

## **Impact of Sexual Harassment on the Overall Well-Being of Female Senior Non-Teaching Workers of Public Tertiary Institutions in Ogun State, Nigeria**

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### **Abstract**

*Cases of inappropriate sexual behaviours have been on the increase in Nigerian society and they transcend age limits and gender of the victims. This study examined the impact of sexual harassment on the overall well-being of female senior non-teaching workers of public tertiary institutions in Ogun State, Nigeria. Three research hypotheses were formulated and a descriptive research design was adopted for the study. The population used was 150 female senior non-teaching workers from the selected public tertiary institutions in Ogun State, Nigeria. Purposive and simple random sampling techniques were used to select 50 samples from each of the selected tertiary institutions. The data collected was analysed using descriptive statistic of frequency and percentage while inferential statistics was used to test the hypotheses. The findings of the study revealed that sexual harassment has a significant impact on the overall well-being of female senior non-teaching workers. Based on the findings of this study, it was recommended that the proprietors of these public institutions should make relevant legislation and regulations to guide against this as there seems to be no specific punishment for sexual harassment in the code of conduct of these institutions aside from lumping it up under general misconduct.*

*Keywords:* sexual harassment, overall well-being, female senior non-teaching workers, public tertiary institutions

The American Association of University Women (AAUW) study defines sexual harassment as a non-consensual and unwelcome sexual behaviour that affects lives of the victims (2011). According to Page and Pina (2015), universally, sexual harassment in the workplace is a major challenge faced by most organizations. Hill and Kearl (2011) define sexual harassment as unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature, which can include unwelcome sexual advances, request for sexual favours, or other verbal, non-verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature. Ige and Adeleke (2012) assert that the impact of culture on sexual harassment in a Nigerian organization evaluated showed that 8 out of 10 interviewees in their study reported their harassers, no serious action was taken against them, by the relevant authority at work, while some ridiculed

it off and chastised the victim for being responsible for arousing the sexual drive of the harasser. Thus, sexual harassment and other prohibited conducts like touching the opposite sex which is of a sexual nature; making sexual comments, jokes or gestures; writing, displaying or distributing sexually explicit drawings; pictures or written materials; calling students sexually charged names; spreading sexual rumours; rating students on sexual performance or circulating or showing or creating e-mails or internet sites of a sexual nature prevail in our tertiary institutions (USA Department of Education and Civil Rights, 2008). Several forms of sexual harassment exist, ranging from physical sexual assault at the end side to the non-verbal sex cues at the other. Also, in layman's view, sexual harassment has diverse meanings, depending on one's perception.

Aina and Kulshretha (2017) submit that the environment, type and structure of organization where sexual behaviour occurs, may influence the perception of what sexual harassment is or not. Aina and Kulshretha were investigating sexual harassment in educational institutions with a focus on awareness of both private and state-owned universities. The study revealed that the environment and structure of such organizations have the capacity to influence the perception of staff as to what actually constitutes sexual harassment.

Johnson et al. (2018) indicated that there are three categories of sexual harassment – “(i) gender-based discrimination (i.e., verbal and nonverbal behaviours that convey hostility, objectification of, exclusion, or to a second-class status about members of one gender), (ii) unwanted sexual attention (verbally or physically unwelcome sexual advances, which may include assault) and (iii) sexual coercion (when favourable professional or educational treatment is conditioned on sexual activity)” (p.2).

