

## The Problem of Sexual Harassment in Selected Organizations in Delta State: The Way Forward for Professional Counselors

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### ABSTRACT

*Sexually harassment can devastate an individual's psychological and, physical well-being. "Sexual harassment" as it is usually used, means any unwelcome act or behaviour (including a verbal one) of a sexual nature or with sexual implications. It offends the dignity and freedom of the person to whose detriment it is committed and is apt to create reprisals or an atmosphere of intimidation. Every act or behaviour defined as sexual harassment is considered as inadmissible (Cole, 1986). The law confirms the right of both male and female workers to be treated in a dignified manner, to be protected in relation to their personal freedom and to report any act of intimidation or retaliation suffered in the workplace. The role of Nigerian counsellors, who must be adequately qualified in terms of the required, specific area of competence, has been created for this purpose. Industrial organization and administrative bodies and firms are advised to seek the assistance of qualified counselors who may be assigned to suitable persons within their own organization to carry out counselling duties.*

### INTRODUCTION

Women who have been harassed often change their jobs, career goals, job assignments, educational programs or academic majors. In addition, women have reported psychological reactions such as depression, anxiety, shock, denial, anger, fear, frustration, irritability, insecurity, embarrassment, feelings of betrayal, confusion, feelings of being powerless, shame, self-consciousness, low self-esteem guilt, self-blame, isolation due to harassment and psychological reactions such as headaches, lethargy, gastrointestinal distress, dermatological reactions, weight fluctuations, sleep disturbances, nightmares, phobias, panic reactions, sexual problems, also some career-related effects such as decreased job satisfaction, unfavourable performance evaluations, loss of job or promotions, drop in academic or work performance due to stress, absenteeism withdrawal from work or school, change in career goals. These reactions and effects are not healthy for a country like Nigeria that is building her economy to meet with developed nations.

### ATTITUDE TOWARDS SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Common myths and assumptions related to sexual harassment are sharelobally. They often

reflect and reinforce social attitudes and aid customs that aggrandize male aggression while at the same time purporting female passivity. According to World Health Organization report (2003), a teenage girl in South Africa observed, forced sex is the norm, it is the way people interact sexually. In qualitative research in Zimbabwe, young women acknowledged their powerlessness in sexual relationship: "A woman can refuse, but then this woman will run the risk that she will be forced into sex, because a woman needs to follow a man (Clement 1993). The recommendations of a Malaysian Parliamentarian is that "women should wear purdah (head to toe covering) to ensure that innocent men do not get unnecessarily excited by women's bodies and are not unconsciously forced into becoming rapists. If women do not want to fall prey to such men, they should take the necessary precautions instead of forever blaming the men.

Many women and girls who suffer sexual assault still may not view their victimization as rape experience is not represented in hegemonic definitions of sexual violence. Based on encounters reported by a national sample of college women in the United States, researchers concluded that from one-fifth to one-quarter of all college women are at risk of an attempt or completed rape during their college years.

However, for those respondents whose experiences were categorized as complete rape according to the standard definition used by the researchers, only 46.5% believed the incident to be rape. Forty-nine percent said it wasn't rape, and 4.7% said they did not know. The Italian Parliament ratified Article 26 of European social chapter by granting all workers the right to impose on the parties an obligation, in consultation with employers and workers organizations, to promote awareness, information and prevention of sexual harassment in the workplace or in relation to work and to take all appropriate measure to protect workers.

Nonetheless, in organizations in Nigeria, work is divided according to gender, women tend to be employed in occupations that are considered 'for women', to be men's subordinates on the job and sometimes end up being paid less than men both on the average and even for the same work both of them are engaged in and for this reason, women employed in paid labor force, who depend upon their income for their livelihood are particularly vulnerable to intimate violation in the form sexual abuse in the course of their work in their work place and are likely to be sexually harassed ( Gutek, Monarch and Coben, 1983). In addition to being victims of the practice working women have been subjected to the failure of recognizing sexual harassment as an abuse. It has therefore, been acceptable and taboo, acceptable for men to do, taboo for women to confront even to themselves. While men conceptualize love in terms of passion, women see love as a friendship (Cole, 2001).

