

## **INADEQUATE LIFE SKILLS IN SEXUALLY HARRASSED UNDERGRADUATES IN AFRICAN UNIVERSITIES: IMPLICATION FOR ADAPTING LIFE SKILLS EDUCATION FOR CONTROL**

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### **Abstract**

The reoccurring reported cases of sexual harassment are fast defaming the image of the African Universities education. Despite the Universities laws against the act and government legislative actions yet the menace still persists; an even taking reformed dimension by the perpetrators and making many victim students helpless. This paper therefore focuses on the inadequate life skills in sexually harassed undergraduates in African universities: implication for adapting life skills education for control. In this position paper, the following were discussed: Concepts, forms and consequences of sexual harassment. Also, the paper examined the theoretical framework, the empirical evidence of sexual harassment in African Universities, link of sexual harassment and life skill education, components of life skills and strategies for adapting life skills education for controlling sexual harassments in African Universities. It was concluded that staff perpetrating sexual harassment cheaply subjected the victim undergraduates to sexual harassments due to their observed inadequate life skills and to control the menace the undergraduates should be regularly trained on life skills education.

**Keywords:** Life skills education, Sexual harassment, undergraduates, African University

### **Introduction**

World-wide, the University environment is designed as a place where individuals are trained in learning and character for self-development to be instrumental to the nation socio, political, economic, scientific and technological growths. The increasing reported cases of sexual harassment in African Universities are fast igniting heartbeat in the minds of the parents as to the fear of their girl children not becoming victims of sexual harassment. The horrible sex-for-grade act in African Universities is no more a news; as several lecturers have used their academic authority and power to lure tolls of female students in to gratifying their sexual urges. The ugly effect is that, the victims of sexual harassment live the rest of their lives traumatized. Many of the sexually harassed female undergraduates ignorantly lay themselves off as cheap preys of the harassers due to their careless inviting dispositions and others indulge in are sexual scandal for attaining academic goal but pretend to be harassed when caught in the act. Although, the universities authorities in Africa have over the years been penalizing sexual harassers but the act is still waxing strong. Hence, inculcating life skills education becomes imperatives in the lives of the girl children in African

### **Sexual Harassment**

In every human society where there is interaction between opposite sex, some levels of sexual attraction is expected. When this occurs, mutual interest and reciprocal response defines a civilized and socially acceptable sexual behaviour (Omotosho, 2015). However, the increasing manifestation of social vices of sexual nature in societies continuously undermine the expected dignity and serenity of human existence, one of such is sexual harassment that has continued

to attract the attention of researchers and the media as a common phenomenon in all domains of human community including higher education Institutions. This abnormal, antisocial behaviour has been accepted as a norm within the higher education institutions Nigeria and overseas. The prevalence of sexual harassment in higher institutions in Nigeria <sup>3</sup> can be attributed to the poor quality of graduates being produced. Previous studies on this subject have provided various definitions of sexual harassment (Taiwo, Omole & Omole, 2014).

Sexual harassment is a term used to describe behaviours such as a form of sexual coercion and exploitation that can be very stable, even confusing to identify and yet highly up-setting. These behaviours include but not limited to unwanted touch, unwanted sexual advances, suggestive, sexually motivated physical contact, request for sexual favours, or coercion of another person by another, particularly in the academic settings or the workplace (Kelly, 2004).

According to Pierce (2003), sexual harassment may include some request for sexual favours either directly or by implication: sometimes ordered in exchange for rewards such as academic success or promotion. In this context, the female student may be deliberately touched, kissed or fondled and brushed against her will by male students or lecturers. Very often, sexually oriented or obscene comments, for example comments about a person's physical appearance or sexuality may be directed at her coupled with being questioning persistently about her private life. Furthermore, uninvited visits, displays of erotic materials such as posters, photographs and pornography and threats of physical assault via cell phones, they all amount to sexual harassment. For many young women, the most common place where sexual coercion and harassment are experienced is in schools or campuses (Omotosho, 2015).