Nigeria, which is generally accepted as the most populous black nation in the world is not a single nation based on homogeneous culture or religion. Instead, it is obvious that Nigeria is a heterogeneous society with multi-ethnic groups and religious affiliations (Asike, 2019). Nigeria being a nation comprising of people with diversified religion, language, and overlapping ethnicity of about 374 groups, including distinct regional boundaries will directly and indirectly encourage diverse sorts of discrimination and harassment especially in terms of gender discrimination due to conflicting cultural practices of its people. Over the years, cases of sexual harassment in various industries have been reported even now that more women have been engaged in the academia and in other fields like science, engineering, and medicine both as students and faculty members (Johnson, 2010). These results implied that more women are now engaged in various fields and as such the preponderances of inaccurate sexual interaction may experience a surge or ascent. According to Jayashree (1999), most sexual harassment is perpetrated by male against female; however, there are also cases of harassment by women against men, and of same sex harassment perpetrated by either sex and apart from campus environment, sexual harassment remains a common phenomenon.

The theoretical framework of this study is based on stress theory as postulated by Louise Fitzgerald (1997) and Pearlin (1989). Fitzgerald and her colleagues developed an integrated theoretical model which identifies the causes and effects of workplace sexual harassment. According to these scholars, sexual harassment is a stressor and the direct effect of this stressor can range from work withdrawal, career instability, job dissatisfaction, poor mental and physical health. In support of Fitzgerald's model that sexual harassment is a stressor that is connected with depressive symptoms, Houle, Mortimer, Uggen and Blackstone (2011) asserted that sexual harassment as a stressor has consequences for the physical and mental health of its targets. In addition, Pearlin (1989) as a stressor theorist, insists that group differences in mental health and well-being is directly as a result of disparities in exposure to stressors and access to personal and social resources that ensure individual ability to cope with stressful experiences. Stressful experiences are expected to be detrimental to mental health when they are chronic, negative and unpredictable and this consequently becomes a sure threat to a person's identity and it also means a failure to achieve a set goal (Avison & Turner, 1988; Thoits, 1991). Stress theory also postulates that some groups of workers may suffer more stress than others when access to power and resources in the workplace tends to be with one group (Kessler & McLeod, 1984; Thoits, 1995). According to Fedina et al. (2018), women are always the victims of sexual harassment in higher educational institutions. They are also likely to have less access to power and resources in most organizations. Therefore, carrying out a study on the impact of sexual harassment on the over-all well-being of female senior non-teaching workers of public tertiary institutions should normally be a desirable inquiry.

Agbaje et al. (2021) conducted a study on workplace gender-based violence and associated factors among university women in Enugu, South-East, Nigeria. The study confirmed high prevalence of sexual harassment among university women in Enugu, Nigeria. The study also opined that this high prevalence of sexual harassment could be due to poor working environment or organizational climate which allow acts by superiors, colleagues or even subordinates. In addition, power imbalance which predisposes female workers to sexual coercion arising from offer of bonuses and promotions in return for sexual attention is a major factor encouraging sexual harassment in the university environment. To curb this menace, Agbaje et al. (2021) suggested an urgent need for well-functioning support structures for sexual harassment victims and active organizational structures in higher educational settings.

Bondestam and Lundqvist (2020) in their study on sexual harassment in higher education suggested an egalitarian workplace that will ensure power balance and equality among all workers irrespective of their gender. This will prevent sexual harassment since women in male-dominated workplaces are more at risk of sexual harassment.

Omonijo et al. (2013) carried out a study in three selected private faith-based universities, Ogun State, South-West, Nigeria which drew on data recorded

between 2008 and 2012, and they reported that 14 members of staff were caught for sexual harassment. The highest figure (50%) was recorded in University B followed by University C with 28.6% while University A recorded the least figure with 21.4%. Finally, the study reported that 85% of members of staff caught for sexual harassment were relieved from work while the remaining 14.3% were suspended.

However, sexual harassment occurs among students, but they are not the only one that could be sexually harassed. Staff are also harassed sexually including the senior non-teaching staff and most staff who experience it do not report to authorities what has happened because they can be targeted for retaliation if they report the case (Johnson et al., 2016).

