Sexual harassment: The ‘silent killer’ of female students at the University of Ayoba in South Africa

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Abstract
The current non-experimental study sought to establish the extent to which sexual harassment takes place at the higher education institution (HEI) under investigation, which for reasons of anonymity will be referred to as the University of Ayoba, in South Africa. The research problem of the study was articulated through the following research questions: (1) What is sexual harassment? (2) Does sexual harassment exist at the University of Ayoba? (3) How is sexual harassment handled at the University of Ayoba? The study targeted female fourth-year students in the Faculty of Education. Data were collected by means of a questionnaire and were analysed quantitatively. The findings showed that respondents understand what sexual harassment means. The findings furthermore revealed that sexual harassment is prevalent at the case study university; the biggest problem is evident in students who have had to repeat modules due to their refusing the attentions of sex-seeking lecturers. The results of the study indicated that incidents of sexual harassment are seldom reported adequately by victims, as they would rather be discussed among females. The implications of sexual harassment are discussed and recommendations are made on how to address sexual harassment at HEIs.

Keywords: sexual harassment, female students, predators

INTRODUCTION
Sexual harassment of female students by male lecturers at higher education institutions (HEIs) has become a topical issue in the corridors of several university campuses worldwide. It seems to be spreading as rapidly as the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) and it has moved from the endemic stage to the pandemic stage. The
perpetrators have become casual about their acts, judging from the fact that there are very few studies which have documented serious sanctions against the sexual predators. Cases abound of final-year students who have continuously been prevented from graduating by sex-seeking lecturers and have been compelled to drop out of a particular school [university], sometimes to start all over again at another school [university] (Garba 2010). More often than not, female students who are victims suffer quietly at the hands of this ‘silent killer’. Those who talk about it, are mostly the affected, not the infected.

Cases of sexual harassment at the case study university, which for reasons of anonymity will be referred to as the University of Ayoba, in South Africa, have spread like wildfire. As there are already indications from numerous studies that sexual harassment of female students can be considered to be a ‘fashionable social ill’ at HEIs world wide, the researchers deemed it necessary to undertake a study to verify its existence at the University of Ayoba. In view of the lack of clear data to show the magnitude and extent of this problem at the HEI under investigation, such a study was deemed to be of crucial importance. An additional problem was that the University of Ayoba has no clear policy nor procedures in place for dealing with allegations of sexual harassment received from female students. Thus the researchers believed that the issue of sexual harassment should be investigated as it not only violates female students’ human rights, but also militates against the attainment of their educational goals.

Extensive research has been carried out on the subject of sexual harassment on university campuses (Benson and Thomson 1982; Sutherland 1991; Idowu 1993; Zindi 1994; Brain, Bless and Fox 1995; Gouws and Kritzinger 1995; Mayekiso and Bhana 1997; Shumba and Matina 2002; Ladebo 2003; Denga and Denga 2004; Dastile 2004; Okeke 2011; Endut, Oon, Teng, Azmi, Ali and Hashim 2011). Most studies have been conducted in Africa (Sutherland 1991; Idowu 1993; Zindi 1994; Shumba and Matina 2002; Ladebo 2003; Denga and Denga 2004; Gouws and Kritzinger 2007).

Zindi (1994) undertook a study on sexual harassment in Zimbabwe’s HEIs in which 2 756 female students participated. The results revealed that sexual harassment is rife in HEIs throughout Zimbabwe. Shumba (2002) undertook a study on sexual harassment of college students by lecturers in Zimbabwe. The results of a questionnaire completed by 83 respondents revealed that the majority of students (90% male and 79% female) agreed that some female students are sexually harassed by male lecturers. Ladebo and Shopeju (2004) conducted research at the University of South West Nigeria on the prevalence of sexual harassment by sampling 290 undergraduate female students. The results of their study revealed that sexual harassment is prevalent. Male students, academics and non-academic staff were identified as being guilty of this behaviour. Another study by Dastile (2004) was undertaken on the prevalence of sexual harassment and rape at the University of Venda in South Africa. The sample comprised ten female students, eight of whom reported to have been raped and two who reported having been sexually harassed.
The outcome of the study proved that sexual harassment is prevalent at the University of Venda. Deng and Deng (2004) conducted research on sexual harassment at a Nigerian University. The study was designed to contrast the Western view of sexual harassment with the view of Nigerian university students. The participants were 500 male and 500 female students selected from five large faculties. The findings revealed that much of the behaviours classified as sexual harassment in the West are not regarded as such by students of the Nigerian University. The Nigerian students’ view differs from the Western view simply in terms of strictness and cultural norms, as Nigerians regard behaviours such as subtle pressure and sexist remarks about women’s clothing or bodies as irrelevant to sexual harassment. Garba (2010, 1) reveals that

