



Knowledge and Attitude Towards Sexual Harassment Among Female Nursing Students in a Federal University Situated in South-South Region of Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Sexual Harassment is a significant concern among students. This study offered a quantitative and qualitative description of the knowledge and attitude of female nursing students towards sexual harassment in Federal University Otuoke, Bayelsa State, Nigeria. The study answers three research questions; a) What is the level of knowledge of female nursing students in Federal University Otuoke on sexual harassment? b) What is the attitude of female nursing students of Federal University Otuoke towards sexual harassment? c) What are the social factors responsible for the exposure of female nursing students in Federal University Otuoke to sexual harassment? The study made use of a frequency table converted to a percentage to analyze data. The research design that was adopted in this study was a descriptive survey. The Taro-yamane formula of 1967 was used to get an accurate sampling size. Sampling method adopted was stratified-type random technique. The findings powerfully revealed that female nurses in the University, in Otuoke, have a positive knowledge towards sexual harassment, but their attitude towards it calls for concern. It is imperative for student nurses to utilize the knowledge they have gained from lectures, seminars attended, workshop experiences, conferences and journals to ensure that the issue of sexual harassment is reduced to the barest minimum. Educational programs must be organized to keep empowering student nurses against being victims of sexual harassment. It is recommended that support and counseling services should be provided for nursing students that reports to be a victim of sexual harassment.

Keywords: Knowledge; Attitude; Sexual harassment; Nurses; University.

Introduction

Sexual harassment can be experienced or observed as any unwelcome sexual behavior, which includes verbal or phonation, physical altercation, psychological manifestation, or visual interaction, which not only involves sexual behavior but also linked to uneven coercion. This study investigated sexual harassment in the medical verbiage and context. Sexual harassment is a form of harassment and misbehavior that involves the usage of either explicit or implicit components of sexual connotations, including the inappropriate and unusual proposal of rewards and/or grants in exchange for sexual favors.

Sexual harassment includes varying inappropriate actions from verbal to physical abuse. It can occur in many different social settings, such as the public, workplace, home, school and religious environments [1]. Victims may be male or female, therefore it is not restricted to female only, as is commonly believed [2]. For students in nursing Department, sexual harassment before, during or after clinical practicum or hospital placements may lead to breakdown in physical and psychological well-being as well as a decline in willingness to take other nursing jobs in the future, this has become a crucial concern in nursing education. When attending to the sick, nurses are often in close or even contact, physically, with the patient; for example, during the check for vital signs, assisting in changing positions, clean-up, wound dressings, etc., which increases the tendency of being harassed. Therefore, nurses, today, are considered to be subjected to a high risk of sexual harassment in the workplace [3]. Nursing students that have less social and clinical experience or with very low awareness of issues relating to sexual harassment are potentially more likely to fall victims of these behaviors in the medical environment. Nursing students are well known to experience series of frustration, helplessness, anger, anxiety, fear and depression when sexually harassed and these emotions suppress their overall learning and academic performance [4]. However, when compared to certified nurses, research on the sexual harassment experience of nursing students is rather limited. Only a very few studies have delved into the sexual harassment experience of students in Nursing Department and some of the

