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Chapter

Sexual Harassment

*Lucy Matsayi Aji, Naomi Nuhu Adamu, Vivian Azumi Kefas,
Augustina Godwin and Chrispina Garba Hassan*

Abstract

Sexual harassment is a form of harassment that involves unwelcome sexual advances, comments, demand for sexual favors, or other verbal or physical behavior of a sexual nature. It is a violation of a person's dignity and can create a hostile, intimidating, or offensive environment. Sexual harassment can occur in various settings, including workplaces, schools, public spaces, or online platforms. It can be perpetrated by individuals of any gender against individuals of any gender. Both men and women can be victims or perpetrators of sexual harassment. The forms of sexual harassment include unwelcome sexual advances, persistent and unwanted sexual comments, jokes, or gestures, displaying or sharing sexually explicit images, using power or authority to pressure someone into sexual activity. It is also crucial to recognize that the impact of sexual harassment goes beyond the immediate incident and can have long-lasting effects on the victim's mental, emotional, and physical well-being. Many countries have laws and policies in place to address and prevent sexual harassment. Some of the coping strategies for victims may include, encouraging the victim to speak up, provide support, seeking assistance from organizations specializing in handling such cases, such as counselors, psychologist, human resources departments, help lines, or legal services.

Keywords: sexual harassment, forms of sexual harassment, causes of sexual harassment, consequences of sexual harassment, coping strategies

1. Introduction

Sexual harassment is a ubiquitous and damaging type of gender-based discrimination that involves unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, or other sexual behavior that is expressed verbally or physically. It creates a hostile or intimidating environment and can occur in various settings, including the workplace, educational institutions, public spaces, and even online. Sexual harassment can have profound and lasting effects on victims, often leading to emotional distress, damage to self-esteem, and a negative impact on their overall well-being. Any unwanted or inappropriate sexual approaches, requests for sexual favors, or other verbal, nonverbal, or physical activity of a sexual character that fosters an uncomfortable or hostile environment are all considered to be sexual harassment.

2. Definition of sexual harassment

Sexual harassment refers to unwelcome and inappropriate behavior of a sexual nature that creates a hostile, intimidating, or offensive environment for the victim. Johnson et al. [1], opine that gender harassment refers to verbal and nonverbal behaviors that express hostility toward, objectification of, exclusion of, or second-class status of members of one gender. Unwanted sexual attention refers to verbally or physically unwanted sexual advances, which can include assault. Sexual coercion refers to when favorable professional or educational treatment is contingent on sexual activity. According to the report of [2], sexual harassment is seen as a type of sex discrimination in numerous nations, including the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia. Sexual harassment is defined by the Australian Sex Discrimination Act 1984, where they performed their research, as unwanted sexual advances or requests for sexual favors that can fairly be expected to offend, degrade, or frighten the harassed person. According to Suleiman [3], sexual harassment is defined as unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and any physical, verbal, or nonverbal behavior that demands or rejects submission to or rejection of such behavior, either explicitly or implicitly. Examples of such behavior include threats, intimidation, taunting, unwelcome touching, unwelcome kissing, phonographic, and other similar behaviors. According to UVA [4], sexual harassment is any action that has a sexual overtone and affects someone's dignity in some way. It could be expressed verbally (comments, innuendo), nonverbally (inappropriate looking, certain movements), or physically (touching). Sexual harassment is said to be a form of social control by men to "keep women in their places. Sexual harassment, as defined by the University of Zambia's sexual harassment policy, is "unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature, when submission to or disapproval of this conduct explicitly or implicitly affects a person's employment or education, unreasonably interferes with a person's work or educational performance or creates an intimidating, hostile, or offensive working or learning environment. Harassment may occur between anyone, and it is also common among members of the campus community: students, faculty, staff, and administrators. Harassment may occur between anyone, and it is also common among members of the campus community: students, faculty, staff, and administrators.

sexual harassment can be defined as Severe or widespread sexually explicit verbal, visual, or physical conduct that is undesirable, impacts working conditions, or fosters a hostile work environment. If the behavior is accepted, it is not sexual harassment. In order to let the harasser know that their actions are upsetting and that you would like them to stop, it is crucial to do so in writing or vocally. Sexual harassment is defined as unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and verbal, physical, or nonverbal behavior that demands or rejects submission to or rejection of such behavior, either explicitly or implicitly, including threats, intimidation, taunting, unwanted touching, unwanted kissing, and so forth [2, 5].

SIU (2020) "Any unwelcome conduct based on an individual's actual or perceived race, color, religion, national origin, ancestry, age, sex, marital status, status under an order of protection, disability, military status, sexual orientation, pregnancy, unfavorable discharge from military service, or citizenship status that has the purpose or effect of materially interfering with the individual's work performance or creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive work environment" is considered harassment.