lecturers in Nigeria, especially males, see themselves as tin gods and as a direct consequence indulge in all sorts of unprofessional acts with impunity fully confident that they will always get away with their misdemeanours at the end of the day ... Save for the single incident in which a UNIBEN Professor was reportedly sacked a few months away from retirement in 2007, hardly any other lecturer has been punished for sexual harassment despite a multiplicity of cases that abound.

Mayekiso and Bhana (1997) investigated perceptions and experiences related to a range of behaviours that constitute sexual harassment at the University of Transkei (presently known as the Walter Sisulu University of Technology) in South Africa. The findings showed that students tend to display tolerance and acceptance with regard to behaviour that could otherwise be construed as sexual harassment. All these studies reported sexual harassment in Africa, but the problem of sexual harassment on campuses is not limited to Africa.

Several studies have reported the prevalence of sexual harassment in HEIs outside Africa. A study on experiences of sexual harassment was conducted at a campus in Berkeley, United States (US), by Benson and Thomson (1982). The majority of students (59%) reported that sexual harassment occurs occasionally, while 30 per cent reported having received unwanted sexual attention from at least one male instructor during their four years at college. Endut, Oon, Teng, Azmi, Ali and Hashim (2011) conducted research at the Universiti Sains Malaysia on the understanding and experiences of sexual harassment among undergraduate students. The research also suggests a high prevalence of sexual harassment on the Malaysian campus and that more female than male students are victims of sexual harassment.

The existence of sexual harassment impacts negatively on female students’ wellbeing and career development. According to Ladebo (2003), sexual harassment has been recognised as a critical stressor that constitutes a threat to the task performance of the individual and even the overall organisational outcome. Gouws and Kritzinger (2007) have observed that some students who have been victims of sexual harassment have been shown to develop avoidance tactics, such as walking a different route or always meeting a lecherous lecturer in groups, and they develop an inability to concentrate in class, among other symptoms. Some may bunk lectures; change the module or the programme; give up their future plans; or bring a friend
to the lecturer’s office, pointedly leaving the office door open upon entering, and sitting at a safe distance. According to the authors, the tactic that was used frequently to forestall escalation of sexual harassment was that of mentioning boyfriends or husbands to instructors. ‘Apart from the impact on the individual, the institution also suffers when the campus becomes known as unsafe for women [female students in particular]’ (Gouws and Kritzinger 2007, 71).

Sexual harassment is under-reported (Dastile 2004; Lodebo and Shopedu 2004). Despite the fact that freedom of expression (which means, among other things, that female students have the right to report harassment to the relevant authorities) was enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa in 1996, victims rarely make use of this privilege. The reason is not too hard to find. Male lecturers seem to have mastered the art of silencing them by stating the condition that ‘you have to have sex with me or fail the module’. In essence this means that the perpetrators threaten the students with punishment for non-compliance or disclosure. Ladebo (2003) has documented that most sexual harassment cases are not reported because the victims are apprehensive about the outcome if the harasser should find out about actions taken to counter such harassment. Ladebo adds that sometimes victims are advised by their friends not to report the matter because of the perceived tendency of university authorities to sweep the matter under the carpet.