Sexual harassment in most cases involves an aggressor who is superior to the victim, which may also include all genders working in the same organization. McLaughlin et al. (2017) opine that the economic and career impact of sexual harassment on working women occurs in many places especially in organized communities such as tertiary institutions. This could take place on the internet, phone communication, texting, face book and manipulation of photos. It could range from direct to indirect harassment, from minor irritation to major assault, from "just having a bit of fun" to breaking the law. A senior teaching or non-teaching staff of a tertiary institution can harass a person in a group or as an individual for days, months, years sporadically or continuously because when something that is not right happens, most workers will be scared to speak so that they would not be bullied. Sexual harassment and overall well-being among female senior non-teaching workers in tertiary institutions can cause significant stress and anxiety. Physical health and emotional health are closely linked. When victims of sexual harassment experience mental and emotional problems, it often results in physical health issues like loss of appetite, headaches, weight fluctuations and sleep disturbance. Sleep disturbance can, in turn, cause other serious health problems like hormonal imbalance, an increased risk of high vital signs and a weakened nervous system (Cohn, 2013).

Recent findings indicated that sexual harassment booms within the Nigerian banking sector (Akinfala & Komolafe, 2017; Aloomo & Atadiose, 2014; Bello, 2016; Fapohunda, 2014). Adenugba and Ilupeju (2012) also submitted that 80.8% of the respondents were sexually harassed and 94.2% respondents agreed that female marketers face numerous risks in the course of executing and retaining their jobs. In fact, Bello (2016) emphasized that 58.38% male and 53.51% female surveyed, experienced and viewed sexual harassment as a challenge to the growth of Nigerian banking sector. Sexual harassment among female senior non-teaching workers is most likely to occur when the harasser is usually superior to the victim, which makes the victim to suffer financially, such as loss of wages and unpaid leave (Agbaje et al, 2021). Some victims of sexual harassment may even face broader career repercussions, such as the loss of job reference. They may plan to leave their current position or employer to avoid a hostile work environment. Cohn (2013) also asserts that sexual harassment features a direct effect on

employees and therefore the global economy. Each year, millions of naira (the basic monetary unit of Nigeria) are lost due to absenteeism, low productivity, employee turnover rate, low morale, and legal costs stemming from sexual harassment and bullying. The economy also suffers due to premature retirement and higher insurance costs.

The main mystery, though, is why sexual harassment in institutions survives yet it is costly and is also illegal. In fact, there are commercial and legal incentives to eliminate this behaviour. The counter balances related to these incentives, however, are implying costs of monitoring and enforcing behaviour coupled with low reporting of sexual harassment which ultimately will reduce any litigation threats in the future.

### **Statement of the Problem**

There is no doubt that survey evidences might have been instrumental in raising public awareness about the extent of institutions sexual harassment. The substantial evidence that sexual harassment is frequent and damaging to individuals and workplaces has led to widespread legislation and institution policies. The limited reliable trend evidences indicate that sexual harassment has not declined (Omonijo et al., 2013). From observations gathered and experience of the researchers who were themselves members of senior non-teaching workers before their conversion to teaching cadre, there have been so many undocumented and unreported cases that indicate that sexual harassment also occurs among workers (teaching and non-teaching) of public tertiary institutions in Ogun State, Nigeria, especially now that technology is providing greater exposure to culture and permissive attitudes.

Considering the above, there seems to be dearth of researches on the consequences and other negative impacts which sexual harassment might have on the overall wellbeing (emotional wellbeing, health challenges, financial challenges and global challenges) of female workers and what this might mean to these sets of workers as well as the achievement of the objectives and goals of tertiary institutions in Ogun State.

This study therefore examined the impact of sexual harassment on the overall well-being of female senior non-teaching workers of public tertiary institutions in Ogun State, Nigeria.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The main objective of this study was to examine the impact of sexual harassment on overall well-being of female senior non-teaching workers of public tertiary institutions in Ogun State, Nigeria.

### **Research Hypotheses**

The following three research hypotheses were formulated to guide the study:

H<sub>01</sub>. There is no significant effect of sexual harassment on emotional well-being of female senior non-teaching workers of public tertiary institutions in Ogun State, Nigeria.