The term “working environment” as used in this definition refers to more than just the actual place where an employee is allocated to carry out his or her duties. “Sexual harassment” refers to any unwanted sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, or other sexually suggestive behavior when any of the following conditions are met: (1) such behavior is made, explicitly or implicitly, a requirement of employment; (2) such behavior is the basis for employment decisions that affect the individual; or (3) such behavior substantially interferes with the person.

The term “gender harassment” refers to sex-based harassment that does not have a sexual overtone, such as making derogatory remarks, making hostile remarks, excluding others, silencing them, or acting in a stereotypical manner. Sexual harassment is unwanted physical, verbal, or nonverbal behavior that is sexual in nature, such as touching, making sexually explicit comments about someone’s appearance or body, stalking, sending sexually explicit photographs, or making sexual jokes [6]. According to Latcheva [7], we use the idea of gender-based violence as a framework for comprehending various forms of gender-based violence, such as date rape, sexual assault, and sexual harassment. So, from bullying and sexist language to sexual assault and rape, sexual harassment is a continuum of various forms of real and prospective gender-based violence that present in higher education settings. Additionally, this is consistent with the prevailing viewpoint supported by a thorough assessment of national incentives for sexual harassment in EU member states [8]. Above all, sexual harassment is an indication of power dynamics. Because females frequently lack power, are in more vulnerable and insecure positions than men, lack confidence, or have been conditioned to suffer in silence, women are considerably more likely to become victims of sexual harassment. It is crucial to examine some of the root causes of this situation in order to comprehend why women experience the great majority of sexual harassment.

Grossly offensive sexual language and nonverbal behaviors that are directed toward a person’s gender, gender identity, or sexual orientation are referred to as gender harassment. Gender harassment takes many different forms, including flashing, displaying sexual objects or gestures at work, and sending sexually explicit emails or texts to coworkers or friends. This category also includes jokes, phrases, and statements that are sexist or heterosexist. Leering and catcalling, making suggestive or positive and negative comments about a person’s physique, spreading sexual rumors about a person, and electronically exchanging sexualized photographs of a person are all examples of unwanted sexual attention. Unwanted sexual attention is also referred to as unwanted sexual touching, which includes purposeful groping, grasping, squeezing, and rubbing up against another person in a sexual manner. This also applies to obstructing another person’s path or pursuing them sexually, as well as to unwanted, uninvited, and unreturned advances such as persistent solicitations for kisses, dates, or sex, as well as attempted or successful rape. *Quid pro quo* SH, the legal term for sexual coercion, refers to the requirement of sexual favors or contact as a condition of receiving rewards or benefits like employment, a promotion, favorable working conditions, assistance, or a high performance rating. Although it appears that sexual coercion is the most severe and infrequent kind of SH, less severe but more frequent forms of SH can nonetheless cause continuous stress and trauma that is harmful to wellbeing [9, 10]. The issue of sexual harassment is related to the roles that men and women are given in social and economic life, which in turn has an impact on women’s positions in the workforce, either directly or indirectly.

3. Forms of sexual harassment

Sexual harassment can take different forms, including: verbal harassment, non-verbal harassment, physical harassment, visual harassment, quid pro quo harassment. Sexual harassment is not limited to a particular gender and can happen to anyone, regardless of their sex or gender identity. The issue of sexual harassment, therefore, should not be based on hearsay. Various examples of lecturers harassing their students by various tactics, such as touching, winking, sexual comments, etc., and actual intercourse, have been documented in various newspapers. This inspired inquiry into the subject. However, because sex is private and shame is associated with it, not much is known about sexual harassment in tertiary institutions. It has been made clear precisely how commonplace this discriminatory behavior is in our culture by the reports of sexual harassment that have overtaken news headlines. Women who have been silent for years are now speaking up and sharing their experiences with sexual harassment, which includes lewd or derogatory remarks, hostile or demeaning jokes, professional sabotage, repeated unwanted sexual advances, groping, demands for sexual favors, and other offensive and discriminatory actions or language [1, 11].

According to the Australian Human Rights Commission [12], sexual harassment refers to a variety of behaviors such as leering or gazing, unwanted touching, and sexual slurs or taunts. In addition to the workplace [13], cited in [14], educational institutions [12, 15], public spaces [12], and online [16], sexual harassment occurs in a variety of settings. Southern Illinois University System (SIU) [17], argued that sexual harassment can entail online or electronic media interactions, even when they occur off-site or “off the clock.” Examples of actions that may be construed as unwanted sexual conduct via email, cell phone, text, Internet or Intranet posting, online comments, blog posts, social media (such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram, YouTube, and Snapchat), or other electronic media include requests or demands for sex, sexually explicit or inappropriate images and videos, sexually offensive language or comments, unwanted flirting, unwanted requests for dates, and cyberstalking.

