

Gender Based Violence in Nigeria: The Case of Sexual Harassment in Tertiary Institutions

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Abstract: *From the cultural perspective, the practice of gender based violence is predominant in the world societies, especially developing countries like Nigeria. One of the identifiable forms of GBV in schools is sexual harassment or abuse. This activity endangers the girls in school and often times engender poor physical and psychological health, even death: GBV therefore remains an obstacle to girls' education. The paper proceeded through a library or secondary search-methodology. It also attempted to evaluate the school activity and let down intervention mechanisms. The paper concludes with a proposal for the enforcement of available laws and repealing of obsolete ones so as to dismantle all forms of impediments against the development/advancement of girls' /women education in Nigerian institutions.*

Keywords: *Education, Gender, Sexual Harassment, Tertiary Institutions*

I. Introduction

Education is a fundamental human right: Every child is entitled to it. It is critical to our development as individuals and as societies, and it helps pave the way to a successful and productive future. When we ensure that children have access to a rights-based, quality education that is rooted in gender equality, we create a ripple effect of opportunity that impacts generations unborn. This is because it ends generational cycles of poverty and disease and provides a foundation for sustainable development (Nwagwu, 1997).

A quality basic education better equips girls and boys with the knowledge and skills necessary to adopt healthy lifestyles, protect themselves from HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases, and take an active role in social, economic and political decision-making process as they transition to adolescence and adulthood. In addition, a rights-based approach to education can address some of societies' deeply rooted inequalities. These inequalities condemn millions of children, particularly girls, to a life without quality education and, therefore, to a life without quality education-therefore, to a life of missed opportunities (Husbands, 1992).

Sexual assault is a broad term that covers many other more specific crimes and issues. Some of those are:

- Child sexual abuse.
- Internet/technology based crimes,
- Sexual harassment
- Rape and statutory rape,
- Stalking.
- Trafficking and sexual exploitation,
- Domestic violence and dating violence.

(Otti,2002:83).

Some youth populations like girls or gay and lesbian youth are at risk.

Sexual harassment is even more than campus cultism is seen as the norm in Nigerian tertiary institution as male lecturers see it as one of the perks of office and male students see it as part of campus life. (Sheriff & Garba 2010).

II. What is sexual harassment in schools?

"Sexual harassment in schools is unwanted and unwelcome behavior of a sexual nature that interferes with the right to receive an equal educational opportunity. Sexually harassing behaviors that can interfere with one's educational opportunity range from words (written and spoken) and gestures to unwanted physical contact. Some of the behaviors may also be criminal acts (assault and rape, attempted or completed and child sexual abuse") Ladebo, (2001)

Dey, Rorn and Sax (1996) present three theoretical models specifying the likely causes of sexual harassment,

- a. Is the social cultural model that views harassment as the enforcement of gender role inequalities within the social system, the prevailing patriarchal system subordinates the position of the women to that of the man. Thus, sexual harassment is seen as a tool of domination to keep the woman perpetually

- subordinated to men.
- b. The natural/biological model argues that the intent is not to harm, or harm women, but that men are naturally aggressive in pursuing their sexual urges. A similar version of this view posits that sexual harassment is the product of attraction of the man to the women.
 - c. The organization model argues that the existing hierarchical authority relations and structures organizations are responsible for the incidence of sexual harassment.

III. Root causes of Sexual Harassment in Nigeria Tertiary Institutions

Sexual Harassment has its root causes on certain facets. Some of these factors according to Susan Carne (2007) include the following:

A. Faulty vetting process:

The non-availability of a clearly defined marking criteria and the non-institutionalization or foolproof examination vetting process provide easy means for lecturers who have an axe to grind with a "stubborn girls" to fail her in their course, regardless of her actual performance in that course.