### **Forms of Perpetrating Sexual Harassment on Undergraduate**

There is usually more than one forms of sexually harassing behaviour. So, a single harasser will often fit more than one category. These are brief summations of each type.

**Mother/Father Figure (a.k.a. The Counselor-Helper)** - These harassers will try to create mentor-like relationships with their targets, all the while masking their sexual intentions with pretenses towards personal, professional, or academic attention.

**Serial Harasser** - Harassers of this type carefully build up an image so that people would find it hard to believe they would do anyone any harm. They plan their approaches carefully, and strike in private so that it is their word against that of their victims.

**Groper** - Whenever the opportunity presents itself, these harassers' eyes and hands begin to wander, engaging in unwanted physical contact that may start innocuous but lead to worse acts of indecency. **Opportunist**-Opportunist use physical settings and circumstances, or infrequently occurring opportunities, to mask premeditated or intentional sexual behaviour toward targets. This will often involve changing the environment in order to minimize inhibitory effects of the workplace or school or taking advantage of physical tasks to 'accidentally' grope a target source.

**Bully** - In this case, sexual harassment is used to punish the victim for some transgression, such as rejection of the harasser's interest or advances, or making the harasser feel insecure about himself or herself or his or her abilities. The bully uses sexual harassment to put the victim in his or her "proper place source."

**Confidante** - Harassers of this type approach subordinates, or students, as equals or friends, sharing about their own life experiences and difficulties, sharing stories to win admiration and sympathy, and inviting subordinates to share theirs so as to make them feel valued and trusted. Soon these relationships move into an intimate domain (Jamela, 2011).

**Situational Harasser-** Harassing behaviour begins when the perpetrator endures a traumatic event (psychological), or begins to experience very stressful life situations, such as psychological or medical problems, marital problems, or divorce. The harassment will usually stop if the situation changes or the pressures are removed source.

**Pest** - This is the stereotypical "won't take 'no' for an answer" harasser who persists in 5 hounding a target for attention and dates even after persistent rejections. This behaviour is usually misguided, with no malicious intent source.

**Intellectual Seducer** - Most often found in educational settings, these harassers will try to use their knowledge and skills as an avenue to gain access to students, or information about students, for sexual purposes. They may require students participate in exercises or "studies" that reveal information about their sexual experiences, preferences, and habits source.

**Incompetent** - These are socially inept individuals who desire the attentions of their targets, who do not reciprocate these feelings. They may display a sense of entitlement, believing their targets should feel flattered by their attentions. When rejected, this type of harasser may use bullying methods as a form of revenge (Omotosho, 2015).

### **Theoretical Framework**

The causes of sexual harassment are supported by various theories. Theory of motivation by Abraham Maslow postulates that before an individual attains growth needs (e.g self-actualization), the deficiency needs must firstly be met (e.g physiological, safety and security needs) (Swartz, de la Rey, Duncan, Townsend & O'Neill, 2011). However, if the female students' financial background is below poverty-line, chances of engaging in transactional sex are high (Luke, Goldberg, Mberu & Zulu, 2011). This group of students may find themselves in compromising situation of abandoning condom use because their economic survival depends on sexual barter, thus social –exchange theory comes in to play.

### **Empirical Evidence of Sexual Harassment in African Universities**

Norman, Aikins and Binka (2012) found that in Ghana, both the traditional and contra power forms of sexual harassment are prevalent in public universities and professional institutions. In Zimbabwe, students are sexually exploited by lecturers in many of the universities in that country (Dhlomo et al., 2012). Sexual harassment in these institutions is tolerated because most of the victims engage in transactional sex with male professors because of the economic pressure to afford university fees (Beninger, 2013). Norman, Aikins, and Binka (2013) reported that women are 61% more likely than men (39%) to be sexual harassed in medical schools in Ghana.

