

**ACOSO SEXUAL EN INSTITUCIONES TERCARIAS: UN CRIMEN COMÚN  
CONTRA LAS MUJERES NO GRADUADAS EN EL ESTADO OSUN, SUROESTE,  
NIGERIA**

**M.A. Olubayo-Fatiregun  
Nigeria.**

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**RESUMEN**

El estudio examina la prevalecencia natural y relativa de diferentes formas de acosos sexuales experimentados por estudiantes femeninas en instituciones terciarias seleccionadas en el estado de Osun, Nigeria, con la visión de proveer información fiable y útil para políticas. La población del estudio consistió en estudiantes de cuatro instituciones terciarias en el estado de Osun, de las cuales se seleccionaron al azar cuatrocientos (400) estudiantes. Los datos fueron recolectados por medio de un cuestionario de elaboración propia y analizados utilizando porcentaje simple, prueba-t y ANOVA. Los resultados revelaron que las formas más dominantes eran “tocar las partes sexualmente sensibles del cuerpo” y “agarradas/abrazos inconscientes”. También se descubrió que el acoso sexual se llevaba a cabo con mujeres estudiantes no casadas, de las cuales la mayoría de las cuales no reportaron tales casos debido a la ausencia de políticas en contra del acoso sexual, o la ignorancia sobre la existencia de las mismas.

**Palabras clave:** Acoso Sexual, Institución Terciaria, Solteras, Casadas, Crimen, Mujeres no graduadas.

**SEXUAL –HARASSMENT IN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS: A COMMON CRIME  
AGAINST WOMEN UNDERGRADUATES IN OSUN STATE, SOUTH-WEST,  
NIGERIA.**

**ABSTRACT**

The study examined the nature and relative prevalence of different forms of sexual harassment experienced by female students in selected tertiary institutions in Osun State, Nigeria with a view to providing reliable and useful information to policy makers. The population for the study consisted of students of four tertiary institutions in Osun State from which a sample of four hundred (400) students were randomly selected. Data were collected via a self-constructed questionnaire and analyzed using simple percentage, t-test and ANOVA. The result revealed the most prevalent forms were “touching of sexually sensitive parts of the body” and “holding/hugging/grabbing unawares”. It was also found that occurrence of sexual harassment

cut across unmarried female students, most of which did not make a report of such cases due to absence of policy against sexual harassment or ignorance of such policies.

**Key Words** Sexual Harassment, Tertiary Institution, Unmarried, Married, Crime, Undergraduates-females.

### **Introduction**

Sexual harassment in schools is recognized as a public-health problem detrimental to girls' psychosomatic health (Fineran & Bennett, 1998, Dahinten, 1999; Berman et al, 2000; Gillander Gadin, 2002). However, Paludi, (1997), stated that sexual harassment within the school setting presents its specific problems. Unlike work place, sexual harassment usually involves sexual coercion or demands for sexual favours accompanied by work-related sanctions for refusal. Sexual harassment in schools might not necessarily entail sexual coercion or include sanctions for refusal, and the harassment might not have clear sexual intent in mind (Duncan, 1999; Gillander Gadin & Hammarstrom, 2000). However, most definitions of sexual harassment in schools use the criterion "unwanted, or unwelcome", as the major identifier to stress that Sexual Harassment is the behavior that was unwanted, regardless of what it appeared to be to the offender. American Association of University Women (AAUW 2001) agreed that sexual harassment is unwanted and welcome sexual behavior that interferes with the victim's life.

The term Sexual Harassment has assumed a greater resonance among scholars at both international and national research literature. Bradenburg (1983), defined sexual harassment as any attempt to coerce an unwilling person into sexual relationship, to subject a person into unwanted sexual attention or punish a refusal to comply Ogunbameru, (2006) recognized Sexual Harassment as any unwelcomed sexual advances, request for sexual favours, or other verbal or physical conduct which makes submission to or rejection of such conduct either an explicit or implicit basis for employment or academic decisions affection the individual. At same time Simelane (2001) described this as verbal comments, abuse, gestures or physical contact of a sexual nature by an individual or a group which is judged by the recipient to have resulted in one or more of the following;

- Mental, physical and social discomfort,

- Interference with his/her work or academic performance. This could result from threatened downgrading of marks, demotion withholding of privileges and dismissal as a result of refusal of a reward for compliance.
- Creation of an intimidating, hostile or offensive environment for him or her on compus.