Even within institutional environments with long-standing histories of radical involvement with the politics of social justice, such as the University of the Western Cape in South Africa, those who found a route to disclosing the pain, humiliation, confusion and anger of their encounters with sexual abuse [harassment] were afraid to disclose their experience beyond the counselling room, or in private conversation with a sympathetic lecturer or residence warden, or a friend (Bennett, Gouws, Kritzinger, Hames and Tidimane 2000, 89).

Possible reasons why some lecturers harass female students sexually is that there is a lack, or an absence, of a clear policy about sexual harassment in some HEIs. Research (Ladebo 2003) has shown that HEIs which have no explicit policies against sexual harassment are less likely to have a stress-free environment that will promote positive employee and student attitudes.

THEORETICAL EXPLANATION OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Various definitions of sexual harassment have been posited in research literature. Husbands (1992) defines sexual harassment in behavioural terms. The author identifies the following behaviour as manifesting sexual harassment: (a) physical advances accompanied by threats of punishment for non-compliance; (b) unequal power relations between the harasser and the victim; (c) behaviour eliciting a negative response from the person being harassed; (d) behaviour perceived as being inappropriate for the actor’s social role; (e) the harasser is seen as persistent in his/her action; and (f) women professionals being more likely than secretarial or clerical personnel to label the behaviour as sexual harassment. Cohan, Hergenrother,
Johnson, Mandel and Sawyer (1996, 4) define sexual harassment as ‘unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favours, and other verbal or physical conduct of sexual nature’. Gouws and Kritzinger (2007) opine that sexual harassment includes a whole spectrum of behaviour, ranging from verbal comments and sexists jokes to quid pro quo behaviour (a very common occurrence in educational settings where lecturers can demand sexual favours for improving students’ marks), to sexual assault and rape. Deng and Deng (2004) view sexual harassment as the use of influence, position or power by a male to satisfy his sexual desires.

Practices such as men touching women without their permission through bottom-patting, palm-scratching and shoulder-rubbing are defended as men’s perceived right to pursue women aggressively with overt interest in sexual liaison, regardless of the women’s expressed disinterest. All this is pursued in the name of culture (Bennett et al. 2000, 89).

On analysing the definitions, sexual harassment can be understood as a concept that involves power imbalance and gender inequality, demands and sanctions for refusal to yield to prescribed favours, and unwelcome persistent sexual advances. The victims of sexual harassment, according to Husbands’ (1992) definition, are limited to employed persons, yet empirical evidence already reveals that sexual harassment has wormed itself into academic institutions – targeting female students. Generally, the perpetrators of sexual harassment are male lecturers.

THEORETICAL CAUSES OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT

It would be interesting to know specifically what the likely causes of sexual harassment are. Theories of sexual harassment are suitable to answer the ‘why’ question underlying sexual harassment. There are several different theories which attempt to explain the phenomenon from different angles and perspectives. Dey, Korn and Sax (1996), and Pina, Gannon and Saunders (2009) present three theories/models specifying causes of sexual harassment. These are the socio-cultural, the organisational, and the natural/biological theories. Pina, Gannon and Saunders (2009) furthermore identify the sex-role spill-over and the social-cognitive theories. Since the researchers were not too concerned about the thinking behind the sexual harasser’s actions, they opted to confine themselves to the socio-cultural, the organisational, the natural/biological and the sex-role spill-over theories. Also, the social-cognitive theories explain the likely causes of rape rather than sexual harassment and the current study was concerned with sexual harassment, not rape. The socio-cultural theory views sexual harassment as linked to the sexist male ideology of male dominance and male superiority. This theory argues that the existing social system sees females as the inferior sex who must subject themselves to male dominance and superiority; sexual harassment is seen as a tool for maintaining this status. Harassment is viewed as the enforcement of gender role in equalities within the social system. In the case of the female student/male lecturer relationship, inequality and male dominance is maintained by intimidating female students either to yield to the demands of the
perpetrator or to fail the subject. According to this perspective, men believe that their behaviour is justified, whereas women blame themselves for being harassed. The organisational model explains harassment in terms of power and status, but does not focus upon power as being gender-specific, as in the socio-cultural theory. This theory postulates that although sexual harassment is commonly committed by males in positions of power at the workplace, it may also be committed by females in power. The organisational theory assumes that the organisational hierarchy and climate are the strongest empirical predictors of sexual harassment. In other words, the issue of power is located in people with authority, despite their gender. Implied in this theory is the supposition that people in power tend to misuse the organisational power to exploit the subordinates (in this case female students) in whatever way.

