FROM 'MR LECTURER' TO THE 'COLD ROOM' EXPERIENCE: UNDERSTANDING THE DRIVERS, MANIFESTATIONS OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND RESPONSES IN NIGERIA'S EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

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Abstract

A major corrupt practice in educational institution is sexual harassment. It has gotten to an alarming and preposterous level not only in Nigeria but globally. In spite of studies and laws to address this social problem and menace, it remains alarming. This paper examined the drivers of sexual harassments in Nigeria educational institutions, manifestations and responses. The study adopts a qualitative methodology and therefore descriptive. Primary and secondary sources of the study were majorly from video documentary, music, literature review, media reports and personal observations. The paper found that the factors responsible for the menace are among other things precarious working/learning conditions, weak educational system, a normalization of gender-based violence, toxic academic masculinities, a culture of silence, lack of active leadership or low level of accountability, depression from victims and predators, lack of proper orientation lot parental care, drug abuse, eroding values and indiscipline. Though responses have majorly come from federal and state legislations as well as a few higher institutions, the problem is still prevalent. The paper argues that profiling sexual harassment as a tertiary institution phenomenon is one of the reasons why the laws, policies and interventions made in the past and in recent past have all failed to address the hydra phenomenon. Recommendations of the study were based on the findings of the study. This includes the need for a comprehensive law to address the menace of sexual harassment across the country.

Keywords: Sexual harassment, rape, student disciplinary council, corruption, sex for grade

Introduction

Sexual exploitation and harassment within educational institutions represent a significant form of corrupt practice that influences learners, the educational sector, and society at large. This issue is prevalent worldwide, affecting various social organizations, including families, communities, workplaces, religious institutions, and educational settings. Sexual harassment was first formally addressed by the International Labour Organisation (ILO, 2003) in the Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention of 1958 and is prohibited under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. According to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), sexual harassment is defined as unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature that impacts an individual's

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employment, interferes with work performance, or creates a hostile work environment. The complexity of sexual harassment lies in the concept of 'unwelcome behavior,' which does not necessarily mean involuntary. Victims might consent or participate in offensive conduct due to coercion or pressure, yet such participation still constitutes harassment. These behaviors can include unwanted sexual comments, advances, jokes, displaying objectifying images, physical contact, or assault. Perpetrators can be colleagues, supervisors, subordinates, or third parties, and within educational institutions, harassers can be students, teachers, staff, or fellow workers.

The #MeToo movement, initiated by Tarana Burke in 2006, highlighted the prevalence and complexity of sexual harassment, particularly for women of color in the United States, and sparked a global conversation. Educational institutions, in particular, have seen significant attention to this issue. Reports indicate that women are more likely to experience sexual harassment than men. A report by Gender Mobile Initiative indicates that 70 percent of the female population in Nigerian schools has encountered such harassment. The issue was notably addressed in Nigerian pop culture by hip-hop artist Idris Abdulkareem in his songs "Mr Lecturer" (2002) and "Mr Lecturer 2" (2004), and further spotlighted by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) documentary on sexual harassment in Nigerian and Ghanaian universities (BBC, 2019). While numerous studies have explored sexual harassment in tertiary institutions, focusing on its impacts and responses (e.g., Joseph, 2015; List, 2017; Ayeni and Stand to End Rape Initiative, 2021; Anwar et al., 2022), these studies often overlook the drivers of this phenomenon and responses across all levels of education. This paper aims to fill that gap by examining the drivers, manifestations, and responses to sexual harassment in Nigerian educational institutions. It argues that limiting the issue to tertiary institutions has hindered effective legal, policy, and intervention measures. The study employs a descriptive approach, drawing on sources from books, journals, media, online videos, and personal observations. The article is structured into five sections: introduction, literature review, drivers of sexual harassment in educational institutions, manifestations and responses, and conclusion.

Sexual Harassments in Nigeria: A Literature Review

Many studies have examined the issue of sexual harassment across the globe and in Nigeria in particular. Ladebo and Shopeju (2004) agreed that female students are primarily targeted in higher institutions, with those harassed generally having lower academic performance than their non-harassed counterparts. Owoaje and Olusola-Taiwo (2011) examined the sexual harassment experiences of female graduates from some tertiary institutions in Nigeria. Their findings revealed that 69.8% of respondents had been sexually harassed, with the main perpetrators being male classmates and lecturers. About two-thirds experienced non-physical harassment, such as sexual comments (57.8%) and requests for sexual favors in exchange for academic benefits (32.2%). Physical harassment included unwanted touching (29.4%) and intentional brushing against in a sexual manner (28.9%). Leach (2013) reported that sexual harassment in education is higher in countries with weak educational systems, low levels of accountability, high levels of poverty, and gender inequality. It is also believed to be more prevalent in institutions where educators are poorly trained, underpaid, and severely under-