Sexual harassment may also take the form of physical coercion such as being brushed against or held sexually, having private parts touched, or being coerced into kissing or other forms of sexual behavior. Sexual harassment is unwanted and undesired behavior of a sexual nature that impedes a student’s ability to have an equal opportunity to learn. It occurs in schools. Between 40% and 85% of men and women in secondary and high schools report experiencing sexual harassment in one of the aforementioned forms [18–21]. Being subject to the physical form of sexual harassment (coercion) is less prevalent, particularly among boys/men [20]. Sexual harassment victimization may cause considerable psychosocial strain. Physical or verbal harassment: psychological, physical or verbal harassment, aggression, threats, or assault, including shouting, swearing, or getting too close physically. It can take the form of a hate crime motivated by hatred based on ethnicity/race, religion, sexual orientation, disability, or transgender identity [22].

Earlier studies from educational institutions in Nigeria and across the world had reported between 67% and 99% of different types of sexual harassment in both public and private institutions [23–25]. For instance, Lichty and Campbell ([19]; UUK [22]; Johnson et al. [1]) have identified verbal, nonverbal, indirect, or physical sexual harassment as the main types experienced. Derogatory sexual

statements or sexual jokes frequently constitute verbal sexual harassment. Personal phone conversations, emails, messages, or other sexually explicit content; pressure to go on dates; sexually suggestive statements, jokes, or inquiries; calling an adult “girl,” “hunk,” “doll,” “babe,” or “honey”; Asking about sexual fantasies, shifting lecture talks to sexual subjects, making sexual remarks about someone’s appearance, anatomy, or attire, or making kissing noises are all examples of inappropriate sexual behavior.

According to SIU [17], nonverbal harassment may include the display of pornographic images or objects, obscene gestures, intentional touching, leaning over, or cornering, sexual looks or gestures, letters, and indirect harassment may include being the target of sexual rumors and having unflattering images posted on social media. Neck and/or shoulder massage is another example of indirect harassment. Hugging, kissing, patting, stroking, or pinching; touching a student’s clothing, hair, or body; and unwelcome proximity to another individual. Standing near to or rubbing up against a person; caressing or stroking oneself sexually when another person is present. As opposed to the other three types of sexual harassment, direct sexual harassment entails rape and physical sexual molestation. Inappropriate sexual remarks, unsolicited groping of female students’ breasts, tapping of female students’ buttocks, and luring female students with high sex test results are only a few examples of sexual harassment of female students, according to Onoyase [26]. Worldwide, both industrial and non-industrial societies exhibit these types of sexual harassment.

According to SIU [17] and Matsayi et al. [11], inhospitable working conditions and quid pro quo are two examples of sexual harassment. Quick for quick. It’s “something for something.” This type of harassment happens when a manager or supervisor informs a subordinate that they must perform sexual acts in exchange for a promotion, raise, preferred assignment, or other types of job benefits, or to avoid something negative like discipline or an unpleasant task. An intimidating, hostile, or offensive work environment is created when uninvited sexual approaches, requests for sexual favors, or any other sexual behavior has the intention or effect of materially affecting a person’s ability to fulfill their job duties. Inappropriate contact, sexual remarks, and offensive items used in the workplace are all forms of sexual harassment (Gruber; Osman as cited in Houle et al. [27]).

Sexual harassment can occur in a variety of ways beyond than advances and requests for sexual favors. A hostile work atmosphere or other sexually explicit behavior can be part of or contribute to quid pro quo sexual harassment. For example, actual or attempted rape or sexual assault; demands for sexual favors; intentional touching, leaning over, or cornering; sexual looks or gestures; letters, calls, personal emails, texts, or other materials of a sexual nature; and so forth. Pressure to go on dates; sexual taunting; sexual jokes; sexual comments; calling an adult a “girl,” “hunk,” “doll,” “babe,” or “honey”; turning business conversations into sexually explicit ones; asking about sexual dreams, preferences, or history; sexual remarks regarding a person’s appearance, body, or attire; smacking lips, wailing, and kissing noises; discussing, fabricating, or disseminating rumors about a person’s private sex life; massage your shoulders or your neck; caressing, kissing, patting, stroking, or pinching an employee; touching their clothing, hair, or body; and unwelcome proximity to them. Sexually suggestive posters, cartoons, websites, or magazines displayed in the workplace or shown to someone; playing sexually suggestive or graphic videos or music; and making sexual gestures with the hands or through body movements