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research focusing on female nursing students was conducted only long ago. In over fifteen years, no single research has examined the sexual harassment that's is experienced by some asian nursing students during their course of study like internship, indicating that a greater understanding of the situation is required if effective improvements or remediation are to be implemented based on relevant factors [5]. One of the difficulties in understanding sexual harassment is that it involves a range of behaviors. In most of the various cases of sexual harassment, it is difficult for the victim to explain what they experienced. This can be due to difficulty in describing the situation or due to stress and humiliation experienced by the recipient. Moreover, behavior and motives vary between individual cases [6]. Sexual harassment is complex and causes occupational hazards in the nursing field. Nurses have more experience than other employees. Nursing has the highest rate of female in the profession. We aimed to determine the prevalence of sexual harassment against female nurses, the types, perpetrators, and health consequences of the harassment. Rape, and unconsented sexual abuse, are extreme perpetrations of sexual harassment [7], it is with clarity that sexual harassment is so common and paired to daily life, so particularly in places of public serenity. In London, Washington, Mumbai or Lagos, the recent testification of events from females using "Me Too" platform and its much iteration has shown the homogeneity of the problem irrespective of citizenship or even tradition[8]. In 2019, one thing was made clear: Sexual harassment is ubiquitous [9]. When quantifying the problem on a level global, minimal levels of reporting raw data and raw data limitations as to what expertise can make provision to help show case and solve the pertinent problem. The gang rape of a young female student on transit in New Delhi, India, in 2018 brought attention to the terrible issue across the asian country. Research by international charity Action Aid in 2019, found that 44%, or about that, of women surveyed in India, as an Asian country, had been groped. According to the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, revealed that about 4 in 10 women have at least experienced sexual or physical coercion from a partner in their lifetime. In Nigeria, the rate of early childhood marriage is high, and at least 7 out of 10 children under the age of 18 have experienced a particular form of physical, emotional or sexual exploitation, according to the National Population Commission in Nigeria [10]. In South Africa, merely 12% of female feel safe from verbal or physical or psychosocial abuse in their own neighborhood, but greater than 50% of women in Faculty and 20–50% of female students encounter or experience sexually harassing conduct in academia. The aim of this present study is to investogate the knowledge and also the attitude of sexual harassment among all female nursing students in Federal University Otuoke, Bayelsa State, Nigeria.

Materials and Methods

Ethical approval

This study was considered and approved by the ethics committee in research of the Department of Human Physiology, Federal University Otuoke, Bayelsa State, Nigeria. With Reference: FUO/REC/HP/2026/0038

Informed consent

Before presenting the questionnaire, each participant gave informed consent which ensures that the participant is properly catered for and utmost confidentiality regarding data collected is considered a priority.

Every participant also has the right to seek further clarification or withdraw at any period of the study.

Population

The population of this study was restricted to a total of 250 nursing students of Federal University Otuoke within the period of October 2024 to October 2025.

Sample Size

The sample size for this investigation was total of 154 nursing Department students from the Federal University Otuoke in Ogbia. The sample size was obtained using the Taro-Yamane formula of 1967, which is used to get an accurate sampling size in research.

n= Sample size
N= Total population
e= Level of precision 0.05

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{250}{1 + 250(0.5)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{250}{1 + 250(0.0025)}$$

$$n = \frac{250}{1 + 0.625}$$

$$n = \frac{250}{1.625}$$

n = 153.846 approx. 154
sample size n= 154

Sample Technique

The sampling method that was used in this study was stratified random sampling. This method of sampling enabled the study population to have an equal and independent chance of appearing in the study sample [11].

A population of 154 nursing students was randomly selected from a population of 250 participants in order to ensure representativeness.

Instrument for Data Collection

The instrument used for data collection was a questionnaire. The questionnaire contained two sections: Section A and section B.

Section A: Contained socio-demographic data of the respondent.

Section B: Contained questions relevant to the study.

Validity of Instrument

Validity is the accuracy with which a test instrument measures what it is supposed to measure [12]. The validity of the questionnaire was established using content and face validity.

Reliability of the Instrument

An instrument's reliability is the consistency with which it measures the target attribute. It is the absence of variation in measurement. To establish the reliability of the instrument, the pilot study was conducted.

Method of Data Collection

The questions were set in English language, and a research supervisor read through the questionnaire and made necessary corrections before typing. The entry point was created with the schools' management i.e. the administrative unit before the questionnaire was distributed and collected back. 154 copies of the questionnaire were distributed and all were filled and returned after due explanation.

Method of Data Analysis

The data collected will be analyzed using frequency tables and converted to percentages.

