Experts decry gender-based harassment, seek workable policies

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Relevant authorities and organisations have been urged to create workable policies to eradicate sexual harassment that women face at workplaces.  
  
This formed the core of discussions at recent sessions convened by HEIR Women Development, a Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) and social enterprise, to mark this year’s International Women’s Day (IWD).  
  
Working with the theme, ‘’ Breaking the Bias – Against Sexual Harassment at Workplaces,” Executive Director, HEIR Women Development, Añuli Ola-Olaniyi, said the group’s research results show that sexual harassment is prevalent at workplaces, while rape, violence such as online stalking, unwanted advance and offensive compliments are predominant forms of sexual harassment.  
  
  
  
“Out of 1000 online respondents and 60 face to face interviews, we found out that 15 per cent of the women sexually harassed were raped at their workplaces while 51 per cent have been sexually harassed at their organisations in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT),” she said.  
  
In her remarks, Programme Officer, Federal Capital Territory Authority (FCTA) Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) Response Team, Munachi Ike, noted that the Violence Against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) Act is binding on all organisations.  
  
She stressed the need for Nigerians to know and understand that their rights are protected. According to her, the policies against sexual assault in Nigeria need to be reviewed as there is not enough punishment spelt out for defaulters.  
  
Head, Gender at the African Union, Adaora Onyechere, said Nigeria needs actionable policies with a deliberate approach to implementing them.  
  
She said there should be organisational review by the Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC) such that if any organisation is found guilty of sexual harassment, punitive actions should be enforced against such entity, like delisting and delicencing such organisation from the CAC.  
  
  
  
Onyechere added that a timeline should be attached to administering the penalties. She equally identified advocacy and collaboration with organisations in ensuring that defaulting organisations are penalised as this would serve as deterrence to other organisations.  
  
Similarly, Executive Director, Joint National Association of Persons with Disabilities (JONAPWD), Tunde Ademefun, expressed concerns that data from the survey shows 55 per cent of respondents from the private sector and 26 per cent in the public sector and 19 per cent are from the development sector as victims of sexual harassment; just as 13.3 per cent of women with disabilities are victims of sexual harassment.  
  
Ademefun noted that this is the tip of the iceberg, adding, “It is more difficult for blind or deaf victims to report their assaulters due to their impairment. Private sectors are more exploitative because they pull the greatest workforce, hence, more going on there.”  
  
Development research expert, Isaac Idoko, emphasised that family has a great role in bringing up children in safe environments, stressing that most perpetrators have been brought up in environments that support such or do nothing about it. He further added that sensitisation and awareness are critical for everyone to understand what sexual harassment is, as many employees and employers need to understand its implications and impact.