In the context of the current study, the abuse of power is located in male lecturers as they are the ones in authority with regard to the dissemination of information and endorsing the success or the failure of students. The sex-role spill-over theory, on the other hand, argues that men and women bring pre-existing beliefs and gender-based expectations for behaviour to the workplace, even though these expectations may not be applicable in the work environment. This in essence means that if males regard females as objects of sexual gratification either in the home environment or in society, it is likely that they (males) will transfer those ideas to the workplace. The same applies to females; if females believe that they have an obligation to yield to male power and provide for males’ needs as demanded by gender-based prescriptions from outside the work place, the likelihood exists that this behaviour will be snow-balled to an inappropriate setting even though such behaviour is not applicable in it.

According to the natural/biological theory, sexual harassment is an outflow of the natural attraction of the man to the woman. The theory posits that men are not intent on harassing women, but are driven by an inner drive to be sexually aggressive. In other words, this theory justifies sexual harassment as something innate. Of concern to the researchers is that if this theory is accepted, then it means that even perpetrators’ children are not safe from harassment. In the context of the current study, it means that male lecturers harass female students for the simple reason that they have to satisfy their sexual drive. The question arises: as persons acting in loco parentis, are they not supposed to control their sexual drive?

Whatever the etiology of sexual harassment is, the researchers are of the opinion that female students are the clients of lecturers as they create jobs for the lecturers and thus need to be treated with the respect that they deserve.

**RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

The university under investigation was identified by the fictional name the University of Ayoba. The main objective of the study was to establish the extent to which sexual harassment takes place at the case study university. The secondary objectives were three-fold: (i) to establish how students define sexual harassment; (ii) to determine the existence of sexual harassment at the University of Ayoba; and (iii) to determine how sexual harassment is handled at the University of Ayoba.
The present study falls under the category of the non-experimental design. A qualitative approach was chosen in order to explore the phenomena under study. The target population for the study consisted of a purposive sample of female students who were final-year undergraduates of a single faculty. The rationale for choosing this year level was that these students have been at the university for a lengthy duration and should therefore have a view about sexual harassment in their faculty as direct or indirect victims. The participants consisted of 63 unmarried and 2 married female students. Fifty-nine of them (91%) were within the 21–30 years age bracket, while 6 (9%) were within the 41–50 years age bracket. Data were collected by a female lecturer so as to make female students feel more at ease. Before students were urged to participate, the purpose of the study and the use of the collected data were explained. In order to further comply with ethical requirements, the researcher sought informed consent before the research instrument was administered; participants were also urged not to include any identifying details in the questionnaire in order to ensure confidentiality. The instrument was a self-constructed questionnaire titled ‘Sexual harassment of female students by male lectures on your campus’. The researchers chose the questionnaire over an interview schedule because sexual harassment is a sensitive and personal subject and the use of a questionnaire would therefore limit embarrassment in some subjects and afford a sense of anonymity. The questionnaire was divided into three sections. Section A sought demographic information such as age and marital status; Section B consisted of 25 close-ended questions (3 which covered the participants’ understanding of sexual harassment, 12 which covered the establishment of the existence of sexual harassment, and 10 which covered how sexual harassment is handled). Data were analysed quantitatively.

**RESULTS**

The primary objective of the study was to establish the extent to which sexual harassment takes place at the University of Ayoba. Three secondary objectives were espoused. The results have been tabled in accordance with the objectives of the study.