H<sub>02</sub>. There is no significant effect of sexual harassment on health challenges of female senior non-teaching workers of public tertiary institutions in Ogun State, Nigeria.

H<sub>03</sub>. There is no significant effect of sexual harassment on overall well-being (emotional well-being, health challenges, financial challenges and global challenges) of female senior non-teaching workers of public tertiary institutions in Ogun State, Nigeria.

## **Method and Procedures**

### **Research Design**

This study used a descriptive survey research design. This design is appropriate because it enabled the researchers to collect data using survey technique in order to determine, explain and ascertain the details of the existing conditions.

### **Population of the Study**

The population of this study comprised of all female senior non-teaching workers from three selected public tertiary institutions in Ogun State. The total population of female senior non-teaching staff in these institutions was 425 while the age range was between 28 and 65 years.

### **Sample and Sampling Technique**

Simple random sampling technique was used to select 50 female respondents from each of the selected public tertiary institutions making 150 respondents used for the study.

### **Research Instrument**

Authors designed a questionnaire to investigate the impact of sexual harassment on overall well-being of female senior non-teaching workers of public tertiary institutions in Ogun State, Nigeria based on the literature e.g. The Inventory of Workplace Sexual Harassment (Nielsen et al, 2019); and Fitzgerald's (1993) sexual harassment questionnaire (SEQ) which measures five types of harassment: gender harassment, seductive behaviour, sexual bribery, sexual coercion and sexual imposition; based on three steps: (i) identification and conceptual framework, (ii) item development and (iii) field testing, were used in the collection of data for the study.

The instrument contained 25 items with five sub-scales measuring sexual harassment, emotional well-being, health challenges, financial challenges and global challenges.

### ***Validity of the Instrument***

To ensure the validity of the instrument, it was given to the experts in the field for scrutiny and necessary corrections were observed and effected.

### ***Reliability of the Instrument***

To ensure the reliability of the instrument, a test re-test method was used. The questionnaires were administered to twenty-five (25) female senior non-

teaching workers of Moshood Abiola Polytechnic, Abeokuta (also a public tertiary institution in Ogun State) who were not part of the population for the study. The administration was done two times within two weeks. The responses obtained through the pilot study were analysed using Cronbach alpha method to determine the reliability coefficient. The result of the analysis indicated a reliability coefficient of 0.86 which confirmed the reliability of the instrument.

### Method of Data Analysis

Data collected was analysed using descriptive statistic of frequency and percentage while regression analysis was used to test all the three hypotheses. In order to process quantitative data statistically, the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) programme was used for data analysis.

## Results

### Data Analysis

Table 1

*Descriptive Statistics of Respondents Based on Sexual Harassment, Emotional Well-Being, Health Challenges, Financial Challenges and Global Challenges*

Variables	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Sexual Harassment	140	20.02	2.51
Emotional Well Being	140	19.87	2.25
Health Challenges	140	19.07	2.34
Financial Challenges	140	18.99	2.67
Global Challenges	140	19.29	2.23

Table 1 shows number of respondents N = (140), sexual harassment has mean of 20.02 and standard deviation of 2.51, Emotional well-being has mean of 19.81 and standard deviation 2.25, Health challenges has mean of 19.01 and standard deviation of 2.34, financial challenges has mean of 18.99 and standard deviation of 2.67 while global challenges has mean of 19.29 and standard deviation of 2.23.

**Hypothesis One:** Sexual harassment has no significant impact on emotional well-being of female senior non-teaching workers of public tertiary institutions in Ogun State, Nigeria.