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resourced (Beninger, 2013). Many scholars assert that females are the highest victims, with perpetrators including both teaching and non-teaching staff (Onoyase, 2019). Victims often decline to report incidents due to fear of school indifference and shaming (Omonijo et al., 2013; Uduma, 2014). Joseph (2015), in a comparative study of sexual harassment in tertiary institutions, found it to be prevalent globally, with significant effects on victims, including trauma, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety, melancholy, irrational behaviors, and poor academic performance. Joseph (2015) also found that most victims are reluctant to report due to a lack of sanctions on perpetrators or being blamed for provocative dressing or behavior. Recommendations include zero tolerance, clear policies on sexual harassment, accessible reporting mechanisms, effective response to incidents, punishment for perpetrators, and training for staff.

Sexual harassment has lasting impacts on future victimization (Chiodo et al., 2009) as well as on the learning, psychology, and well-being of victims (Anwar et al., 2022). List (2017) avers that perpetrators of sexual violence against female students are predominantly male, with under-reporting and trivialization still high for rape and sexual assault. Inadequate institutional responses and fear of not being believed deter victims from reporting, while universities often delay responses to preserve reputations or due to lack of evidence, reinforcing students' fears. Thompson (2012) and Thompson & Awange (forthcoming) consider sexual harassment a form of violence against women, with physical, economic, social, and psychological impacts. It is a prevalent public health issue and a violation of human rights. Onoyase (2019) concluded that sexual harassment of female students is perpetrated by male lecturers and non-academic staff through inappropriate comments, unwanted touching, and enticing students with high scores for sex. Bondestam and Lundqvist (2020) confirmed that it is a global epidemic with significant impacts on victims. Ayeni and Stand to End Rape Initiative (2021) found that 85% of participants who experienced workplace sexual harassment in Nigeria were female, while 15% were male. Despite numerous studies on sexual harassment in Nigeria, there has been inadequate attention to the drivers of sexual harassment in higher education institutions.

Method

The study adopts the qualitative methodology and therefore descriptive. Sources for the study were mainly from primary and secondary sources. The primary source for the study is personal observation from the years of teaching and interacting with students by the researchers. The average teaching experiences in higher institution of the researchers (13+2+0+23+20/5) is 11.6 years and for the fresh graduate student who also gave an insight of his encounters with his teachers at both the undergraduate and the graduate levels. Three of the researchers have had more than a decade teaching experiences in secondary schools before joining the university. Since the primary source of observation has its weaknesses, it was supported with other secondary sources such as video documentary, music, literature review and media reports. These sources were used to complement the primary sources.

Results and Discussions

Drivers of Sexual Harassment in Nigeria Education Institutions

Sufficient literature has delved into the issue of sexual harassment across the globe. Many studies agree that sexual harassment is a global phenomenon (Prinsloo, 2006; Morley and Lussier, 2009; Smit and Plessis, 2011; Kebirungi, 2021; Ngubelanga, 2021) and Nigeria is no exception. Various factors contribute to sexual harassment in Nigeria's higher educational institutions. These drivers include precarious working and learning conditions, poor family backgrounds, high academic and societal pressure on graduating students, a weak educational system, normalization of gender-based violence, toxic academic masculinities, a culture of silence, lack of active leadership and accountability, depression among victims and predators, lack of proper orientation and parental care, drug abuse, eroding values and indiscipline, absence of surveillance technology such as closed-circuit television (CCTV) around campuses and office corridors, lack of clear policies on harassment and gender-based violence, poor institutional response, lack of confidential reporting mechanisms, desperation among graduating students, peer pressure, and provocative dressings (Ladebo, 2003; Ladebo and Shopeju, 2004; Chiodo et al., 2009; Omonijo et al., 2013; Uduma, 2014; Joseph, 2015; List, 2017; Ayeni and Stand to End Rape Initiative, 2021; personal observations).

Both students and teachers can fall victim to sexual harassment, with female students and teachers being particularly vulnerable. Poor leadership and low accountability, weak educational systems, and the normalization of gender-based violence create environments where predators feel unchallenged, perpetuating the suffering of victims. Desperation among some students, particularly those nearing graduation, can lead them to initiate sexual advances towards weak or undisciplined teachers or lecturers. In Idris Abdulkareem's music video "Mr Lecturer Part 2," the student initiates the amorous relationship with the lecturer, reflecting a consensual but ethically problematic situation. The student, who describes herself as an "olodo" (meaning dull student), offers a relationship in exchange for passing her exams. This scenario illustrates how desperation and weak institutional structures can lead to unethical behaviors from both students and teachers. In the BBC documentary, a lecturer from a public university admitted that many inappropriate interactions occur in a "cold room" between lecturers and students. The "cold room," intended as a Senior Staff Club for academic staff to unwind, becomes a site of sexual exploitation. The lecturer suggested that "sex for grades" is mutually beneficial, highlighting the normalization of such practices in some institutions. These inconsistencies and lack of proper legal action against perpetrators reinforce the deeprooted complexity of handling sexual harassment cases. In some instances, supposed victims willingly offer themselves to teachers in exchange for favors such as additional marks, good grades, referee reports, or recommendation letters. This further complicates the issue, making it challenging to address and resolve effectively. Addressing these drivers requires comprehensive institutional reforms, strict enforcement of policies, active leadership, and creating a safe and supportive environment for victims to report incidents without fear of retribution.

