

IMPACT OF SEXUAL HARRASSMENT ON PERFORMANCE OF FEMALE STUDENTS IN HIGHER INSTITUTIONS; A CASE STUDY OF BUSHENYI DISTRICT

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ABSTRACT

This study sought to investigate the impact of sexual harassment on performance of female students in higher institution. The objectives were; to establish the influence of verbal sexual harassment on performance of female students, to examine the effect of physical sexual harassment on performance of female students in higher institutions and to establish the strategies employed by university management in addressing student's sexual harassment in higher institutions. The study applied descriptive design that employed self-administered questionnaires, and semi-structured interviews. Multi-stage sampling technique, which involves simple random sampling, was used to arrive at the sample size of 100 respondents. Quantitative data was analyzed using the Statistical Packages of Social Sciences (SPSS). Summary of the key findings indicated that 25% of respondents strongly agreed that Psychological and psychosocial problems including lowers self-esteem and body image, 40% agreed with the statement, 7% were not sure, 10% disagreed while 18% strongly disagreed with the statement. 55% of respondents strongly agreed that verbal sexual harassment results into Fear and anxiety depression, 45% agreed with the statement, while none neither disagreed nor strongly disagreed. 51.9% (14) teachers and 46.3% (132) students were very satisfied with actions taken to address SH. The findings reveal that a quarter of the students, 72(25.3%) were of the contrary view saying they were not satisfied at all with the actions taken. Interestingly, some teachers to whom rests the onus of instituting measures to address SH were either moderately satisfied 5(18.5%), slightly satisfied 6(22.2%) or not satisfied at all 2(7.4%) with the actions. The researcher therefore concludes that Sexual harassment is an epidemic throughout global higher education systems and impact individuals, groups and entire organizations in profound ways and as well recommends that MIU and other higher education governing bodies should approve and officially sign into law-making team-teaching compulsory in higher institutions and policies should be put in place so that any lecturer caught in sex scandal should be given open and public disgrace ranging from termination of appointment to 5 years of imprisonment or both.

Key words: Sexual Harassment, Female Students and Academic Performance.

Background of the study

Globally, sexual harassment is a serious social and public health problem that occurs in all countries of the world, across all racial, ethnic, religious and socioeconomic groups (Joyline et al., 2023a). It is a problem that has become almost epidemic in higher institutions in various countries (Joyline et al., 2023b) and is considered a risk factor for lifelong problems including low self-esteem (Joyline et al., 2023b). According to (James, 2023), sexual harassment is a "burning problem" and a "silent problem" that is under-addressed in the education sector, yet it impacts on student performance,

especially for girls, leaving them feeling upset and disappointed. Studies conducted by the World Health Organization (WHO, 2018 and 2020) reveal that more than 150 million girls have suffered and continue to suffer from painful incidents of SH, which often impact student performance (Ntirandekura et al., 2022). Empirical studies by AAUW posit that SH is an "unfortunate part of school culture" that affects the educational experience of millions of female students, especially in higher institutions (Aisha et al., n.d.). These experiences seem to form a painful but permanent

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part of adolescent life. AAUW statistical findings show that more than 80% of female students complain of the negative effects of SH, often culminating in poor performance leading to dropout (James, 2023).

In Africa, both formal and informal evidence has shown the presence of sexual harassment in educational institutions. Universities have been accused of promoting the "sex for grades" phenomenon, where some lecturers harassed female students when female students did not submit to the lecturers' sexual demands (Martin & Matovu, 2023a). (Martin & Matovu, 2023b) indicated the existence of sexual harassment in educational institutions, while (Joyline et al., 2023a) demonstrated that 24 percent of sexual harassment occurred in a school-based educational setting (Godfrey et al., 2023). In Uganda, the Minister of Education, Mrs. Janet Museveni, has asked all

higher education institutions to implement sexual harassment guidelines to make universities safe for students. In a speech read by Speaker of Parliament Jacob Oulanyah at Makerere University, Mrs. Museveni said cases of sexual harassment and abuse in educational institutions affect the performance and productivity of students (James, 2023). "We are all aware that one of the key components of quality education is a safe and conducive learning environment. We cannot expect our students to be safe in an environment filled with selfish, unprofessional and backward behavior that threatens their stability," Museveni said. (Shamim et al., 2023). She added: "I appeal to you to protect students in educational institutions and let them focus on what brought them to school. I call for professionalism and integrity among the staff who work in educational institutions (James, 2023).