**Objective 1: Definition of sexual harassment**

Objective 1 sought to find out how participants defined sexual harassment. To this end, respondents were asked to tick questions that best defined sexual harassment. The responses were subjected to descriptive statistics. The data in Table 1 reveal that all (100%) of the respondents understood sexual harassment to mean unwanted, one-sided attention from males in power. Fifty-two of the participants (80%) defined sexual harassment as unwanted conduct of a sexual nature that has a negative effect on the recipient, and only 15 (24%) did not associate themselves with this definition. Fifty respondents (76%) defined sexual harassment as unwanted and unwelcome behaviour that interferes with one’s life.
Table 1: Meaning of sexual harassment: Students’ responses to items 1–3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item no.</th>
<th>Brief description of item</th>
<th>No. of ‘Yes’ responses</th>
<th>No. of ‘No’ responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Unwanted conduct of sexual nature that has a negative effect on the recipient</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Unwanted and unwelcome behaviour that interferes with one’s life</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Unwanted one-sided attention from the person by males in power</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Objective 2: The existence of sexual harassment

Respondents were asked to ascertain the existence of sexual harassment from their point of view by requesting them to respond to specific situations regarding sexual harassment encounters. Data collected from participants were subjected to descriptive statistical analysis and Table 2 reflects the responses. The analysed results indicated that the majority of respondents (68%) knew of lecturers who had exploited female students and these respondents held the view that sex for the exchange of marks exists in their institution. A slightly above average percentage of them (53%) claimed that they had heard of office sex involving female students and male lecturers. Forty-six per cent of the participants maintained that if a female student refused to yield to the sexual advancement of a male lecturer, the male lecturer would punish the student by failing her in his subject. Seventy-two per cent of the respondents had never experienced a situation where a lecturer had asked them for a sexual favour. However, there were female students (28%) who had been asked for sexual favours by male lecturers. Twenty-five per cent of the respondents reported sexual harassment that had occurred in the form of sexual advances, and 26 per cent of them reported to have been sexually harassed by male lecturers. Eighteen per cent of the participants had been hugged by a male lecturer against their will; 14 per cent had been pressured to go on a date with a male lecturer; 12 per cent had actually failed a male lecturer’s subject because they did not agree to his sexual advances; and 8 per cent had been kissed against their will on a single occasion by a male lecturer.
Table 2: Establishment of its existence: Students’ responses to items 4–15

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item no.</th>
<th>Brief description of item</th>
<th>No. of 'Yes' responses</th>
<th>No. of 'No' responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Do you know any lecturer who has exploited a student?</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Has any male lecturer harassed you sexually as a student?</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Have you ever been asked for sexual favours by a male lecturer?</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Has any male lecturer ever pressed against you in a sexual way?</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Has any male lecturer ever pressured you to go on a date with him?</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Has your male lecturer intimidated you with failing his subject because you did not agree to his sexual advances?</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Has any male lecturer made sexual advances to you?</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Have you ever heard of office sex directed at female students by male lecturers?</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Does sex for the exchange of marks exist in your institution?</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Have you ever been hugged by a male lecturer against your will?</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>A lecturer once kissed me against my will</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>If a male wants a sexual favour from you and you refuse, he fails you in his subject</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Objective 3: How sexual harassment is handled**

The current study sought an answer to the question about how sexual harassment is handled at the University of Ayoba. The objective was to determine how this HEI handles sexual harassment. Table 3 shows a frequency distribution of the participants’ responses. The findings indicated that an overwhelming majority of female students (75%) do discuss the sexual harassment that takes place at the University of Ayoba. A similarly overwhelming majority (74%) were of the view that a sexual harassment policy should be put in place. Sixty-three per cent of the
respondents held the view that there should be a sexual harassment centre, while 60 per cent of the respondents indicated that they knew of other female students who were afraid to report to authorities about their situation. Forty-three per cent of the participants felt that corrupt lecturers should be reported, while 57 per cent of the students believed that they should not be reported. Thirty-seven per cent of the respondents maintained that sexual harassment cases have been reported to the Protective Services Department (PSD) of the university; while 31 per cent made their family aware of such incidents. Some of the respondents (25%) reported sexual harassment to the Student Representative Council (SRC), but only 9 per cent of the participants reported sexual harassment to other lecturers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Should corrupt lecturers be reported?</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Do you know of anyone who is afraid to report?</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Should there be a policy for sexual harassment?</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Should there be a sexual harassment centre?</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Do you, as female students, discuss sexual harassment?</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Sexual harassment is reported to the Student Representative Council (SRC)</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Sexual harassment is reported to the Protective Service Department (PSD)</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Do you discuss sexual harassment with other lecturers?</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Do you make your family aware of sexual harassment by lecturers?</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**DISCUSSION**