### **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

Sexual harassment appears to be a widespread problem in the Nigerian public sector. The word sex and women in industry connotes sexy image that sounds frivolous and so has not been closely examined by Government. They do not seem to take seriously the analysis of the number of sexually harassed victims in our industrial-organization sector. And when they do, they do not find lasting solution to the problem, instead such problems are left with the organizations or the victims. Studies have shown that approximately one out of every two women is harassed at some point during her academic or working life. Sexual harassment can occur in any work situation, but surprisingly more emphasis is made on academic institution

then settings. Again in Nigeria, the professional Counselors seem to work mainly in Educational Institution to solve career problems and students problems, less is being done to solve workers social problems in industrial-organizations especially in the area of sexual harassment. The present paper may address these gaps and give lasting solutions that may help build or industrial workplace for sustainable development.

For example if sexual harassment occurs in the workplace, male and female employees may apply to the counselor to initiate informal proceedings in an attempt to solve the problem in a discreet manner. If in the course of disciplinary proceedings, the competent officer believes that the complaint is justified, he must inform the manager to take appropriate measures to ensure immediate cessation of the undesired behaviors and harassment. Persons who have reported offences may ask to remain in their current position or be transferred to a site or position where they feel secure.

### **OBJECTIVES OF THE PAPER**

The objective of this paper is to examine if sexual harassment is one of the reasons for workers quitting their jobs in industrial organizations. It is also to find out if close contact with opposite sex would result in sexual harassment.

### **Hypotheses**

- Sexual Harassment has no significant relationship with employees quitting their job.
- Sexual Harassment has no significant relationship with close contact among employees of the opposite sex.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Newman, Jackson and Baker, (2003) studies on sexual harassment in the workplace in the U.S., noted that sexual harassment appears to be a wide spread problem in the workplace especially within the public sector. According to these authors, within the public sector, the number of sexual harassment charges filed with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) and with State and Local fair employment practices agencies around the country totaled 15,836 in 2000, up from 10,532 in 1992. McKinney and Maroules (1991) survey of college students in U.S. find out that 50% of women 20% of men report some experiences of

harassment in school from faculty, other students or staff. Coles (1986) found out that 50% of women who filed a sexual harassment complaint with the state of California were fired, and another 25% resigned because of the stress of the complaint process or the harassment itself. Knowledge or anticipation of those kind of psychological, occupations and legal implications of sexual harassment charges in turn, may act as an impediment to women reporting the event they have experienced (Fitzgerald, Swan and Fischer, 1995). McArthur and Eisen (1976) studied 22 popular children's shows portrayed on television in order to determine male and female characters were shown behaving in different ways. The first problem faced by McArthur and Eisen was a basic one- finding major female characters to study. Fully 68% of the major characters in the shows were males and only 32% were female. When the behaviors of the available females were compared with that of males, large differences emerged. For example, males were shown engaging in problem-solving activities more often than females. Similarly, they demonstrated autonomy (doing something without help) more often than females. These findings, and those obtained in other studies. (Stemglanz & Serbin, 1974) suggest that children's television shows are in fact teaching youngsters that males and females are very different. Overall, they seem to be informing children that males are active planners and leaders while females are usually passive followers. As you can see, this provides support for traditional sex roles and- stereotypes about males and females.

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

A more sophisticated approach to sex typing was proposed by Sandra Bern (1981). This view focuses on the basic cognitive processes that appear to underlie sex typing. In particular, it begins by suggesting that this phenomenon is based on the development of a clear-cut gender schema. Bern (1981) suggests that children soon acquire a gender schema, a cognitive framework based on the society's expectations and beliefs about differences between males and females. Once this takes form, it influences their perception and understanding of a wide range new information.

According to Bern (1981), a very crucial step in sex typing then involves assimilation of the individual's self-concept to the gender schema.

Briefly children soon learn to evaluate their own adequacy or worth as a person in terms of the gender schema. To the extent that their preferences, attitudes, behaviors, and traits match this schema, and their self-esteem is enhanced. And to the degree that their preferences, attitudes, behaviors and traits fail to match the gender schema, however, their self-esteem may suffer. Evidence for the existence of a gender schema has been obtained in several recent experiments. For example, in one study (Bern, 1981), sex-typed individuals persons holding traditional views of masculinity and femininity-were faster than non sex-typed individual in judging whether various traits relating to gender were or were or were not descriptive of themselves. This finding is consistent with Bern's theory, which states that sex typed persons should possess a stronger schema than non sex-typed persons, and so be able to process information relating to gender more quickly. These and other findings suggest that gender schema theory offers an intriguing alternative to the older and more traditional social learning and cognitive views.