Ethical Consideration

In the course of this study, permission was obtained from the Faculty of Nursing Science, Federal University Otuoke, Bayelsa State. Informed consent was obtained. The respondents were briefed on the objectives of the study and they were reassured of confidentiality and anonymity throughout the study. Respondents who were not willing to participate were withdrawn from the study.

Results

Data obtained was analyzed using frequency tables and converted to percentages.

Table 1: Socio-Demographic characteristics of respondents

Characteristic	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Sex	Female	134	87.0
	Male	20	13.0
	Total	154	100
Age	Below 21 years	18	11.7
	21–23 years	87	56.5
	Above 23 years	49	31.8
	Total	154	100
Religion	Christian	154	100.0
	Muslim	—	—
	Traditional	—	—
	Total	154	100
Marital Status	Single	114	74.0
	Married	40	26.0
	Separated	—	—
	Total	154	100
Level	100	30	19.5
	200	32	20.8
	300	31	20.1
	400	30	19.5
	500	31	20.1
	Total	154	100

The result of socio-demographic data of respondents in Table 1 showed that 134 (87%) of the respondents were female, with male being 20 (13%) and 136 (88.3%) of the respondents were between the ages of 21-23 and above. 154 (100%) were Christians, majority 114 (74%) were single, while 40 (26%) were married. The highest level was 200 level with 32 (20.8%) respondents and the least being 100 and 400 level with 30 (19.5%) respondents each.

Research question 1: What is the level of knowledge of all female nursing students in Federal University Otuoke on sexual harassment?

Table 2: Respondents knowledge on sexual harassment

Variable	Response	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Knowledge of Sexual Harassment	Yes	154	100.0
	No	—	—
	Total	154	100
Knowledge of Various Forms of Sexual Harassment	Yes	154	100.0
	No	—	—
	Total	154	100
Knowledge of Legal Implications of Sexual Harassment	Yes	100	64.9
	No	54	35.1
	Total	154	100

From the results above, all the respondents 154 (100%) were aware of sexual harassment and its various forms. 100 (64.9%) knew about the legal implications of sexual harassment while 54 (35.1%) argued that they were not aware of the legal implications of sexual harassment.

Research question 2: What is the attitude of all female nursing students of Federal University Otuoke towards sexual harassment?

Table 3: Respondents towards sexual harassment

Variable	Response	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Reports when Sexually Harassed	Yes	22	14.3
	Don't know	32	20.8
	No	100	64.9
	Total	154	100
Dress Indecently	Yes	81	52.6
	Don't know	23	14.9
	No	50	32.5
Total	154	100	
Visit Member of the Opposite Sex	Yes	30	19.5
	No	124	80.5
	Total	154	100
Welcome and Accept a Sexist Remark from the Opposite Sex	Yes	90	58.4
	No	64	41.6
	Total	154	100

Table 3 explained the attitude of the respondents towards sexual harassment. 22 (14.3%) had a positive attitude reporting if they had experienced sexual harassment of any form, 100 (64.9%) had a negative attitude reporting and 32 (20.8%) said they may not report. In dressing indecently, 81 (52.6%) confirmed dressing indecently, 23 (14.9%) rarely dressed indecently, while 50 (32.5%) did not dress indecently. In visiting members of the opposite, 30 (19.5%) visited members of the opposite sex while 124 (80.5%) did not visit members of the opposite sex. 90 (58.4%) accepted sexual comments about their physical appearance from members of the opposite sex while 64 (41.6%) did not accept such remarks from the opposite sex.

Research question 3: what are the social factors responsible for the exposure of female nursing students in Federal University Otuoke to sexual harassment?

Table 4: Respondent knowledge on social factors.