are all prohibited. So are touching or rubbing oneself sexually on oneself in front of another person, standing close to or brushing up against a person, looking a person up and down, and more [28]. Touching or making any other physical contact with a coworker, including patting or scratching their backs, holding them by the waist, or obstructing their movement. Unwanted flirting or persistent solicitations for dates that are declined illustrations of sexual harassment sending or publishing messages, emails, or images with sexual or other harassing content putting up posters, images, or things that are sexually suggestive Playing music with explicit lyrics, Tripartite Model of SH, Sexually Harassing Behaviors, and the generally accepted tripartite model of SH (Fitzgerald et al. as cited in [29]) the three behavioral elements of sexual coercion, unwanted sexual attention, and gender harassment are identified. According to Holland and Cortina [30], these three kinds are persistent over time, across cultures, and across occupational sectors.

According to Menon et al. [31], anywhere on a university campus, including in a classroom, a workplace, or a dorm, can be a victim of harassment. Sexual harassment incidents are now more frequently than in the past included in the stress framework, making them more commonly associated with organizational dysfunction at work than with poor personal qualities. According to an analysis of reporting and punishment, the culprit was formally punished in 1.4% of incidents overall. According to the literature, there are two sorts of sexual harassment: “quid pro quo,” which involves asking for sexual favors in exchange for job advancements, and “hostile environment,” which refers to the atmosphere created by unwanted sexual advances, sexist remarks, or other offensive behavior. Due to the inconsistent definitions of what defines a hostile environment, the definition of hostile environment harassment seems to be less obvious to people. For instance, some people consider sexual jokes to be sexual harassment, while others consider them to be a typical aspect of contact at work or school. It may be vital to comprehend how people perceive hostile settings in order to comprehend sexual harassment.

3.1 Primary categories of sexual harassment

The two main categories of sexual harassment are:

- i. **Quid Pro Quo:** This type of sexual harassment occurs when a person in a position of authority, such as an employer or supervisor, demands sexual favors in exchange for job benefits, promotions, raises, or other favorable treatment. It creates a coercive and exploitative dynamic, where the victim may feel compelled to comply due to fear of reprisal or adverse consequences for refusing. According to Bread for the city (nd), Quid pro quo (“This for that”) is one form of sexual harassment. An individual in a position of authority, usually a supervisor, requests sexual favors in exchange for receiving or maintaining a job perk. They may also make inappropriate gestures, jokes, comments, or reactions, or write unpleasant words on their clothing.
- ii. **Hostile environment:** In a hostile environment, the workplace or environment becomes permeated with unwelcome sexual advances, comments, or behaviors that create an intimidating, hostile, or offensive atmosphere. This can include sexual jokes, explicit materials, derogatory comments, or even non-consensual physical contact. Such an environment can interfere with an individual’s ability to perform their job or engage in educational activities.

4. Causes of sexual harassment

It has been suggested that lust, the pursuit of happiness, a lack of moral standards, a lack of conscience, the pursuit of pleasure, a lack of restraint, passion, habit, value, personality disorders, inferiority complexes, immaturity, cheapness, abuse of power, and demonic possession are among the factors that motivate sexual harassment. In addition, inappropriate dressing habits among female students who appear virtually naked may also be contributing causes to the persistence of sexual harassment. According to the opinion, Aluede, as cited in Taiwo et al. [32] and Matsayi et al. [11], one of the causes of sexual harassment is women's indecent dressing, which results in the display of sensual body parts (such as the breasts, navel, and buttocks) through tight and transparent clothing, which is commonly referred to as "sexual flashpoints." These situations frequently lead to school authorities prohibiting indecent dressing by creating codes of conduct to help female students.

Sexual harassment is a complex issue with multiple contributing factors. It's important to note that sexual harassment is never justified or excusable, but understanding its causes can help in addressing and preventing it. Here are some common causes and contributing factors:

1. **Power imbalance:** One of the primary causes of sexual harassment is a power imbalance between individuals. This can occur in workplace settings, educational institutions, or even in personal relationships. The harasser may use their position of authority or influence to exert control over the victim.
2. **Gender inequality:** Societal norms and gender inequality play a significant role in sexual harassment. In many cultures, women and gender minorities have historically been treated as inferior, which can lead to harassment as a means of asserting dominance or control.
3. **Cultural and social norms:** Cultural attitudes and social norms can normalize and perpetuate sexual harassment. For example, objectification of women in media, victim-blaming, and the trivialization of harassment can create an environment where it is tolerated.
4. **Lack of education and awareness:** Ignorance about what constitutes sexual harassment and a lack of awareness about its impact can contribute to its occurrence. Comprehensive education about consent, boundaries, and respectful behavior is crucial in preventing harassment.
5. **Toxic masculinity:** The pressure on men to conform to traditional notions of masculinity can sometimes result in aggressive or disrespectful behavior toward others, including sexual harassment. Challenging toxic masculinity is important in addressing this issue.
6. **Workplace culture:** A toxic workplace culture that ignores or minimizes reports of harassment can enable perpetrators. Employers must create an environment where victims feel safe reporting harassment without fear of retaliation.
7. **Alcohol and substance abuse:** The use of alcohol or drugs can impair judgment and increase the likelihood of engaging in harassing behavior. Parties and social gatherings with excessive alcohol consumption can be high-risk environments.

8. **Online harassment:** The anonymity provided by the internet can lead to online sexual harassment, including cyberbullying, revenge porn, and online stalking.
9. **Unresolved personal issues:** Some individuals may have unresolved personal issues or psychological factors that contribute to their engaging in harassment. This can include anger management problems, narcissism, or a history of trauma.
10. **Social and economic factors:** Economic disparities can contribute to harassment, especially in situations where victims may be economically dependent on their harassers. Fear of job loss or financial repercussions can deter victims from reporting.
11. **Peer pressure:** In some cases, individuals may engage in harassment due to peer pressure or a desire to fit in with a particular social group.
12. **Lack of legal protections:** In regions where there are insufficient legal protections against sexual harassment or where enforcement is weak, perpetrators may feel emboldened.

5. Consequences of sexual harassment

Sexual harassment exposes people to physical, psychological, and professional repercussions. Evidence-based research demonstrates that sexual harassment in the workplace can result in depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), physical discomfort, unintended pregnancies, sexually transmitted illnesses, increased alcohol use, lower job motivation, and more [33]. The victims of sexual harassment may experience disastrous effects on their educational pursuits. According to Quaicoe-Duco [34], the victims' academic performance worsens because they find it extremely difficult to focus on their studies. In order to avoid the teachers' unwelcome attention, this has led to little engagement among the victims. According to a study conducted in Kenya, women who encountered sexual harassment in the classroom had a 136 casual attitude, lost interest in their work, and lost their sense of discipline [35].

Embarrassment, a loss of confidence, rage, and psychological harm are all experienced by sexual harassment victims [36]. Additionally, sexual harassment causes issues at work like poorer performance [37], higher absenteeism, and lower job satisfaction [38], among other issues. The victim's attitude toward their job may also be impacted by sexual harassment [39]. Employees who experienced sexual harassment reported less job satisfaction, more intents to quit their jobs, and higher absenteeism, according to Merkin and Shah's [40] research. Furthermore, having the impression that sexual harassment in the workplace is not addressed seriously can affect one's physical health [40]. Due to decreased employee productivity and the cost of monetary settlements awarded to victims of sexual harassment, sexual harassment can harm a company's reputation and performance [41].

According to Jyotimala [28], sexual harassment typically has a negative impact on a person's emotional, social, and physical wellbeing. Adolescent females who had experienced sexual harassment in one study described emotions resembling those experienced by rape victims. The following are some significant effects of

sexual harassment on women: (i) Psychological repercussions: sexual harassment causes the victim to lose self-confidence and self-esteem, which is embarrassing and incredibly unpleasant. The victim experiences anxiety, depression, depression, and anger. Additionally, it is a significant role in job stress. The victim's productivity at work suffers as a result, and in severe cases, they may even quit. (ii) Physiological repercussions: sexual harassment victims' physical health is directly impacted by the emotional misery it causes. A sleepless night for the victim could result in pains, joint pain, and other health issues. The victim's inability to focus on her work will make it harder for her to be productive at work. Blood pressure issues could arise in victims. As a result of sexual harassment, the victim could also have food disorders, substance misuse, and even suicidal thoughts. (iii) Financial repercussions: a victim of sexual harassment may suffer serious financial implications. Every year, a large number of women lose their jobs and experience unemployment, which causes financial and economic loss. Because it might have an impact on her work history and references, sexual harassment may have repercussions outside the workplace.

Some scholarly works such as Norman et al. [42], Julie [43], and Suleiman [3] equally acknowledged are the negative psychological impacts of sexual harassment on female students' academic performance. The victims' health is also negatively impacted, which increases their risk of developing STDs and causes dread, trauma, despair, anxiety, and lack of trust. Acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS) or human immunodeficiency virus (HIV). Additionally, they claim that sexual harassment violates the rights of the victims by making the victims' academic performance uncomfortable.