### **METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION**

#### **Sampling Size**

The participants used in the study were 200 female employees from five private organizations and five State Government Parastatals. The participants were randomly selected from junior and senior staff & the different organizations. Participants were between the ages of 20-50 years.

Instruments: The study employed the use of questionnaire for data collection. Prior to its use the reliability and validity was established. The questionnaire with 23 items was subjected to a reliability and validity test. It was administered to 25 employees of Ministry of Education and Chevron Oil Company Limited, were there was an interval of 2 weeks before it was re-administered. However it reported a coefficient of  $r=0.83$ . To determine validity the questionnaire was compared to Gutek, Monarch and Cohen (1983) which is a similar questionnaire used to measure sex and the work place and it had a validity score of 6.21,  $r0.84$ .

Procedure and Design: The organizations visited were randomly selected private and Government organizations. The Government Organizations include Federal Parastatals in Yenagoa, Benin, Umuahia and Uyo. The private organizations

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include Shell Petroleum Development Company, Elf Nigeria Limited and Chevron Nigeria Limited all in Port Harcourt and Warn metropolis. The 200 participants were divided into 4 groups. There were 50 junior employees from private organizations and 50 senior employees from Government organizations. Salary scale was provided by the Private Organizations and the Ministry of Labor and Employment. Participants with salary between N10,000-N40,000 were considered junior staff while participants with salary N 100,000 and above as senior staff.

Participants were told outright from the onset the purpose of the research which is to assess man - woman relationship in work environment. They were told to be honest and that the information they would provide would be treated with utmost confidentiality. Therefore, they were told to take their time in filling the questionnaire hence they were given 2-3 days. Even more, some busy ones still requested for more days while others returned them unresponded. The participants were also asked to provide some demographic information concerning their age, educational qualification, their salary range and also provide information as to whether their immediate boss in the office is a male or female.

In all 260 questionnaires were distributed but only 200 were retrieved while some participants saw it as fun and so readily responded to the questionnaire others did not at all. The rating scale of the questionnaire was of Likert-type 5 point scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). Strongly disagree (1) disagree (2) undecided (3) agree (4) strongly agree(s).

Item analysis was done by the use of Pearson product moment correlation coefficient matrix to help group the items into different groups. The 23 items in the questionnaire resulted into eleven items. Some items correlated highly with others as shown by the correlation results. The items which correlated with others became one item and the individual scores for such items were put together and analyzed together as one item. For example, items 2 and 3 were polled together as one. Item 7 and 9 polled together as one. Item 14 and 15 polled higher as one.

### RESULTS

Hypothesis i: Sexual Harassment has no significant relationship with employees quitting their job. The result showed a significant effect with the status of employees  $F(1, 196) = 6.7, p < 0.05$ . There was no significant effect with type of organization and interaction effect.

**Table 1: 2 x 2 ANOVA table indicating whether threats and worries of sexual harassment would result to employees quitting their jobs.**

| Source of Variation      | Ss  | df  | ms  | F    | P     |
|--------------------------|-----|-----|-----|------|-------|
| Status level (A)         | 16  | 1   | 16  | 6.7  | /0.05 |
| Type of Organization (B) | 3   | 1   | 3   | 1.25 | n.s   |
| AxB                      | 2   | 1   | 2   | 0.83 | n.s   |
| Error                    | 476 | 196 | 2.4 | -    | -     |

The result indicated that junior staff with a  $x = 14.46$  is mostly affected by the threats and worries of sexual harassment than senior employees with  $x = 13.64$ . This shows that low status employees would quit their jobs more easily if they are threatened and if sexual harassment gives them worries. Hypothesis ii: Sexual Harassment has no significant relationship with close contact among employees of the opposite sex.

The hypothesis for this study showed no significant effect with type of organization and there was no interaction effect. But there was a

significant effect with the status of employees,  $F(1, 196) = 8.2, p < 0.05$ .