- The grievance procedure put in place to address issues of this nature in several schools only exacerbate the situation as it only earns the concerned victim further victimization.
- The strong spirit of camaraderie that exists among lecturers ensures that a girl that a girl who attempts to go against the norm by demanding for her scripts. it sometimes ends up predisposing herself to the vendettas of the other department or even faculty lecturers.

B. Inadequate security:

- Poor policing by a poorly staffed, paid, and armed Nigerian police force gives undesirable elements like rapists - students and lecturers a field day to terrorize female students on campus. Multiple cases abound of female students that have been raped in broad daylight by a lecturer in his office or by male students (usually cultists) in an obscure location on campus.

C. Decline of Cultural Values:

- The steady decline of cultural values, especially as it pertains to sartorial decorum among female students (some female students dress worse than high-class prostitutes) has also contributed to this natural but negative phenomenon.
- Male lecturers and students are easily tempted into seeking sexual relationship with these female students; when they don't get it the easy way, they resort to extremes.

D. Declining Academic Standards

- The steadily declining rates of academic performance among students in general also play a part.
- Till acquisition of tertiary education is increasingly seen as a social vocation with students preferring cultism and high-class prostitution to their books. This makes it easy for a male lecturer to threaten a female student with failure, secured in the knowledge that she is a below average student.
- A vicious cycle has resulted in female students not seeing any reason to study when they can easily get good grades just by sleeping with their respective lecturers.

E. Cultism:

Although, condemnable. one of the major reason for the rise and proliferation of many female campus cults (the Black Bra, Pink ladies, Daughters of Jezebel, the Elizabeths among others), was the need to protect themselves from sexual harassment and victimization from male lecturers and students alike.

F. Brain Drain:

- Brilliant female students who refuse to play ball are increasingly being frustrated out of Nigerian schools to foreign Universities, other without similar means may simply dropouts and their educational careers t that terminated prematurely.

G. Gender Inequality:

- Sexual harassment in Nigeria tertiary schools as a part of the general phenomena leading to violence against women (as stated in the alarm raised in the UN Declaration on the Elimination of violence against women) effectively reduces the opportunities for female students to legal, social, political and economic equality in society.

Five norms or belief systems that contribute to sexual violence

- Limited roles, objectification and oppression of women,
- Value placed on claiming and maintaining, power.
- Tolerance of aggression and attribution of blame to victims,
- Traditional constructs of manhood,
- Notions of individual and family privacy that foster secrecy and silence
- Societal pressure to keep silent, victim-blaming and stigma surrounding sexual violence mean that few women report sexual assaults.
- There is no law specifically addressing sexual harassment in Nigeria

Existing Mechanisms/ issues on GBV- FRN (2004)

- A few Nigerian states have a law in place to address domestic violence, for example the Domestic Violence Law of Lagos State (2007).
- Gender Based Violation Law of Ekiti State (2011). However, the country's Penal Code grants husbands permission to beat their wives, provided the violence does not result in serious injury.
- Police are usually reluctant to intervene in domestic violence cases, unless the woman has sustained serious injury.
- Women's rights organizations are active in providing support services to victims of domestic violence and other forms of violence against women, as well as raising awareness, and pushing for legislation to address domestic violence to be introduced.

- The percentage is higher in urban areas (30.2%) than in rural area (26.3%) and higher in the South-South region (52.1 %) than in the North West region (13.1%).
- Further, attitudes condoning domestic violence are entrenched - when presented with a list of five reasons why a man might be justified in beating his wife, 43 % of women agreed with at least one of the reasons.
- Although accurate figures as to prevalence are unavailable, rape and sexual violence is recognized as a widespread, serious problem in Nigeria.
- Sexual harassment is considered to be widespread, and includes the practice of demanding sexual favours in return for employment or grades in university.
- Sexual violence has also emerged as a significant feature of the ongoing conflict in the Niger Delta, with reports of state security forces using rape as a tool to intimidate the local population and as a way of 'revenge' attacks by militants on oil installations

IV. How to Deal with Sexual Harassment in School: On the part of the Victim

The definition of Sexual harassment is unwelcome words or conduct of a sexual nature that have the purpose or effect of creating an embarrassing, hostile, humiliating or offensive environment for the victim. It could just be a one time thing, but when it becomes routine, the victim's life could become a living nightmare. If you are a victim of sexual harassment, it is up to *you* to take the first action: Tell your harasser to stop and report future incidents to a trusted adult at school. Fitzgerald (1995).