Factors	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Ignorance	20	13.0
Peer Pressure	21	13.6
Alcohol and Drug Use	70	45.5
Neglect from Parents and Guardian	43	27.9
Total	154	100

The above table shows the social factors responsible for the exposure of female nursing students at Federal University Otuoke to sexual harassment. 70 (45.5%) believe that alcohol and drug use is a factor responsible for exposure to sexual harassment, 20 (13%) are of the view that ignorance predisposes one to sexual harassment. 21 (13.6%) that peer

pressure is a factor while 43 (27.9%) stated that neglect from parents and guardians is a factor responsible for the exposure to sexual harassment.

Discussion

The result of socio-demographic data of respondents in Table 1 showed that 134 (87%) of the respondents were female with male being 20 (13%) and 136 (88.3%) of the respondents were between the ages of 21-23 and above. 154 (100%) were Christians, majority 114 (74%) were single while 40 (26%) were married. The highest level was 200 level with 32 (20.8%) respondents and the least was 100 and 400 level with 30 (19.5%) respondents each. From Table 2, it can be seen that all the respondents 154 (100%) were aware of sexual harassment and its various forms. 100 (64.9%) knew about the legal implications of sexual harassment while 54 (35.1%) argued that they were not aware of the legal implications of sexual harassment. These findings correspond with earlier findings [12], who reported in a similar study that the majority (67%) of student nurses had good knowledge of sexual harassment. Similarly, the result agrees with the findings of some scientists [10], whose comparative study on knowledge and attitude of sexual harassment among student nurses revealed that (75%) had good knowledge on the topic. It is important to state here that the knowledge of sexual harassment helps to curb certain unwanted consequences and that its knowledge cannot be over emphasized. From table 3, it was observed that the respondents had poor attitude towards sexual harassment. 22 (14.3%) had a positive attitude reporting that if they had experienced sexual harassment of any form, 100 (64.9%) had a negative attitude reporting and 32 (20.8%) said they may not report. In dressing indecently, 81 (52.6%) confirmed dressing indecently, 23 (14.9%) rarely dressed indecently while 50 (32.5%) did not dress indecently. In visiting members of the opposite, 30 (19.5%) visited members of the opposite sex while 124 (80.5%) did not visit members of the opposite sex. 90 (58.4%) accepted sexual comments about their physical appearance from members of the opposite sex, while 64 (41.6%) did not accept such remarks from the opposite sex. These findings were in accordance with earlier studies where all respondents had a bad attitude towards sexual harassment [8]. More than two-thirds of the respondents dressed indecently. This helped the researcher conclude on the importance of a positive attitude towards sexual harassment. Table 4 shows the social factors responsible for the exposure of nursing students at Federal University Otuoke to sexual harassment. 70 (45.5%) of the respondents believe that alcohol and drug use is a factor responsible for exposure to sexual harassment, 20 (13%) are of the view that ignorance predisposes one to sexual harassment. 21 (13.6%) that peer pressure is a factor while 43 (27.9%) stated that neglect from parents and guardian is a factor responsible for the exposure to sexual harassment. A study showed that 50% cause is as a result of alcohol and drug use [13].

This analytic investigation has revealed, and as well postulated, that an increase in the concerned knowledge will be a factor they promotes a good and responsible attitude geared towards the avoidance of all forms of sexual harassment. The knowledge and also the attitude towards sexual harassment, as well as similar behaviors, can be enhanced by educators in Nursing, Biomedical and Allied Health disciplines, thereby intensifying teaching on sexual harassment, while clinical instructors also follow up to ensure guidance and proper practice.

From the study outcome, the student nurses who participated in the study have good or relevant knowledge but a poor associated attitude towards sexual harassment. It is therefore imperative for student nurses to utilize the knowledge they have gained from seminars, workshops, conferences and journals to ensure that the issue of sexual harassment is reduced to the barest minimum. Educational programs must be organized to keep empowering student nurses against being victims of sexual harassment.

Conclusion

The study presented that female nursing students at Federal University Otuoke have high knowledge about sexual harassment but their attitude towards it calls for concern. The researcher achieved her aim as the student nurses appreciated the message and promised to modify their attitude towards sexual harassment to combat the complications following it.

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