Idris et al. [44] opined that apart from the physical and psychological trauma it exposes the victims to, their productivity is greatly affected. Burn [29] opined that psychologists are concerned about SH since it is widespread and linked to stress-related mental and physical disorders. The situations that SH produces are unfair, threatening, hostile, abusive, and insulting; they undermine victims' confidence and sense of security and obstruct their ability to perform and achieve their goals. According to Bread for the City (nd), sexual harassment that is verbal, physical, or visual, and that is "sufficiently severe, persistent, or pervasive" as well as unwanted, is classified as occurring in a hostile environment. A hostile environment could be produced by a single, serious incident, as a sexual assault. A "hostile environment" is more frequently produced by a string of events.

Vyas and Jodhpur [45] Sexual harassment cause stress: Its effects and consequences. Sexual harassment is a problem that is "coming out of the closet" more frequently. Businesses are beginning to acknowledge the existence of the issue; some managers are recognizing that it may harm their employees, and more victims are beginning to have the bravery to voice their complaints. Additionally, victims do have legal options under current labor laws. Everyone wants to work toward achieving a more opulent and financially secure lifestyle. Both men and women are making good money and succeeding in their careers. Changes in technology are accepted. New environmental developments do not frighten people any longer. The theory behind sexual harassment is that it causes stress and has an impact on the targets' physical and mental health. While sexual harassment can have a negative impact on a victim's health in any situation, workplace harassment is particularly nasty. A labour and law employment attorney who has handled hundreds of sexual harassment cases, Nannina Angioni, is quoted in Spector [46] as describing it as a "slithering snake that ripples its way through a work environment, causing disastrous results." According to

Angioni, “employees talk about having a pit in their stomach while driving to work, experiencing anxiety, panic attacks, unexplained crying fits, and experiencing physical manifestations of stress, such as hair loss, hives, weight gain or loss, insomnia, and lethargy.”

Research showed that people are reluctant to label sexually inappropriate behavior as sexual harassment (Magley; Hulin; Fitzgerald; DeNardo as cited in [47]) and one explanation could be that being a victim of sexual harassment is linked to stigma and vulnerability, which could cause others to be ignorant of or minimize those experiences. Women who experienced sex-related behaviors had extremely similar consequences on their mental health, regardless of whether they labeled these encounters as sexual harassment, according to research by Magley, Hulin, Fitzgerald, and DeNardo as referenced in Vincent-Höper et al. [47]. Since Mackinnon’s cited in as cited Houle et al. [27] Social scientists have described sexual harassment as a stressor that is harmful to both one’s mental and physical health (Fitzgerald, Hulin, and Drasgow as referenced in Houle, Staff, Mortimer, Uggen, and Blackstone [27]). Harassment has been linked to higher rates of anxiety, depression, and PTSD as well as lower levels of self-esteem, self-confidence, and psychological well-being (for reviews, see Pryor and Fitzgerald; Welsh; Wellness, Steel, and Lee as cited in Houle et al. [27]).

Matsuyi [2, 5] opine that, students’ wellbeing at postsecondary institutions can be seriously harmed by sexual harassment. The state of one’s mental health is among the possible effects. Anxiety, despair, and PTSD can all be signs of sexual harassment, which can also result in a loss in mental health. Sexual harassment can have a negative impact on one’s physical well-being and cause physical symptoms like headaches, stomachaches, and muscle strain. In addition to negatively affecting academic performance, sexual harassment can also result in students skipping classes, falling behind on their assignments, or even quitting school entirely. Sexual harassment can make students withdraw from their friends and family, straining friendships and family ties. Future employment opportunities for students may also be impacted by sexual harassment. It may result in diminished self-assurance, diminished job satisfaction, and diminished career opportunities. Their capacity to establish networks and professional contacts may also be impacted. Overall, sexual harassment can have a serious detrimental effect on students’ wellness at postsecondary institutions.

Sexual harassment can have significant and far-reaching consequences for both the victim and the perpetrator, as well as for the workplace or community where it occurs. These consequences can be physical, emotional, psychological, and legal in nature. Here are some of the potential consequences of sexual harassment:

1. Emotional and psychological impact on victims:

- **mental health effects:** Victims may experience anxiety, depression, PTSD, and other mental health issues as a result of the harassment.
- **Low self-esteem:** Sexual harassment can erode a victim’s self-esteem and self-worth.
- **Guilt and shame:** Victims may unfairly blame themselves or feel ashamed about what happened.

- **Fear and anxiety:** A constant fear of encountering the harasser or similar situations may develop.
- **Isolation:** Some victims may withdraw from social interactions or the workplace to avoid further harassment.