This sexual harassment can be conceptualized as a social construct which is deeply embedded in dimensions of power, gender and sexuality. It can also be considered as any non-consensual sexual contact or sexual threat. Such sexual contact include but not limited to unwanted sexual behavior like kissing and intentional touching of another persons intimate parts such as breasts, buttocks, genital area, groin or inner thigh or the clothing covering these areas and unwelcomed sexual penetration.

Denga and Denga (2004) have also observed that sexual harassment is the use of influence, position or power by a male to get a female to satisfy his sexual desires. Many other scholars such as Benson and Thomson, (1982); Metha and Nigg (1983); Onuma (1984) and Popoola (2007); in his presentation viewed the phenomenon not only in terms of male-female exploitation of a power relationship but also in terms of power exploitation by any person in authority over another person who cannot refuse sexual demands without the risk of reprisal.

In Nigeria, Abdullahi (1997) revealed that one of the manifestations of the general wave of indiscipline currently sweeping through the nation is sexual indiscipline. This act is growing like wildfire through all sectors of life tertiary institutions, secondary schools, business sectors, in home between house boy and girls and between masters and female house helps. Sexual indiscipline among secondary school includes increasing rate of premarital sex, promiscuity, prostitution, teenage pregnancy and motherhood, child abuse and abandonment.

Sexual harassment in tertiary institution is one of the vices that are surreptitiously eroding every form of dignity and work of all members of the institutional community as it has become a major concern in recent years. Henderson (1998), stated that the measurement of prevalence of sexual harassment is more difficult to identify since in many countries it is not considered a criminal offence. Henderson (1998), further refers to this as an area in which reporting is traditionally low. Figures available have tended to focus on work place harassment only ignoring issues such as “flashing” which research suggested that 63% of women experience and the use of abusive phone calls as well as other forms of harassment in public places.

Researchers like Owuamanam (1990), Aba (1992), Denga (1996) and Adamolekun (2003), have provided empirical evidence to show that sexual harassment is a pervasive social problem in Nigerian University campuses, though most of these studies focused mainly on harassment of female students by male lecturers. According to Popoola (2007), it is widely observed that sexual harassment of students by their lectures or others in position of authority has severe and negative consequences on the overall quality of tertiary education in Nigeria.

Within the school setting, sexual harassment is used to encompass a wide range of unwelcome sexually-oriented and gender offensive behaviours that contribute to a hostile learning environment. Such behaviours can be conceptualized on a continuum ranging from fairly mild actions to extreme ones (Popoola, 2007). Sandler (1981), observed that harassment at its extreme may include subtle pressure for sexual activity, physical assault of a sexual nature and outright demand for sexual favour accompanied by implied or overt threats concerning one's grade. Behaviours such as unnecessary touching and pinching, sexist remarks, leering or ogling and verbal abuse were classified by Adamolekun (2003), as mild forms of sexual harassment on university campuses and even in private sectors.

In addition, sexual harassment as stated by Charney and Russel (1994), can result in a variety of consequences for the students; this include depression, anxiety, shame, humiliation, anger and hostility.

In his unpublished articles stated in many parts of the world research findings have shown that sexual harassment perpetrated by students is much more common than sexual harassment perpetrated by teacher. Also Fineran and Bennett (1998), declare that sexual harassment in schools is widespread and most experiences involve students' harassment of other students.

Female undergraduate harassment by their male counterpart in Nigerian tertiary institutions has not received much attention from researchers and policy makers compared to teachers-student harassment. This may be attributed to the tendency among Nigerians to view female undergraduate sexual harassment by their male counterpart as part of normal college social life which every student must learn to cope with. There is also an erroneous belief among the people that the moral implications as well as the social consequences of female sexuality are not as serious as that of teacher to student harassment. It is presently observed that a growing body of literature has now begun to accumulate to suggest that the consequences of female sexual

harassment by their male counterpart are as debilitating as those from teacher-student harassment.

As a consequence of this reality it is appropriate that remedy be put in place by administrations and policy markers furthermore, additional information about the state of things, in particular that of types and forms of sexual harassment is needed. Thus, this study was designed to examine forms of sexual harassment of female undergraduates by their male counterpart in some selected Nigerian higher institutions. In addition it tries to find out what the female undergraduates regards as sexual harassment, determine its prevalence and strategies used by the victims to cope with the hidden crime. So, the following questions directed the research; that was undertaken; there the relevance of the findings.

- (1) Which is the commonest form of sexual harassment perceived by students?
- (2) What forms of sexual harassment do female students in high institution experience most?
- (3) At what age range are female students likely to encounter sexual harassment most?
- (4) Is there any significant difference in the encounter of sexual harassment between married and unmarried female students?
- (5) Do female students often report sexual harassment to their institution's authority?
- (6) Is there any sexual harassment policy in your institution?
- (7) In which of the four institutions is sexual harassment very common?