Problem statement

Higher institutions are expected to provide a conducive learning atmosphere where students are protected from all forms of harm. Sexual behavior is a prevalent social behavior in tertiary institutions in Uganda (Martin & Matovu, 2023a). However, studies from various countries around the world continue to show that SH targeting students, especially girls, is on an upward trajectory. This seems to be especially true in higher institutions (Gracious, 2023). Many female students in higher institutions have been victims of sexual harassment (Brighton et al., 2023). Perpetrators continue to victimize women with impunity because most institutions in Uganda are male-dominated and lack clear policies to address sexual harassment (James, 2023).

However, sexual harassment has negatively affected students' self-esteem levels, often resulting in their inability to not only cope with the stigma, but also lead to poor performance, with serious consequences for the victim's psychological well-being (Victoria et al., 2023). Victims experience emotional problems in the form of mental illness that affects the performance of students, especially female students (Elizabeth et al., n.d.; Joyline et al., 2023b).

Objectives of the study

1. To establish the influence of verbal sexual harassment on performance of female students in Bushenyi district
2. To examine the effect of physical sexual harassment on performance of female students in higher institutions, in Bushenyi district.
3. To establish the strategies employed by university management in addressing student's sexual harassment in higher institutions.

Methodology.

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The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The data was collected using questionnaires, interviews or FGDs. In this study, a sample of university principal, lecturers, and students (both females and males) and victims of sexual harassment of Bushenyi district and it totaled up to 190 respondents were used to gather data relevant to the stated objectives. Quantitative approach was used to process data which can be quantified and is numeric in nature and qualitative approach was used to describe qualitative data which cannot be quantified in numbers, this included respondents' opinions and ideas. Primary data was gathered from respondents during the study who were assumed to give first-hand information on the subject under study through use of questionnaires and discussions. Secondary data included data obtained through the existing literature from libraries, data from published bulletins and newspapers. The data was largely obtained from bulletins, newspapers, text books and journals. Before the actual study, the instruments were discussed with supervisors. The feedback from the supervisors and the experts helps in modification of the instruments. The reliability of an instrument is increased by identifying the precise data needed and repeated use of the instrument in field testing. Data was analyzed using descriptive statistics and Likert test so that deductions about the impact of sexual harassment on academic performance can be made using SPSS (Nelson et al., 2022).

Results.

Influence of verbal sexual harassment on performance of female students

This study further sought to establish the Influence of verbal sexual harassment on performance of female students at Bushenyi district.

Table 3: Influence of verbal sexual harassment on performance of female students

Influence of verbal sexual harassment on performance of female students	Strongly agree	F	Agree	F	Not sure	F	Disagree	F	Strongly disagree	F
Psychological and psychosocial problems including lowered self-esteem and body image	25	25	40	40	7	7	10	10	18	18
Fear and anxiety depression	55	55	45	45	0	0	0	0	0	0
Students absenting themselves from school due to ridicule and taunting from peers poor school performance and drop out	50	50	35	35	3	3	10	10	2	2

Source; Researcher, 2022

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According to the table above, 25% of respondents strongly agreed that Psychological and psychosocial problems including lowers self-esteem and body image, 40% agreed with the statement, 7% were not sure, 10% disagreed while 18% strongly disagreed with the statement (Victor et al., 2023). 55% of respondents strongly agreed that verbal sexual harassment results into Fear and anxiety depression, 45% agreed with the statement (John et al., 2023), while none neither disagreed nor strongly disagreed. On Students absenting themselves from school due to ridicule and taunting from peers poor school performance and drop out 50 % strongly agreed that students absent themselves as a result of verbal sexual harassment (Richard, 2022), 35% agreed with the statement, 3% were not sure, 10% disagreed while 2% strongly disagreed.

Effect of physical sexual harassment on performance of female students

Effect of physical sexual harassment on performance of female students

Effect of physical sexual harassment on performance of female students in higher institutions	Strongly agree	F	Agree	F	Not sure	F	Disagree	F
Students who are physically sexually abused develop scars and hurt that remain throughout their life since much of the effect of this abuse is emotional more than physical	55	55	35	35			10	10
Experiencing physical sexual harassment like rape are profound because the effects can last for an extended period of time, contribute to lower mental health, can result in lower psychosocial functioning	60	60	30	30	3	3	7	7

Student's personality and social life may be affected to the extent that they may alienate themselves from the day today activities including distancing themselves from academic pursuits which later affects their performance academically.	40	40	60	60				
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Source; Researcher, 2022

55% of the respondents strongly agreed that Students who are physically sexually abused develop scars and hurt that remain throughout their life since much of the effect of this abuse is emotional more than physical, 35% agreed with the statement, none were not sure while 10% disagreed with the statement. 60% agreed that experiencing physical sexual harassment like rape are profound because the effects can last for an extended period of time, contribute to lower mental health (Richard et al., 2023), can result in lower psychosocial functioning, 30% agreed with the statement, 3% were not sure while 7% disagreed with the statement.