Manifestations and Responses in Nigeria

Manifestations

While most studies have shown that sexual harassment happen in every facets of the society including homes and work place, our focus are educational institutions starting from nursery and secondary schools, Koranic schools, secondary and tertiary institutions and they were given below.

Table 1: Selected Manifestations of Sexual Harassments in Nigeria Education

S/	Education	Incidence	Source
N	Institutions		
1	University of Lagos Women Society Nursery and Primary School in Akoka, Lagos/ April 2019	School driver molested a female pupil	https://saharareporters.com/2019/04/08/unilag-women-society-school-suspends-teacher-over-defilement-four-year-old-pupil
2	Divinity Care Nursery and Primary School in Makurdi, Benue State,	A male teacher molested three Primary school students	https://www.tvcentertainment.tv/2018/11/school-teacher-arrested-for-molesting-3-students-in-benue/
3	Koranic school in Lagos	Male teacher raped and molested nine Islamiyya pupils aged seven and 13 years	https://www.vanguardngr.com/2 022/06/how-arabic-teacher- allegedly-assaulted-9-islamic- pupils-sexually-in-lagos-nurse/
4	L. A. Secondary School, Ipetumodu, Ife North Local Council of Osun State,	Male teacher rapes junior school student inside school laboratory	https://guardian.ng/news/nigeria/ metro/osun-teacher-remanded- for-raping-student-inside-school- laboratory/
5	Federal Polytechnic, Bauchi, 2021	Two male lecturers found guilty for raping female students	https://punchng.com/bauchi- poly-fires-two-lecturers-for- raping-students-expels-30- students/
6	Rivers State College of Health Science and Management Technology,	Male lecturer rapes first year student	https://dailypost.ng/2021/05/15/rivers-college-of-health-lecturer-allegedly-rapes-female-student-family-raises-alarm/
7	Department of English and Literature, Faculty of Arts, University of Benin	A male lecturer raped a 400 level project student in his office	https://punchng.com/uniben- english-lecturer-allegedly-rapes- final-year-student-in-office/

Source: Compiled by the authors

Table 1 is instructive because it shows that the menace persists across all educational levels from nursery and primary to even Koranic and tertiary institutions. It further affirms that most of the perpetrators are males and victims are female students. *Responses*

The table below show how some countries have responded to the issue of sexual harassments in their institutions of learning.

Table 2: Comparative Response to Sexual Harassment in Educational Institutions

Country Responses to Sexual Harassment		
France	Approval of legislation that makes sexual harassment a	
(2012)	crime and it covers sexual harassment in educational	
	institutions. The violation of the new French law is	
	punishable by up to three years in prison.	
Ghana	Guidelines for the development of Anti Sexual	
	Harassment Policy in Tertiary Education Institutions	
	(TEIs) in Ghana	
Nigeria	While the constitution is not clear on sexual harassment	
	in Nigeria, there are a Criminal and Penal code and	
	Corrupt and Other Related Offences Act 2000. Also	
	most educational institutions usually set up panels	
	through the Student/Staff Disciplinary Committee to deal	
	with such cases. Introduction of the Sexual Harassment	
	in Tertiary Education Institution Prohibition Bill in 2016	
	and another bill to Prevent, Prohibit and Redress Sexual	
	Harassment of Students in Tertiary Educational	
	Institutions and for other matters connected therewith	
	2019. The bill pegged 14 years jail term with a minimum	
	of 5 years without an option of fine for any educator who	
	commits sexual offences in tertiary institutions. In 2020,	
	the Senate also amended the bill to sentence lecturers	
	found guilty of sexually abusing students to 21 years	
	imprisonment. The senate adjusted the law to all schools	
	including primary schools, bosses at work, directors,	
	HODs, supervisors, chairman, councilors and	
	conductors.	
South Africa	Various Acts protect learners against sexual harassment.	
	These are: The Constitution, South African Schools Act,	
	The Children's Act, The common law of (in loco	
	parentis), A National Child Protection Register must be	
	kept by the Director-general of the national department,	
	etc.	

Britain Enactment of the Equality Act (2010) to address the

issue rather than focus on education sector or tertiary institution. The law takes into cognizance the perception of the harasser, the other circumstances of the case; and whether it is reasonable for the conduct to have that

effect.