Owoaje and Olusola Taiwo (2009 2010) found that the majority of female respondents (69.8%) had been sexually harassed by male classmates and lecturers in several tertiary institutions in Nigeria. Of these, 48.2% experienced physical sexual harassment, while 32.2% had requests to do something sexual in exchange for academic favors. Imonikhe, Idogho, and Aluede (2011), who conducted a study of 200 lecturers and 200 students of tertiary institutions in Edo state, reported that the majority of the respondents agreed that sexual harassment is prevalent in these institutions. They also found that "the range of sexual harassment reported by teachers and students in tertiary institution was extensive" (Imonikhe, Idogho, & Aluede, 2011). Likewise, Omonijo and associates (2013) examined the prevalence of sexual harassment on three faith based private universities in the Ogun State, South West Nigeria. Using recorded data, between 2008 and 2012 and results from a questionnaire with female students and members of staff, they found that the majority of female students experienced sexual harassment on campus, but many did not report it to the institutions. Taiwo, O. C. Omole, and O. E. Omole (2014) investigated the occurrence of sexual harassment and its psychological implication among

students in five higher education Institutions in South West, Nigeria. Results from their sample of 2500 students revealed that 97 percent of the respondents were aware of incidences of sexual harassment and of these 98.8 percent were male lecturers sexually harassing female students. The respondents also reported that poverty (55%), provocative dressing (20%), and lust from the male lecturers (12%) were the main reasons for sexual harassment in these institutions.

Mamaru, Getachew, and Mohammed (2015) conducted a study with 385 female participants from Jimma University in Ethiopia. They found that 78.2 percent of the respondents had experienced physical, 90.4 percent had experienced verbal, and 80 percent had experienced nonverbal form of sexual harassment, respectively. Other studies indicate that sexual harassment is common on other university campuses in Ethiopia (see: Shimekaw, Megabiaw, Alamrew, 2013; Tora, 2013). Female students in Zimbabwe's universities report that they are increasingly subjected to sexual harassment by their lecturers (Jamela, 2011). Other research studies on different educational institutions of higher learning in many African countries revealed that sexual harassment by male faculty, staff, and students included degrading verbal remarks, unwanted touching, and other types of gender-based violence (Adedokun, 2004).

### **Link of Sexual Harassment and Life Skill Education**

The term 'life skills' covers a broad range of abilities, competencies and approaches. Life skills is concerned with the education, health, and social sectors and generally represents a set of skills for empowering cognitive, emotional, personal and interpersonal skills. These skills are essentially the abilities that promote mental and social well-being in situations encountered in the course of life (Wiedemann, 2013). Life skills are personal and social skills needed to all people to act with confidence and competence with themselves and within the community and society. According to UNICEF and WHO, life skills are useful in several areas of life and a broad range of issues, like prevention of drug and substance abuse, prevention of HIV and AIDS, prevention of sexual violence, reduction of teenage pregnancy, prevention of suicides, peace education, environmental education, livelihood and income generation. The United Nations International Children's Education Fund (UNICEF) defines life skills based education as basically being behaviour change or behaviour development. Generally the term life skills refers to a group of psycho-social and interpersonal skills which can help people make informed decisions, communicate effectively, and think critically (James., 2010).

Life skill refers to a positive behavior, that encompasses a mix of knowledge, behavior, attitude and values and designates the possession of certain skills and know how to do something positively, or reach a goal. The strength of positive behavior depends upon the depth of skills acquired by the individual. Life skills are abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enables individual to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life. Life skills are essentially those activities which help to promote mental well being and competence among young people as they face the realities of life. It is based on the philosophy that young people should be qualitatively trained to take responsibility for their action. Most development professionals agree that life skills are generally applied in the context of health and social events (Spence, 2003). They can be utilized in many content areas: prevention of drug use, sexual violence, teenage pregnancy, HIV/AIDS prevention and suicide prevention. The definition extends into consumer education, environmental education, peace education or education for development, livelihood or income generation. In short, life skills empower young people to take positive action to protect themselves and promote health and positive social relationships (Francis, 2007).