Sexual harassment is illegal. If the harassment is not sexual in any way, it may or may not be illegal, but it is not described or dealt with as sexual harassment. Repeated verbal abuse surrounding your weight, for example, is not sexual in nature.

Any of the following behaviors, when not welcomed, fall under sexual harassment, whether they come from another student, or any kind of authority figure as well:

- Touching, pinching, and grabbing body parts.
- Being trapped
- Being sent sexual notes or pictures (regardless of how they are sent).
- Sexual graffiti.
- Being the target of suggestive or sexual gestures.
- Being the target of sexual rumors or sexual propositions
- Having your clothes taken off.
- Someone else taking their clothes off.
- Being forced to kiss someone or do something else sexually.
- Being forced to have sexual intercourse with someone.

Find out if there are other victims. If you are not the only person who's being harassed, talk to the other victims and find out about their experiences. Suggest attempting to stop the harassment by taking the following steps together:

- A. Let the harasser know that their behavior or comments make you feel uncomfortable and that you want them to stop, even if you have even the *slightest* suspicion you are being sexually harassed. It's best to do this immediately when an incident occurs, or as close to the incident as possible. Saying "I don't like it when you do that and I want you to stop" is enough. This will make it clear to the instigator that the behavior is not welcomed and not flattering. Preferably, say this to them while there are other people around who can act as witnesses, and don't laugh or smile or do anything else to make the harasser think you're only joking.
- B. If you feel especially victimized, or worry that a confrontation like this may put you in further danger, skip this step. At the very least, try not to smile or laugh when it happens, so as not to encourage the behavior.
- C. Keep a written record of all of the incidents that occur. Write down the date, time, and exactly what happened, as well as the names of people who saw it happen. Also record any attempts to make it clear that the behavior is unwanted. Save any notes or pictures you receive as evidence. You should also record the impact that the harassment is having on your life, including how it makes you feel, and how your self-esteem, academic performance, and emotional stability are being affected.
For example: *June 15, 2007. Today at around 2:30, as I was walking from history class (in Room 13) to math class (Room 2B) on the third turned around, made eye contact, and they laughed and pointed at me. Two people from history class (Mary Latter and Christina Jones) both watched it happen and didn't say or do anything. I started to cry and felt embarrassed. so I turned around and kept walking. When I was in class, I couldn't stop thinking about what happened even though I had a test that I'd studied so hard for. I usually ace my math tests, but couldn't concentrate, and I think I might have actually failed this one."*
- D. Not only will doing this help you report the incident and show that it was indeed sexual harassment, it may also help you vent, and shake feeling of self-doubt.
- E. Go to an authority figure for help.
 - The school nurse, doctor or sexual harassment officer are an excellent choice. If you don't feel comfortable talking to them, tell a trusted teacher or other faculty member. Request that they keep a written record of the day and time that you told them.
 - If the person asks you why you didn't speak up earlier, explain that you were afraid of being ostracized or further harassed for reporting the behavior unnecessarily.
Tell more than one authority figure, if possible, such as a parent, a school nurse, a teacher, or an administrator.
- F. Write a letter to the harasser. Describe what they have been doing to harass you and that they bother you and you want them to stop. Keep a copy for yourself. Have your trusted authority figure deliver the letter so the harasser takes it seriously

V. Sexual Harassment in Nigerian Tertiary Schools: Prevention and Control Nan Stein (2007)

- Passage of enabling and specific legislations by the Nigerian legislature is needed to address the issue of sexual harassment and victimization, of female students at all levels of education.
- The Nigerian University Commission/NCCE should push for stricter, more specific and more transparent vetting procedures in tertiary schools to ensure lecturers grade papers without vindictiveness or favour.
- The Nigerian media should conduct more investigative reports to expose this negative phenomenon. (Hourad, Katherine, 2007).