**Objective 1**

The results undoubtedly indicate that respondents understand what sexual harassment entails, namely that it is unwanted, one-sided attention from males in power which
affects the recipient negatively to the extent that it interferes with this person’s life. This, in essence, means that female students are aware of the fact that sexual harassment occurs because there are unequal power relations between them and male lecturers. The type of power these males wield includes the ability either to release a pass mark or to withhold it. Sexual harassment is understood as a tool that subjects female students to the male lecturer’s power. Female students, in other words, are harassed so as to maintain the status of the superiority of men over women, as pertains within any social system (the academia included). Women’s inferior position in the workplace [academia] and society in general, is not only a consequence, but also a cause of sexual harassment (Pina, Gannon and Saunders 2009). Respondents are conscious of the fact that sexual harassment is a costly malady in that it impacts negatively on their career, which is their life. If a victim denies the perpetrator a sexual favour of any kind, she is made to fail the subject taught by that lecturer. The findings of the investigation generally indicate that female students at the University of Ayoba comprehend what sexual harassment means, which in turn means that they can easily identify it if it occurs.

**Objective 2**
The findings indicate that sexual harassment prevails at the University of Ayoba. It is important to note though, that a relative majority of the respondents (72%) have never experienced sexual harassment from male lecturers, but know of victims of sexual harassment as well as the perpetrators of sexual exploitation. The findings suggest that the victims of sexual harassment form a minority (about 28%) of those who are directly affected. The researchers are of the opinion that even this minority that has come to the surface has to be taken seriously as their existence serves to indicate that many other female students are under siege from male lecturers who are predators. It is also an open secret that the culprits extort favours, such as hugging and kissing, and that victims are pressured to go on dates with these predators and, worst of all, have to sex with them in return for marks. According to the survey, 46 per cent of the respondents believe that, at the University of Ayoba, those who do not accede to sexual favours face the risk of failing the subject taught by the perpetrator. The survey reveals that some 14 per cent of the respondents are already repeating the subjects taught by harassers. This is a cause for concern to the researchers, as repeating a subject due to being held ransom by a person who should be providing support and guidance has a negative effect on the future career progression of female students. This cruel sanction by predators also borders on financial victimisation as repeating a subject has cost implications. It is reported that sexual harassment takes place in the perpetrators’ offices which suggests that this activity takes place after official working hours. This implies that victims, who find themselves at risk of not graduating in time for whatever reason, perceive that they can avert the consequences by sacrificing themselves; they therefore yield to the perpetrator’s demands to visit their offices during unofficial hours to provide the services demanded of them.
Objective 3