Strategies employed by university management in addressing student's sexual harassment

The last objective of this study was to establish the strategies used by institutions to address student sexual harassment.

Table 5: Actions Taken to Address SH in universities

Action taken	Teachers' views		Students' views	
	F	%	F	%
The perpetrator is punished	30	30%	25	25%
The perpetrator is given a warning	9	9%	20	20%
The perpetrator is suspended from school	15	15%	35	35%
The perpetrator is asked to apologize	13	13%	8	8%
The perpetrator is referred to counselling office	30	30%	7	7%
The perpetrator is sent to the disciplinary committee	2	2%	5	5%
No action was taken	1	1%	2	2%

Source; Researcher, 2022

The results on Table 5 show that according to majority of the lecturers 30(30%) and students 25(25%) punishing the perpetrators, referring them to the counselling office 30% lecturers and 7% students,

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suspending them from school 15% lecturers, 35 students and giving them a warning 9% lecturers, 20% students were the some of the strategies schools used to address issues of SH (Cand et al., 2022). The results show that in very few instances was no action taken against the perpetrators. This view was reported by 2% students and 1% lecturers. These findings demonstrate a strong attempt by schools to address SH (Christopher et al., 2022). The fact that offenders were referred to the Guidance and Counselling (G/C) office may be in recognition of the role of counselling in addressing the psycho-social needs of SH victims

Table 6: Distribution of Respondents' Levels of Satisfaction on Actions Taken to Address Sexual Harassment at School

	Teachers' views		Students' views	
	N	%	N	%
Very satisfied	14	51.9	132	46.3
Moderately satisfied	5	18.5	47	16.5
Slightly satisfied	6	22.2	34	11.9
Not satisfied	2	7.4	72	25.3

Source; Researcher, 2022

The findings captured in Table 4.23 reveal that 51.9% (14) teachers and 46.3% (132) students were very satisfied with actions taken to address SH. The findings reveal that a quarter of the students, 72(25.3%) were of the contrary view saying they were not satisfied at all with the actions taken. Interestingly, some teachers to whom rests the onus of instituting measures to address SH were either moderately satisfied 5(18.5%) (Brighton et al., 2023), slightly satisfied 6(22.2%) or not satisfied at all 2(7.4%) with the actions. The interpretation from these findings is that schools need to interrogate the strategies they use to increase victim's satisfaction and confidence.

Summary of Findings

The purpose of this study was to describe and explore SH and its influence on students' performance in higher institutions of learning. The study targeted a total of 100 respondents that is University principal, Lecturers, Male students, Female students and Victims of sexual harassment from MIU by use of questionnaires, the Rosenberg self-esteem scale, interviews and FGD guides. The data were then analyzed both descriptively and inferentially so as to be able to provide answers to the research questions and to be able to test hypotheses. Hypotheses testing was done using chi-square statistic to establish if there was any significant statistical relationship between forms of Sexual Harassment (SH) experienced or witnessed in higher institutions. The variables of the study were: prevalent forms of SH, Verbal sexual harassment, physical sexual harassment, visual sexual harassment, self-esteem, strategies of dealing with SH in schools. The study adopted the descriptive survey research design.

Conclusion

Sexual harassment is an epidemic throughout global higher education systems and impact individuals, groups and entire organizations in profound ways. It is a pervasive chronic problem that can cause enduring psychological and social harm. Sexual harassment of female undergraduate students in higher institutions is a violation of fundamental human right of women and also their dignity. It is a social evil that must be fought with all effective educational and psychological measures to curb it. Enough of allowing the perpetrators of sexual assault

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and harassment to go free, they should face the law. The study concluded that whereas physical and visual sexual harassment had a negative influence on students' self-esteem yet this influence was not statistically significant probably because some of the physical and visual sexual harassment incidents were not as prevalent as those connected to verbal sexual harassment. The study also concluded that despite public and private institutions employing various strategies to address SH some of which were perceived as effective, yet these strategies may not be adequate as student sexual harassment continues to be a common occurrence in universities.

Recommendations

MIU and other higher education governing bodies should approve and officially sign into law-making team-teaching compulsory in higher institutions. This will prevent those lecturers who use "sex as bait for grades" from having monopoly of a course which of course gives them the advantage to sexually harass students.

University authorities should put up a serious fight against indecent dressing pattern among female students who almost go naked in their appearance. This could be achieved via setting up a "committee against indecent dressing" in each department with the head of department as the chairman, 3 lecturers and the students' course representatives as members.

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