Answering them represented an additional effort to find out if the marital status of the female undergraduate had any influence on their experience of sexual harassment as well as their coping ability.

## **METHODS**

### **Participants and Setting**

The subjects' population consists of all female undergraduates from the four randomly selected tertiary institutions in Osun State, Southwest Nigeria. These are Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU), Ile-Ife; Ladoke Akintola University of Technology (LAUTHECH), Ogbomoso; College of Education (COE) Ilesa and College of Technology (OSCOTECH), Esa-Oke. Participants consist of 400 female undergraduates selected by disproportionate stratified random sampling, from four faculties, one each from the universities and the colleges. The distribution of the participants consisted of 150 (37.5%) from both OAU and LAUTHECH while

50 (12.5%) each from College of Education and College of Technology respectively. The participants were briefed on the subject issue by research assistants before the research instrument was administered.

### **Measures**

The instrument was a self-constructed questionnaire with a test re-test reliability coefficient of 0.79 over a period of interval of three weeks. The questionnaire was subdivided into three sections: Section A sought demographic information from respondents, such as institution, age and marital status. Section B sought respondents' personal experience on sexual harassment in their various campuses, category of person(s) subjected to sexual harassment and the reactions of the institution's authorities. Section C, elicit information on their opinion about sexual harassment in their campuses. It also contained six questions with commonest form of sexual harassment and finally availability of policy on sexual harassment in their institutions. Suggestions on how sexual harassment could be curbed in the various institutions were also solicited.

### **Procedure**

After receiving permission from the various institutions to conduct the study, copies of the questionnaire were taken to the various institutions by research assistants. Each of four research assistants distributed the questionnaires and collected them personally. The respondents were asked to complete the survey instrument independently and return on the spot. Data collected were subjected to frequency count, simple percentages and inferential statistical analysis. Out of four hundred questionnaires sent and returned, only 239 were usable due to invalid responses.

## **RESULTS**

**Research Question 1:** Which is the commonest form of sexual harassment perceived by students? One of the major objectives of the study was to determine the commonest form of Sexual Harassment in the tertiary institutions. To address this research question, students' responses to item 1 in the questionnaire were analyzed for descriptive information and the result is as presented in table I.

**Table 1: Descriptive analysis of the commonest forms of sexual harassment**

	<b>Form of Sexual harassment.</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
A	Names calling (e.g. asewo meaning prostitute)	54	22.6
B	Touching sensitive parts of the body (breast, buttocks)	69	28.9
C	Holding/hugging/grabbing one unawares	42	17.6
D	Sexual rumours	13	5.4
E	Rape (by male colleagues)	5	2.1
F	Sexual look (lustful look)	17	7.1
G	Showing pornography	8	3.3
H	Lecturers' demand for sexual favour	5	2.1
	Total	239	100.0

From table I, touching sensitive part of the body such as bottoms as the commonest forms of sexual harassment in the institutions under study (28.9%) while name calling (22.6%), closely followed. A few respondents (17.6%) considered holding and hugging as a common form of sexual harassment. Surprisingly rape which the society viewed as serious sexual harassment issue had only slightly two percent (2.1%)

**Research Question 2:** What natures of sexual harassment have students experienced most?

This was a major objective of the study which was to ascertain the type/forms of sexual harassment experienced most by the female students in the higher institution. To this end, the respondents were asked to indicate which of the listed forms they mostly experienced. Their responses were subjected to descriptive statistical analyses as shown in table 2.

**Table 2: What nature of sexual harassment have students experienced most?**

Forms of Sexual Harassment		Yes		No		No Response		Total	
		f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
A	Names calling (e.g. asewo meaning prostitute)	27	10.8	179	75.4	33	13.8	239	100
B	Touching sensitive parts of the body (breast, buttocks)	119	49.8	86	36	34	14.2	239	100
C	Holding/hugging/grabbing one unawares	97	40.6	108	45.2	34	14.2	239	100
D	Sexual rumours	19	7.9	187	78.2	33	13.8	239	100
E	Rape (by male colleagues)	9	3.8	195	81.6	35	14.6	239	100
F	Sexual look (lustful look)	25	10.5	178	74.5	36	15	239	100
G	Showing pornography	7	2.9	198	82.8	34	14.2	239	100
H	Lecturers' demand for sexual favour	3	1.3	202	84.5	34	14.2	239	100

The data in Table 2 indicate that the respondents experienced various forms of sexual harassment. The most common type of sexual harassment experienced was touching sensitive

parts of the body (49.8%). This was followed by holding/hugging and grabbing (40.6%), names calling “Asewo” (10.8%) sexual looks (10.5%), sexual rumors (7.8%) and rape (3.8%). The data however indicate that showing of Pornography (2.9%) and lecturers demand for sexual favour was least experienced. The conclusion arising from these results is that female students experienced a high prevalence of sexual harassment from their male colleagues in the tertiary institutions.