United States of America Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 is a

federal civil rights law that prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex in any education program or activity that receives federal funding. Title IX is a powerful tool for students who want to combat sexual violence at school and on college campuses. Under Title IX, discrimination on the basis of sex can include sexual harassment, rape,

and sexual assault. Many schools also have

Responses to Sexual Harassment in Nigerian Educational Institutions

Countries, including Nigeria, have taken various measures to address the menace of sexual harassment. Notably, Nigerian law led to the conviction of Professor Richard Akinyele, who was sentenced to two years imprisonment in 2018 for sexual misconduct. Furthermore, at least 18 lecturers in Nigeria's tertiary institutions were indicted and dismissed for similar offenses between 2021 and 2022 (Tolu-Kolawole, 2022). Although Nigerian higher institutions have a degree of autonomy, it is incumbent upon each university or the Committee of Vice Chancellors (CVCs) to develop comprehensive and inclusive policies to address sexual harassment uniformly. Many tertiary institutions in Nigeria have established disciplinary committees, either standing or ad-hoc, responsible for addressing social vices, including sexual harassment. These committees often operate at different levels, such as student disciplinary committees and senior and junior staff disciplinary committees. However, they frequently fall short in effectively addressing sexual harassment. The persistent issue of sexual harassment in the country is exacerbated by the inhibiting factors inherent in the drivers, affecting the efficiency and efficacy of these committees. It has been established that sexual harassment is not limited to higher education institutions but is also growing at the preschool level. The current focus of authorities and stakeholders is predominantly on higher institutions, but this is only a part of a broader societal issue. The persistence of sexual harassment is symptomatic of deeper systemic problems within Nigerian society and the educational system, which reflects this larger context. Authorities and stakeholders must recognize that addressing sexual harassment at higher institutions is crucial, but a comprehensive approach that considers the entire educational continuum and societal norms is essential. Holistic reforms and targeted interventions are needed to create a safer and more equitable educational environment at all levels (Joseph, 2015).

Conclusion

Inclusion of various drivers, manifestations, and responses to sexual harassment in Nigerian educational institutions reveals that numerous factors contribute to the problem. These factors include precarious working and learning conditions, a weak educational system,

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normalization of gender-based violence, toxic academic masculinities, a culture of silence, lack of active leadership and accountability, depression among victims and predators, poor parental care, drug abuse, eroding values and indiscipline, absence of technology such as CCTV, unclear harassment policies, poor institutional responses, lack of confidential reporting mechanisms, desperation among graduating students, societal pressures, peer pressure, and provocative dressings. This issue spans all educational levels, from nursery to tertiary institutions. Despite existing laws and policies, sexual harassment remains prevalent, largely because it has been misprofiled as a problem specific to tertiary institutions.

Educational Implications

The findings of this study underscore the need for significant reforms in Nigerian educational institutions to address sexual harassment. Schools and universities must improve their working and learning environments, enforce stronger policies, and foster a culture of accountability and respect. The study highlights the importance of implementing comprehensive sexual harassment policies, providing thorough orientation and training on these issues, and establishing robust support systems for victims. Additionally, there is a need for greater transparency and action from institutional leaders to effectively combat sexual harassment and ensure a safer educational environment for all students and staff.

Contribution to Knowledge

This study provides significant insights into sexual harassment within Nigerian educational institutions by identifying a broad spectrum of contributing factors, including precarious working conditions, normalization of gender-based violence, and lack of accountability. It demonstrates that sexual harassment is a systemic issue affecting all educational levels, not just tertiary institutions, thereby challenging narrow perceptions of the problem. The evaluation of existing laws and institutional responses highlights their limitations, offering a critical view of why past efforts have been insufficient. Recommendations for improving educational environments, strengthening laws, and establishing support structures provide actionable guidance for policymakers and educators. Additionally, the study suggests directions for further research, such as assessing the impact of specific interventions and understanding cultural factors. Overall, this research enhances the understanding of sexual harassment and informs more effective strategies for addressing it in Nigerian educational settings.

Recommendations

To address the pervasive issue of sexual harassment effectively, several measures should be implemented:

1. Educational institutions should enhance working and learning conditions, reinforce the educational system, and actively counter the normalization of gender-based violence and toxic academic masculinities.

- 2. The government and educational institutions should reinforce the enforcement of existing laws and ensure the implementation of comprehensive and inclusive policies specifically targeting sexual harassment.
- 3. Policymakers should ensure that teachers are recognized as role models and provide them with training to uphold high ethical standards and lead by example.
- 4. Educational institutions should establish robust support structures for victims, implement effective case management procedures, and increase funding to support the educational system comprehensively.
- 5. Schools should offer comprehensive orientation on sex education and sexual harassment, implement rigorous recruitment and admission processes, and establish reporting centers and safeguarding policies to protect students effectively.

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