2. Physical health effects:

- **Stress-related illnesses:** Long-term stress from harassment can lead to physical health problems such as high blood pressure, headaches, and digestive issues.

3. Professional consequences:

- **Career impact:** Victims may experience career setbacks, including missed promotions, job loss, or a decline in job performance.
- **Hostile work environment:** A workplace with a history of sexual harassment may become toxic, leading to decreased morale and productivity.

4. Social and interpersonal consequences:

- **Strained relationships:** Harassment can strain relationships with friends and family due to the emotional toll it takes.
- **Difficulty trusting others:** Victims may have difficulty trusting coworkers, superiors, or authority figures.

5. Legal consequences:

- **Legal action:** Victims may pursue legal action against the harasser and the organization, leading to lawsuits, fines, or settlements.
- **Criminal charges:** In some cases, sexual harassment can escalate to criminal charges, especially in cases of assault or rape.

6. Reputation damage:

- **Perpetrator's reputation:** Perpetrators of sexual harassment may face damage to their personal and professional reputations if their behavior becomes public knowledge.
- **Organizational reputation:** Companies or institutions where harassment occurs can suffer reputational damage, impacting their ability to attract and retain talent and customers.

7. Financial costs:

- **Legal fees:** Organizations may incur substantial legal costs in defending against harassment claims.

- **Compensation and damages:** If found liable, organizations may have to pay compensation and damages to victims.

8. **Prevention and awareness:** Organizations may need to invest in training and awareness programs to prevent future incidents of harassment.

6. Challenging stereotypes and myths

Challenging stereotypes and myths surrounding sexual harassment is crucial for creating a safer and more inclusive society. These harmful stereotypes and misconceptions often perpetuate a culture that tolerates or normalizes such behavior. Let us examine some common stereotypes and myths about sexual harassment and how to challenge them:

1. Myth: It's only sexual harassment if it involves physical contact or violence.

Fact: Sexual harassment encompasses a broad range of behaviors, including verbal comments, gestures, and non-physical actions that create a hostile or uncomfortable environment. Unwanted advances, comments, or even cyber harassment can all be forms of sexual harassment.

2. Myth: Sexual harassment only happens in certain industries or workplaces.

Fact: Sexual harassment can occur in any setting, including offices, schools, public spaces, and online. It is not limited to specific industries or job types.

3. Myth: Only women are victims of sexual harassment, and only men are perpetrators.

Fact: Sexual harassment can happen to anyone regardless of gender, and perpetrators can be of any gender. It's essential to acknowledge that anyone can be a victim or perpetrator, and support should be available for all individuals.

4. Myth: People who dress provocatively are asking for sexual harassment.

Fact: What someone wears is not an invitation for harassment. Harassment is about power and control, not the victim's clothing choices. Blaming the victim based on their attire is victim-blaming and unacceptable.

5. Myth: False accusations of sexual harassment are common.

Fact: Research shows that false accusations of sexual harassment are rare. Most victims hesitate to come forward due to fear of not being believed or facing retaliation. It's essential to take all claims seriously while respecting due process.

6. Myth: If someone does not say "no" or resist physically, it's not harassment.

Fact: Consent is a clear and enthusiastic agreement to engage in any sexual activity. Silence or the absence of physical resistance does not imply consent. Consent must be freely given and can be withdrawn at any time.

7. Myth: Sexual harassment is just “locker room talk” or harmless banter.

Fact: Inappropriate comments and behavior can contribute to a hostile work or social environment. What may seem like harmless banter to some can be deeply offensive and distressing to others.

8. Myth: Reporting sexual harassment will lead to immediate consequences for the perpetrator.

Fact: Reporting sexual harassment can be a lengthy process, and outcomes may vary. However, it's essential to encourage victims to report incidents, as it's the first step in addressing the issue and holding perpetrators accountable.

9. Myth: It's not my responsibility to address sexual harassment if I'm not directly involved.

Fact: Everyone has a role in preventing sexual harassment. Being an active bystander by intervening or supporting victims when you witness harassment is crucial in creating a safer environment.

10. Myth: Addressing sexual harassment is an isolated issue unrelated to broader social and gender equality concerns.

Fact: Addressing sexual harassment is integral to promoting gender equality and a more inclusive society. A culture that tolerates harassment perpetuates harmful power imbalances and discrimination.

Challenging these stereotypes and myths requires education, awareness, and active efforts to create a culture of respect, consent, and zero tolerance for sexual harassment. Encouraging open conversations, supporting survivors, and holding perpetrators accountable are essential steps toward a safer and more equitable society.