**Research Question 3:** At what age range do the female students likely to encounter sexual harassment most? In order to address this research question, two analytical approaches were adopted. Firstly, the respondents’ harassment experiences were given a descriptive analysis and the result is presented in table 3 (a) below.

**Table 3(a): Relative prevalence of sexual harassment on the basis of respondents’ ages**

Experience	Age in Years					Total
	12-20	21-25	26-30	30 above	Non Respond	
Sexual harassment	37(15.5%)	123(51.5%)	38(15.9%)	13(5.4%)	28(11.7%)	239(100%)

From table 3(a), it can be seen that sexual harassment is most prevalent among the age group of 21 to 25 years across all the different levels of sexual harassment. This result seems to suggest that the age group to which respondents belong may influence the experience of sexual harassment. Consequently ANOVA test was conducted to determine if a significant difference exist in the experience of sexual harassment by the respondents on the basis of their age group. The result is presented in table 3(b) below.

**Table 3(b): ANOVA table for the difference in the occurrence of sexual harassment experienced by different age groups.**

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Remark
Between Groups	17.580	4	4.395	.752	.558 Significant	Not Significant
Within Groups	1367.885	234	5.846			
Total	1385.464	238				



Table 3(b), shows no significant difference in the sexual harassment experienced by different age group. It can therefore be said that the age group that a person belong does not influence her exposition to sexual harassment or that sexual harassers seem not to have a preference for a particular age group notwithstanding that in table 3(a) sexual harassment is more prevalent in the 21-25 age grade.

**Research Question 4:** Is there any significant difference in the encounter of sexual harassment between married and unmarried female student? This question sought to know from the respondents whether married, unmarried, fresh or satellite students were more often sexually harassed.

**Table 4: Experience of sexual harassment according to student categories and marital status**

Students' response	Marital Status				Student status			
	Married		Unmarried		Fresh		Satalitte	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Yes	39	16.3	206	86.2	20	8.4	4	1.7
No	190	79.5	23	9.6	209	87.4	225	94.1
No Response	10	4.2	10	4.2	10	4.2	10	4.2
Total	239	100	239	100	239	100	239	100

Table 4, indicate that a greater proportion of the respondents (86.2%) believe that unmarried female students are more often sexually harassed than their married counterparts (16.3%). It was also observed in the study that fresh students are slightly often harassed with (8.4%) than their satalittes colleagues (1.7%). A further attempt was made in the study to determine the significant difference in the experience of Sexual harassment between the married and unmarried students. This was subjected to t-test statistical analysis as shown in the table 5.

**Research Question 5:** Do female students often report cases of sexual harassment to institution authority?

A descriptive analysis of item 5 of the research questionnaire was undertaken to answer this research question. The result shows that only a very small proportion of the respondents (8.8%) claimed to have ever reported a case of sexual harassment while a great proportion (55.2%) claimed they do not. However, 36% of the respondents did not respond to this item.

**Table 5: Difference in encounter of Sexual Harassment between married and unmarried female students**

Married Status	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Married	69	1.217	0.420
Unmarried	126	0.912	0.565
No response	44		
Total	239		

Table 5, indicated that a significant difference exists in the sexual harassment experienced by both married and unmarried female students in the institutions under study. This supports the finding in table 4 that unmarried female students experienced more occurrences of sexual harassment.

**Research Question 6:** Is there any policy on sexual harassment in your institution?

To address this question, a descriptive analysis of item 11 of the questionnaire was undertaken. The result shows that 30.5% of the respondents claimed that there are policies on sexual harassment in their various institutions while more of them (37.2%) believed there are none, although, almost an equal proportion (32.2%) did not respond to this item.

**Research Question 7:** Which of the four institutions is sexual harassment very common?

**Table 7: Relative Occurrence of Sexual Harassment in Higher Institutions**

Occurrence of SH	Institution								No Response		Total	
	OAU		LAUTECH		COLLEDU		OSCOTECH		F	%	F	%
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
	69	28.9	71	29.7	50	20.9	39	16.3	10	4.2	239	100

Table 7, report that incidences of sexual harassment seem to be most prevalent among LAUTECH and OAU students with 29.7% and 28.9% respectively as compared to other institutions when although at moderate level, sexual harassment in LAUTECH seems to surpass that of OAU.

