relatives	19	6.3
Others	56	18.8

**Table 3:** Forms of sexual harassment

Form	N	%
Obscene and offensive languages	96	50
Fondling	67	34
Rape	21	11
Reporting of harassment	196	65.4

**Table 4:** Percentage of the participants who meet criteria for illness according to General Health Questionnaire (GHQ).

The GHQ finding	Frequency	Percent
NO CASE	192	63.6
CASE	108	35.8
Total	300	99.4

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The prevalence of sexual harassment in tertiary educational institution is alarming and is mainly perpetrated by people close to the females, particularly those they trust. Most of the victims are poorly empowered on how to deal with the experience, but ironically are able to manage to maintain normal health. Consequently, the study reveals that female students study in hostile and sexually driven environment. There is no policy for dealing with sexual harassment in the schools. Teachers are major source of sexual harassment. No effective channel for receiving psychological attention after sexual harassment experience. It is concluded based on the findings of this study that if the trend is not addressed as a matter of urgency, it may negatively affect female child education and this will dampen the future of the girl child which has dangerous economic effect considering the role of women in nation building. A more detailed study using qualitative approaches may be needed to understand the difficulties in mental health of the victims of sexual harassment. Based on the foregoing, the study recommends the following:

- i. Policy should be formulated to tackle the issue of sexual harassment in schools.
- ii. Students should be encouraged to report cases of sexual harassment to the appropriate authority who should in turn treat it with required maturity.
- iii. The school authority should provide counseling services to give support for potential victims.
- iv. There should be encouragement for the funding of victim support groups.

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