Table 2

*Summary of Regression of Sexual Harassment on Emotional Well-Being of Female Senior Non-Teaching Workers of Public Tertiary Institutions*

	Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig
R = .511	Regression	229.791	1	229.791		.000
R <sup>2</sup> = .261	Residual	649.145	138	4.704	48.851	
Adj. R <sup>2</sup> = .256	Total	878.936	139			
Std. Error = 2.16886						

Table 2 shows significant impact of sexual harassment on emotional well-being of female senior non-teaching workers of public tertiary institutions

in Ogun State, Nigeria ( $R = .511$ ;  $R^2 = .261$ ;  $F(1.138) = 48.85$ ,  $p < .05$ ),  $Adj. R^2 = .256$ ). The result revealed that sexual harassment significantly accounted for 25% of the variance in emotional well-being of female senior non-teaching workers of public tertiary institutions in Ogun State, Nigeria. This implies that the null hypothesis which states that sexual harassment has no significant impact on emotional well-being of female senior non-teaching workers in tertiary institutions is rejected.

**Hypothesis Two:** Sexual harassment has no significant impact on health challenges of female senior non-teaching workers of public tertiary institutions in Ogun State, Nigeria.

Table 3

*Summary of Regression of Sexual Harassment on Health Challenges of Female Senior Non-Teaching Workers of Public Tertiary Institutions*

	Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig
R = .088	Regression	6.808	1	6.808	1.077	.301
R <sup>2</sup> = .008	Residual	872.128	138	6.320		
Adj. R <sup>2</sup> = .001		878.936				
Std. Error = 2.51391	Total		139			

Table 3 shows non-significant impact of sexual harassment on health challenges of female senior non-teaching workers of public tertiary institutions in Ogun State, Nigeria ( $R = .088$ ;  $R^2 = .008$ ;  $F(1.138) = 1.077$ ,  $p > .05$ ,  $Adj. R^2 = .001$ ). The result shows that the independent variable (sexual harassment) accounted for less than 1% of the variance in health challenges of female senior non-teaching workers of public institutions in Ogun State and therefore not statistically significant. This implies that the null hypothesis which states that sexual harassment has no significant impact on health challenges of female senior non-teaching workers of tertiary institutions in Ogun State is retained.

**Hypothesis Three:** Sexual harassment has no significant impact on overall well-being (emotional well-being, health challenges, financial challenges and global challenges) of female senior non-teaching workers of public tertiary institutions in Ogun State, Nigeria.

Table 4

*Summary of Regression of Sexual Harassment on Overall Well-Being (emotional well-being, health challenges, financial challenges and global challenges)*

	Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig
R = .551	Regression	266.386	4	66.596	14.677	.000
R <sup>2</sup> = .303	Residual	612.550	135	4.537		
Adj. R <sup>2</sup> = .282		878.936				
Std. Error = 2.13012	Total		139			

Table 4 indicates significant impact of sexual harassment on overall well-being (emotional well-being, health challenges, financial challenges and global



challenges) of female senior non-teaching workers of public tertiary institutions in Ogun State, Nigeria ( $R = .551$ ;  $R^2 = .303$ ;  $F(1.138) = 14.677$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $\text{Adj. } R^2 = .282$ ). The result revealed that the independent variable (sexual harassment) accounted for 30% of the variance dependent variables (overall well-beings - emotional well-being, health challenges, financial challenges and global challenges) of female senior non-teaching workers of public tertiary institutions in Ogun State, Nigeria. This implies that the null hypothesis which states that Sexual harassment has no significant impact on overall well-being (emotional well-being, health challenges, financial challenges and global challenges) of female senior non-teaching workers of public tertiary institutions in Ogun State, Nigeria is rejected.

### **Discussion of Findings**

The result from the first hypothesis revealed that sexual harassment has significant impact on emotional well-being of female senior non-teaching workers of public tertiary institutions in Ogun State. This finding is in tandem with the work of Cohn (2013) who asserted that victims of sexual harassment often experience mental and emotional problems. The emotional well-being of workers is very important in the workplace for effective and efficient service delivery and the achievement of organizational goals. It should be noted that female senior non-teaching workers who experience sexual harassment may be so careful on how they relate at work and this will affect their productivity and initiative.