7. Coping strategies for sexual harassment

Coping with such experiences can be incredibly challenging, and it's important to seek support and assistance when needed. Here are some coping strategies that may help:

1. **Reach out for support:** Talk to someone you trust about what you are going through. It could be a friend, family member, or a counselor. Sharing your feelings and experiences with a supportive person can be therapeutic.
2. **Seek professional help:** Consider speaking with a therapist or counselor who specializes in trauma or sexual harassment. They can provide you with guidance and coping strategies tailored to your specific situation.
3. **Self-care:** Take care of your physical and emotional well-being. Engage in activities that help you relax and relieve stress, such as exercise, meditation, yoga, or deep breathing exercises.

4. **Educate yourself:** Learn more about your rights and the laws regarding sexual harassment in your area. Knowledge can empower you and help you make informed decisions about how to handle the situation.
5. **Document the harassment:** Keep a record of incidents, including dates, times, locations, and descriptions of what happened. This documentation can be valuable if you decide to take legal action or report the harassment to authorities.
6. **Set boundaries:** Clearly communicate your boundaries to the person responsible for the harassment, if you feel safe doing so. Let them know that their behavior is not acceptable and that you expect it to stop.
7. **Safety measures:** If you feel threatened or unsafe, take steps to protect yourself. This may involve changing your routine, installing security measures, or seeking a restraining order if necessary.
8. **Support groups:** Consider joining a support group for survivors of sexual harassment or assault. Talking to others who have experienced similar situations can provide validation, understanding, and additional coping strategies.
9. **Legal action:** If you decide to pursue legal action, consult with an attorney who specializes in sexual harassment cases. They can help you understand your options and guide you through the legal process.
10. **Self-compassion:** Be kind to yourself. Recognize that you are not to blame for the harassment. Practice self-compassion and avoid self-blame or guilt.
11. **Empowerment:** Take steps to regain a sense of control in your life. This could involve setting goals, making plans for the future, and focusing on personal growth.
12. **Advocacy:** Consider becoming an advocate for change in your workplace or community. Raise awareness about sexual harassment and work toward creating a safer environment for everyone.

Remember that coping with sexual harassment can be a long and difficult journey. It's essential to prioritize your well-being and seek help when needed. Do not hesitate to reach out to organizations that specialize in supporting survivors of sexual harassment for additional resources and guidance.

8. Conclusion

Sexual harassment refers to unwelcome and inappropriate behavior of a sexual nature that creates a hostile, intimidating, or offensive environment for the victim. It is important to note that consent is a crucial element in any sexual interaction, and any behavior without clear and voluntary consent is considered harassment. It is a form of gender-based discrimination and can occur in various settings, including workplaces, educational institutions, public spaces, and online platforms. Sexual

harassment can take many forms, including, verbal harassment, non-verbal harassment, physical harassment, visual harassment, online or cyber harassment. Sexual harassment can have serious emotional, psychological, and professional consequences for the victim. Laws and regulations addressing sexual harassment vary by country and jurisdiction, but many places have legal provisions in place to protect individuals from such behavior in workplaces and other settings. It is essential to raise awareness, promote respectful behavior, and create safe environments where individuals can work, study, or live without the fear of sexual harassment. It's important to recognize that the consequences of sexual harassment can vary widely depending on the specific circumstances of the incident and the response to it. Prompt and effective intervention and support for victims, along with clear policies and training to prevent harassment, can mitigate some of these consequences and help create safer environments. It's essential to recognize and combat sexual harassment to create safe and respectful environments for everyone, and organizations often have policies and procedures in place to address and prevent sexual harassment. Sexual harassment is not limited to any particular gender, and victims can be of any gender as well. Perpetrators can also be of any gender. Laws and regulations vary by country, but many jurisdictions have implemented legal protections and guidelines to address and prevent sexual harassment. These laws often require employers, institutions, and organizations to take proactive measures to prevent sexual harassment, investigate complaints, and provide support for victims. It's essential to recognize the importance of education, awareness, and prevention when it comes to sexual harassment. By fostering a culture of respect, consent, and gender equality, societies and institutions can work toward eliminating this form of discrimination and creating safer environments for everyone. Preventing and addressing sexual harassment requires a multi-faceted approach that includes education, cultural shifts, legal protections, and support for victims. It is essential to create a society where harassment is not tolerated, and victims are empowered to report and seek help when needed.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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Author details


Lucy Matsayi Aji^{1*}, Naomi Nuhu Adamu¹, Vivian Azumi Kefas¹, Augustina Godwin² and Chrispina Garba Hassan¹

¹ Department of Guidance and Counselling, Taraba State University, Jalingo, Nigeria

² Taraba State Ministry of Education, Jalingo, Nigeria

*Address all correspondence to: lucy.matsayi@tsuniversity.edu.ng

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