United Nations Resolution 1325

- October 2000 the United National Security Council accepted resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and security.
- The resolution was initiated by the then minister of women affairs in Namibia when that country took its turn chairing the security Council.

UNFPA, UNDP, WHO, UNDP, UNESCO etc have put every effort into enabling women to speak out against GBV and to get help when they are victims of it.

United Nations' strategy is to:

- Ensure that emergency contraception is available for victims of sexual violence.
- Strengthen advocacy on sexual harassment.

- Integrate messages on the prevention of GBV-Sexual Harassment into projects/programme.

Among the recommendations to the UN and notional governments, the resolution calls for:

Key provisions of the resolution are captured by "three P's

- Prosecuting people for crimes against women (often committed with impunity).
- Protection of the human rights of women and girls during times of conflicts.
- Prevention of Gender- based violence (GBV) and equal participation of women in peace building and reconstruction.

Consequences of sexual harassment in the words of Olugbenga:

- Unwanted pregnancies
- Unsafe abortion or injuries sustained during a legal abortion after an unwanted pregnancy.
- Sexually transmitted infections including HIV/AIDs
- Persistent gynecological problems.
- Psychological problems.

VI. Recommendations/Strategies to Address GBV/Sexual Harassment in schools.

- Create awareness adequately and support girls and women and women to speak out against sexual harassment.
- Strengthen advocacy on sexual harassment to policy makers for the enactment and revision of necessary legal instrument like: pass bills on harmful practices against girls and women.
- Re-orientation on societal values on equal status for girls and boys children.
- Establish local structures to deal with sexual harassment issues at the community and institution levels.
- Establish youth clubs in schools/tertiary institution and educate them on GBV.
- Establish skilled personnel that handle sexual harassment cases at the school levels.
- Specialized training for health workers on the medical consequences and treatment for sexual harassment cases need be promoted.
- There should be monitoring and evaluation on sexual harassment, cases In school.
- There should training programmes for school guidance and counselors on sexual harassment for them to be motivated to impart the knowledge to students.
- The Guidance and Counseling department in schools should have a GBV Unit that will handle all sexual harassment cases
- There should be training programmes for the school Guidance counselors on GBV to enable them handle all harassment cases appropriately and also be motivated to impart the knowledge to students.
- To ensure the implementation of laws that protect against GBV in tertiary institutions for example, sexual harassment.
- Advocate for female magistrates to handle sexual harassment cases in Nigerian schools.
- Advocate for the enactment of laws that will punish perpetrators of sexual harassment in school.
- There should be school sensitization on sexual harassment.
- Sensitization of lecturers, students, non teaching staff, women groups.
- Laws to be enacted in the schools to prohibit all sales and use of hard drugs or sport; use of coercion on female students for selfish ends by lecturers or fellows.
- Parents to ensure proper dressing codes for their daughters.
- Discourage their daughter from accepting unwholesome gifts from men,
- Inculcate good morals in children early in life.
- Prompt payment of monthly wages to lecturers and non-teaching staff as when
- Contentment on the part of the girls.
- Re-introduction of long vacation jobs.
- Provision of bursary awards to students
- Free education at all levels.

VII. Conclusion

It is obvious that Nigerian nation and institutions at present lack the enabling legislation to curb sexual harassment in her schools. What we can do at present is to create serious environment for advocacy to ensure stress-free academic environments that will promote students-lecturers relationship devoid of sexual harassment.

It is only when the academic environment is sanitized and free from sexual harassment and related experiences that girls' education in Nigeria will produce the kind of future that we all envisage.

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