Curiously, the finding from the second hypothesis showed that sexual harassment has no significant impact on the health challenges of female senior non-teaching workers of public tertiary institutions in Ogun State. This finding is at variance with the study carried out by Cohn (2013) who submitted that sexual harassment has significant impact on mental, emotional as well as health status of the victims. The reason for such findings might not be unconnected with the social stigma associated with victims that dare to report cases of sexual harassment. It is only when cases of sexual harassment are reported and acted upon that one can really genuinely come up with perceived impact.

Findings from the third hypothesis indicated that sexual harassment has significant impact on overall well-being of female senior non-teaching workers of public tertiary institutions in Ogun State. The result of this finding corroborates the study done by Cohn (2013) who asserted that sexual harassment has a direct effect on employees and the global economy. In addition, this result also corroborates the work of Young et al. (2009) which examined adolescent peer-on-peer sexual assault victimization occurring within and outside school. The sample consisted of 1,086 7<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grade American students, with a mean average of 15. Most of the respondents were white (54%) or black (45%), and approximately half of the respondents were females (54%). A modified version of Sexual Experiences Survey was used to assess opposite-sex sexual victimization in the 7<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grade students. Rates of peer sexual assault were high, ranging from 26% of high school boys to 51% of high school girls. In

addition, the study also corroborates the study by Muasya (2014) which revealed that in a survey among 2,460 students and staff in tertiary institutions in Kenya, sexual harassment has been a major issue and has really affected the victim in no small measure. Sexual harassment could lead to victims developing emotional and health problems as well as financial challenges which may lead to spending extra attention and money to cater for the overall well-being of the victims.

### **Conclusion**

The study has established that sexual harassment has significant impact on the overall well-being of female senior non-teaching workers of public tertiary institutions in Ogun State, Nigeria. It has also established that tertiary institutions in Ogun State have no clear policy that addresses issues related to sexual harassment and bullying among the female senior non-teaching staff of tertiary institutions in Ogun State, Nigeria. Sexual harassment normally starts with the harasser who ends up violating the rights of their victims physiologically, sexually and physically. Cases range from mild which may involve unusual sexual jokes and inappropriate touching to serious ones where brutality against the victims is involved. Most victims do not have the courage to even report their ordeal to relevant and appropriate authorities apart from few friends and family members they can confide in. This eventually has the capacity to damage their self-esteem and lead to depression and poor sense of belonging in the place of work. Studies point out that victims, after being sexually harassed and bullied, show low self-confidence/self-image, depression, insecurity and poor sense of belonging to the institution (Bondestam & Lundqvist, 2020; Houle et al 2011). The general attitude against victims of sexual harassment is that the occurrence is not extraordinary and therefore the victims ought to take things easy and move on with their life.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings and conclusion of this study, the subsequent recommendations were made:

- Effective ways of handling sexual harassment should involve all the stakeholders in the public tertiary institutions in the state. These include the government, non-teaching and teaching staff, parents, students. Victims should be encouraged to speak out so that appropriate steps and punishment could be meted to the aggressor.
- Appropriate policy that deals with sexual harassment should be put in place by way of legislation and updating institutions code of conduct for staff. Such policy should clearly delineate what constitutes sexual harassment so that female non-teaching staff will be informed appropriately.
- Public tertiary institutions in Ogun State should strive to uphold the principles of equity and fairness among all the workers so that one gender will not be made to feel inferior to the other. In addition, discipline should be enforced strictly when and if cases of sexual harassment are reported.

➤ Management of public tertiary institutions in the state should ensure that extant rules and regulations on sexual harassment are made and also strictly implemented to discourage would be aggressors. This is necessary due to the fact that there seems to be no specific punishment for sexual harassment in the code of conduct of public tertiary institutions in the state aside from lumping it under general misconduct.

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