With the result, junior employees has a  $x = 14.46$ , higher than senior employees with  $x = 13.64$ . This showed that close contact of lower status employees to the opposite sex will result in sexual harassment than if senior female employees have close contact with opposite sex employees.

Items 14 and 15 were polled together to test the hypothesis that physically attractive females are more sexually harassed than unattractive females. This hypothesis received no report.

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Table 2: 2 x 2 ANOVA table showing that close contact among employees of opposite sex would result in sexual harassment.

| Source of Variation      | Ss   | df  | ms  | F   | P     |
|--------------------------|------|-----|-----|-----|-------|
| Status level (A)         | 75   | 1   | 75  | 82  | /0.05 |
| Type of Organization (B) | 10   | 1   | 10  | 1.1 | n.s   |
| AxB                      | 12   | 1   | 12  | 1.3 | n.s   |
| Error                    | 1804 | 196 | 9.2 | -   | -     |

$$N=200 \quad F=(1/106) \approx 8.2 \quad P=0.05$$

### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Nigerian professional counselor is to assess and counsel a worker who is harassed through vocational readjustment. The worker concerned is expected to readjust or come back to real life. Rehabilitation becomes very important especially to bring back the sensory handicapped worker to adjust to his or her working environment. Sometimes the use of systematic desensitization is significant.

Recovery from the traumatic experience or shock of sexual harassment requires a good relationship between the victim and a professional counselor which must be confidential. This will make the recovery process faster. One area of enhancing this relationship is the study of the attitude. If the counselor studies the attitude of the sexually harassed worker, the victim will recover quickly. However, if the attitude of the client is not well taken into consideration, it may prolong the recovery or readjustment process.

The cultural background and the sexually harassed must be understood by the counselor to enable them facilitate the recovery process of the client. Culture enjoys an advantage not only at making correct diagnosis but also at a good judgment. Environmental psychological knowledge also helps the counselor in understanding the relationship between industrial organization and the environment. The knowledge and understanding of environmental psychology can help the counselor to advise the client on his or her fears in and his treatment or in working in the same industrial-organization environment where harassment has taken place.

The need for counseling professionals to liaise with nongovernmental organizations to create enlightenment campaign for workers to understand the ethics of work in industrial-

organizational work place is significant in Nigeria. Many workers do not know what is expected to be done in their workplace. For example, industrial-organizational workers should not be allowed to come into their workplace with pornographic magazines or casual wears that exposes their bodies.

Industrial-Organization should endeavor to employ professional counselors in their working environment, who will from time to time handle workers personal problems within and outside the organization. Issues concerning their privacy can be kept in confidence with the counselor. Where need be the counselors can advise management of organization in case of any sexual harassment incidence? Evaluation of the number of cases of sexual violence, harassment or rape by a professional counselor will help industrial-organization in their decision making process and reduce the number of stress and hostility in the workplace.

Industrial-organization should invite certified professional counselors during recruitment, selection and placement of personnel. Sometimes, these professionals are gifted with knowledge about different people and how to get them during interviews. Applicants when invited for interviews can be given predictive validity test which can help in the recruitment and selection process. Certified and professional counselors should be involved in appraisal processes in work organizations. They are to sign as part of the recommendation processes for promotion of workers in organizations. Their assessment should be kept under confidential cover. Awards for dissent behavior should be given annually possibly quarterly to workers of good behavior in industrial-organizations. This will serve as a way of encouraging industrial workers to have dissent behavior for a better

human capital development. Nigerian workers should have the right to protection of their dignity at work, just as the Italian parliament did by law No. 30 of a February 1999.

The professional counselor can also use Lie detectors. This is very important because witnesses to incidence in industrial-organizational settings usually conceal most of the facts they get or mislead management in decisions. The greatest potential benefit is to protect the innocent from long harassment. In industrial organizational settings, the use of lie detector has not been limited for detecting theft, job selection but also played dual role in getting accurate information about the sexually harassed worker. The certified counselor also can apply Alpha and Beta test in the investigation of anti-social behaviors such as sexual harassment. This is because physical characteristics have been found to be related to antisocial behavior. In the last 20-30 years, women's rights activities have emphasized the basic human rights of women and girls and the accountability of men and boys in respecting these rights. Human rights activists should be allowed to carry out their activities in the Nigerian workplace to stop human rights abuse especially sexual harassment.

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