Despite the fact that sexual harassment is prevalent at the University of Ayoba, it emerged that victims seldom report incidents of sexual harassment. This finding is in accord with research studies (Dastile 2004; Lodebu and Shopedu 2004) which revealed that sexual harassment is under-reported. Sixty per cent of the respondents were aware of victims who are afraid to report sexual harassment to the relevant university structures because of negative consequences that might befall them. Of interest to note is that an overwhelming majority of female students (75%) do discuss the sexual harassment that takes place at their institution. This in essence means that sexual harassment is of concern to female students. It also suggests that sexual harassment does not only have direct victims, but also indirect victims. Discussing sexual harassment among female students can also be viewed as a sign of sisterhood and a cry for help. This also means that students prefer to resort to using informal structures which proved to be useful in the sense that the problem was brought to the attention of researchers via such structures. It is therefore not surprising that the PSD, which should be used by female students as a source of safety and security, is used minimally as revealed by the investigation. The minimal engagement of this structure could be attributed to the fact that since this is a structure on campus, students may suspect that the staff of the section are biased towards protecting perpetrators, or for that matter, may inform them of the reported cases against them. There seems to be reluctance to report such problems to the SRC which might be as a result of the fact that the structure is managed by peers. Secondly, the structure might be viewed as powerless in view of the seriousness of the case. The findings show that sexual harassment is hardly (9%) brought to the attention of other lecturers. This revelation suggests that other lecturers are viewed with suspicion, as partners in crime, or as colleagues who would not want to involve themselves in issue that affect their peers. Some respondents have already brought the issue of sexual harassment to the attention of their family members (31%). The fact that some students have opted to report the matter of harassment to their families reflects negatively on how the University of Ayoba handles sexual harassment. Respondents (74%) are of the view that there should be a sexual harassment policy at the University of Ayoba. In addition, the findings reveal that respondents (63%) hold that there should be a sexual harassment centre. The fact that female students have to resort to giving each other emotional support is indicative of the need for such a structure on campus. A disturbing finding is that an above average number of respondents are adamant that corrupt lecturers should not be reported. This decision could be explained by the fact that victims believe and know that the harassers wield the power to allow students either to graduate or not. Another reason might be that there is no disciplinary policy at the University of Ayoba. In addition, as the findings show, female students seem to doubt the effectiveness of structures set up to assist them because they are apprehensive about the outcome if they report the harasser to such structures.
CONCLUSION

The study revealed that female students of the University of Ayoba have an understanding of what sexual harassment is. It is a bonus for respondents to comprehend what sexual harassment entails as it makes it easier for victims to interpret the behavioural intentions of the predator. A further analysis indicates that sexual harassment does exist at the case study university and that although a relative majority of respondents have never experienced sexual harassment, they know victims of sexual harassment as well as the perpetrators of sexual exploitation. The fact that female students are harassed by people who wield authority over them is a clear indication of abuse of organisational power as expressed by the organisational theory. These male lecturers further role-play abuse in accordance with the spill-over theory and the socio-cultural theory. The actions of lecturers are viewed by the researchers as role confusion, because lecturers are supposed to be protectors and guiders of students and not demanders of sexual gratification or upholders of outdated socio-cultural expectations about the role and treatment of womenfolk. The outcome is that female students are in danger and steps should be taken to create an atmosphere conducive to learning. These findings also suggest that the university must educate staff, particularly male lectures, about their moral responsibility towards female students. The organisational culture also needs to be put under scrutiny. The study noted that some victims already have to repeat modules taught by their harassers because they failed to yield to the patriarchal power and sexual needs and desires of these perpetrators. This is cause for concern – also with regard to the university’s image and its management. This implies that investigations need to be done concerning all females who are repeating modules, particularly those who failed modules offered by male lecturers. In addition, steps must be taken against perpetrators. It is disturbing to find that respondents are aware of victims who are afraid to report sexual harassment.

Furthermore, sexual harassment is widely discussed among female students rather than being reported formally. An implication of this finding is that there is a need to empower and strengthen the PSD regarding sexual harassment and gender issues. There must be a guarantee that students will not be victimised for being proactive about their plight. It will be advisable that these cases be handled by female staff in the PSD. A sexual harassment centre or an equivalent structure that will give specific attention to victims of sexual harassment should be established. In addition, campaigns that advocate against violence against female students must be organised. Such campaigns can be extensions of campaigns such as the ‘16 Days of Activism against Violence against Women and Children’. Workshops on women’s rights must be conducted to sensitise female students with regard to their rights. In addition, ‘female student/female lecturer buddy groups’ should be formed, in which a female lecturer takes charge and monitors a group of five female students regarding gender-based issues on campus. Another option would be setting up a hotline where students can report their plight anonymously. As the results have already indicated that there is no sexual harassment policy in existence on campus, it is suggested that such a
policy must be put in place. More importantly, there is a need for the Department of Higher Education to put in place a common sexual harassment policy for use by all academic institutions. ‘The development of the policy should be seen as a process which ultimately aims at strengthening a campus-wide awareness of a need to eradicate sexual harassment’ (Bennett 2002, 44) and thus protect female students from ‘academic predators’.

REFERENCES


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