Most victim of sexual harassment in African Universities confused and baffled by the exposure to the limitless information and choices based on that orientation. Although not lacking in knowledge, the learner certain times find it difficult to face the challenges of the day-to-day life. formal education these days is inadequate to prevent the learner from the menace of sexual harassment and as such they sadly dwell in the hand the sexual harassers. The emphasis should be given on creative thinking and reasoning and personal growth of the individual. Every individual is capable of thought and reason, a free will and is capable of making choices and taking decisions (Pradeep, 2017). To enable these behavioural transformations in the child, the system needs to enrich the school curriculum with a highly researched and effective life skills training programme. An empowered (empowered with life skills) child has the competence to cope with the challenges of life using the available resources even amidst such adversities.

### **Components of Life Skills**

Life skills include psychosocial competencies and interpersonal skills that help people make informed decisions, solve problems, think critically and creatively, communicate effectively, build healthy relationships, empathize with others, and cope with managing their lives in a healthy and productive manner. The Ten core Life Skills as laid down by WHO are: 1. Self-awareness 2. Empathy 3. Critical thinking 4. Creative thinking 5. Decision making 6. Problem Solving 7. Effective communication 8. Interpersonal relationship 9. Coping with stress 10. Coping with emotion.

Also we can put in order the aims of life skills education: 1. To provide young people with strategies to make healthy choices that contribute to a meaningful life, 2. To enable young people to analyze their capacities to enhance the function in a most productive way, 3. To allow the youth get along with other people, able to adjust with their environment and making responsible decision, 4. To enable the learner to develop a concept of oneself as a person worth and dignity, 5. To help one to understand oneself and lead to growth in personal responsibility, 6. To help the young people to empower in challenging situations (Francis, 2007).

Youths require both formal and informal education for development of their life skills as well as other individuals who are at different age groups. The objective of life skills education is to help young people cope with daily problems in a successful manner and thus provide to their development (Gazda and Brooks, 1985).

### **Strategies for Adapting Life Skills Education for Controlling Sexual Harassments**

Efforts to inculcate life skill education should receive holistic and collaborative approaches by the school, home, print, electronic media, etceteral.

- i. As a matter of urgent, workshop should be organized for all the female undergraduates on adapting life skill education to prevent sexual harassment.
- ii. Yearly, the newly admitted undergraduates should be exposed to the life skill education adapting the skill to gain self consciousness, think critically and make informed decision which would help them to actualize their academic goal in Universities.
- iii. The counselling unit of every African Universities should be functional with personnel who are experts and sound in life skill education and be AVAILABLE for the undergraduates experiencing sexual harassment in the hand the University staff.
- iv. The teaching of the life skill education should be included in general and compulsory courses and should be taught at the first semester in year one. v. The

- government, using experts on non-formal education should be exposing the teeming University female undergraduates on both print and electronic media.
- v. Most students like to confide in their parents. To this end, the African University authorities should device a means to expose the students' parents to the various forms of sexual harassment in Universities and how to adapt life skill education on their children to prevent them from being victims

## Conclusion

Against all odds, the future of the graduates in the African Universities seems squalid. Many of the female undergraduates are victims of sexual harassments in the hands of the Universities staffs, more especially the lecturers who devised several means not be caught in the act and when caught even go extra miles to avert punishment. The perpetrating staffs are quite aware that the penalty is grievous but cheaply invading and victimizing the student due to their observed ignorance and inadequate life skills. Exposing the undergraduates to the training in life skill education will expose them to skills acquisition on self-awareness, empathy, critical thinking, creative thinking, decision making, problem solving, effective communication, interpersonal relationship, coping with stress, and coping with emotion to save and prevent them from victimization of sexual harassments while they are in the school.

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