**DISCUSSION**

This study was aimed at finding out the specific experience and opinions of the students to whom explicit or implicit actions amounting to sexual harassment is usually targeted. The questionnaire is initially framed to find out from a particular respondent if she has ever experienced sexual harassment. Copies of questionnaire belonging to those who claimed not to

have ever had such an experience were not included in the analysis of data, as direct experience of the said respondent is paramount to the problem of the study.

The American Office for Civil Rights, OCR (2008) advised students, parents and school staff to recognize different forms of sexual harassment, and understand what they can do to prevent it from occurring or how to stop it if it does occur, as the impact of sexual harassment on a student's educational progress and attainment of future goals can be significant and should not be underestimated. For example asexually harassed student may have troubled learning, drop out of school altogether, lose trust in school officials, become isolated, entertain fear for personal safety, or lose self-esteem. Consequently, in this research, the students' personal experiences and opinions were solicited for. The results confirmed that the respondents considered "touching of sensitive parts of the body (breast, buttocks, etc.) to be the most prevalent forms of sexual harassment in the institutions under study. They also said that this form was the type of sexual harassment they directly experienced most. This was followed in terms of frequency by another form which is very similar but seems to be closer to satisfying the inordinate demand of the harasser – holding, hugging, and grabbing unaware, both in terms of their opinion and in terms of their experience. These are in agreement with the findings among secondary school students in Port-Harcourt, River state, Nigeria (Nwaneka, Nwaneka, Adeoye and Mustafa, 2001).

The study also revealed that there is no significant difference in the sexual harassment experienced by the respondent on the basis of their ages, although, the occurrence of sexual harassment is mostly prevalent among the age grade 21 to 25 years. It should be noted that members of this age group are those who are just leaving the late adolescence (OHCS, undated) and are just being introduced to adulthood. Carr-Gregg (undated) argued that developmental demands (and features) of late adolescence often extend into the period referred to as young adulthood. The research further found that unmarried (single) ladies are more exposed to sexual harassment probably because the harasser assume that since they are single, inordinate sexual advances cannot be frowned at by the society. In fact, a significant difference was found in the sexual harassment encountered by married and single female students in the schools under study.

Also, fresh students were found to suffer sexual harassment more than their older counterpart. This can be attributed to the suggestion made by Adedokun (2005), that those malpractices that repeatedly accompany the Senior Secondary School Examinations and Joint

Admissions Matriculation Examinations which expose university applicants (and their parents and guardians) to exploitation in the desperate bid to gain admission into Nigerian universities. Female applicants in search of 'favours' sometimes initiate or succumb to sexual relationship with males who have assisted them in various ways.

When asked whether they have ever reported any of the cases of sexual harassment noted above, 55.2% of the respondents said "no", while only a paltry 8.8% claimed to have reported such a case. A greater percentage (37.2%) of the respondents reported that there exists no policy on sexual harassment in their institution, compared to those who answered in the affirmative (30.5%). From their report, they are either not aware of such policies or they do not exist altogether. Both of these situations have implications for school guidance and counseling. This may account for the inability of the respondents to report cases of sexual harassment. The American Office for Civil Right OCR (2008) however warned that if harassing behaviour is ignored or not reported, it is likely to continue and become worse, rather than go away.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study has established that sexual harassment of female undergraduates is not only a social act but also a social fact. This fact should be of concern to all stakeholders in tertiary institutions. Abodunrin (2008) stated that the presence of these phenomena is the manifestations of personal disorder emanating from societal disorder. The study further revealed the commonest forms of sexual harassment and that the group of female students mostly susceptible is the unmarried female, though the married were not totally spared in the scourge.

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

- Proper policy framework that gives lucid explanation of what constitutes sexual harassment be put in place by governing body of all institution, policy makers and individual organizations.
- Enlightenment campaign and more effective guidance and counseling services be stepped up in the tertiary institutions under study and in all others institutions in general.
- Set up machinery that will encourage female students to make reports without intimidation or reprisals in each institution.
- Stern and strong penalties that will apply to defaulters should be spelt out for guidance.

Conclusively, the issue of sexual harassment must be discussed with all seriousness and intent of purpose with strong disapproval of the act expressed by institutions, policy makers and Non-governmental organization. Appropriate sanctions be introduced and protective devices should be made available for harassed females who dire to make reports.

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