

The Effect of Sexual Harassment of Female Employees on the Level of Performance among Anambra State Civil Servants

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Abstract

Sexual harassment has become an issue of global discourse. This singular act was adjudged to be very offensive and is targeted mostly at female employees which violates their fundamental human rights and reduces their dignity as women. Whenever sexual harassment occurs, it creates a negative scene which harms their level of performance in the workplace. To this end, this study focused on the effect of sexual harassment of female employees on the level of performance in the Anambra State Civil Service. The study adopted the descriptive cross-sectional survey research design. Four research questions guided the study. Role identity theory was adopted as the theoretical framework of the study. The sample size for the study was 180 female employees who were selected through the proportionate stratified random sampling technique. Data for the study were collected through questionnaire administration and data collected were processed using the SPSS software package. Data analysis was performed using descriptive statistics like simple percentages, and frequency tables. The hypotheses were tested using chi-square (χ^2) statistical inference. Findings of the study revealed that the female employees of Anambra State Civil Service at the lower cadre experience more sexual harassment and this affects the level of performance in their workplace. The study recommended the need for the Commission to come up with tough policies aimed at reducing the incidence of sexual harassment.

Keywords: environment, female employees, performance, sexual harassment, workplace

Introduction

Sexual harassment in the workplace has become an issue of a global discourse given the challenging role of female employees, especially in modern African societies. This social vice has eaten deep into the fabric of our societies, especially in the workplace. It has been observed from several studies on sexual harassment that

most cases of this menace seem to be perpetrated by men against women (Work Harassment, 2012). The issue of sexual harassment in the workplace tends to attract less attention because the victims are constrained to report their experiences for fear of further discrimination. Akanmu (2009) noted sexual harassment contaminates the work environment and has negative consequences on those concerned thus bringing about a decline in productivity, or reaching their full potential. Sexual harassment can also poison the environment for everyone else and if left unchecked in the workplace, tends to escalate to violent behaviour.

Women experience several challenges in their place of work. Otulayo (2000) noted that female employees in the lower cadre are often the target of sexual harassment by their superiors. Yusuf (2010) also observed that sexual harassment is one of the major constraints because the effect cuts across physical, psychological, emotional, social and economic dimensions. Also, employees' performance in the workplace is pertinent to organizational survival. Haralambos and Holborn (2013) argued that the extent of productivity in the workplace is considered more rather than goal accomplishment.

Sexual harassment takes various forms but happens especially when there is unanticipated conduct. Timmerman (2002) identified three clear dimensions of sexual harassment, namely unwanted sexual attention, sexual coercion and gender harassment. The International Trade Union Confederation (2008) observed that those who indulge in this act in the workplace span from colleagues, supervisors or management. Otite and Ogionwo (2006) are of the view that if a male boss maltreats a female employee, or derives her of promotion or appointment because she refuses to have sexual intercourse with him or if sexual intercourse is made a condition for such promotion or appointment, would be a case of sexual harassment. Otulayo (2000) equally noted that due to the high rate of unemployment in Anambra State in particular and Nigeria at large, sexual harassment renders the victims helpless and frustrated. This also includes the nature of jobs, placement of cadre wages and salary administration, promotion, staff welfare, and development of the victims. Hence, the organisation suffers a setback because of the compromise that will follow. The female employees will either not be serious because the strict recruitment procedures have been abused also those already employed will experience a reduction in their performance because there will be

no adequate supervision. The supposed supervisor will rather play to the gallery.

The Problem

Sexual harassment has been a tremendous problem to most African women, especially those in paid employment. This problem has greatly affected their performance in their paid employment. According to Mashingaidze (2006), sexual harassment has impacted women's self-esteem as well as their emotional, social and psychological wellbeing.

Sexual harassment has greatly posed a challenge in several places of employment. Research conducted on the different work environments in Nigeria has revealed the trends and nature of sexual harassment experienced by female employees. These include but are not limited to degrading verbal remarks, unwanted touching, winking of the eye, rolling off the tongue, and other types of gender-based violence (Abati, 2006; Ejiogu & Onyene, 2006).

The problem of sexual harassment in various places of work has not received the appropriate attention it deserved from the management. As a result of this many female employees have decided to be dying in silence instead of voicing out for fear of being harassed again or violated. Though studies found that there are now measures put in place for policy initiatives on sexual harassment but who is going to bear the cart first is the question on the lips of most women. They don't want to be seen as being responsible for the termination of the offenders' appointment. To this end, this study seeks to explore in detail, avenues of arresting the ugly incidence that has been on the increase in our society and in commission in particular which made female employees not to perform efficiently in their workplace.

Research questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What are the forms of sexual harassment experienced by female employees?
2. What are the effects of sexual harassment on the level of performance of female employees?
3. To what extent does sexual harassment affect the work performance of female employees?
4. What strategies can be used to reduce the incidence of sexual harassment against female employees?

Research hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated in this study:

1. Female employees in the junior cadre seem to experience a high rate of sexual harassment than those in the senior cadre.
2. Female employees who earn less income seem to experience a high rate of sexual harassment than those with more income.

Review of Related Literature

Sexual harassment implies the verbal or physical act inflicted on the victim through body language, and verbal or non-verbal communication to compel women to sexual intercourse (Haralambos & Holborn, 2013). Yusuf (2010) saw sexual harassment as a form of behavioural patterns such as sexual teasing, jokes, comments or unwanted pressure for a sexual favour. Akanmu (2009) observes that sexual harassment pollutes the work environment and hurts those distressed thus bringing about a decline in performance. Ayodele (2021) observes that workplace sexual harassment is still a prevalent issue in Nigeria and females are more likely to be victims. Oluade (2001) observes that the banking sector has a high prevalence of sexual harassment because of extremely high targets to general definite sums of deposits to their banks or lose their jobs. Oluade (2001) admits that it is not only the banking sector that experiences this but almost all sectors of the economy ranging from education to communication, oil and gas, entertainment etc.

The United States courts identified two forms of sexual harassment which include “quid pro quo”, a situation where a supervisor demands from a worker sexual acts as a condition, or promises of work-related benefits in exchange for sexual acts and a “hostile work environment” where a pattern of sexual language, lewd posters, or sexual advances makes a worker so uncomfortable that it is difficult for her to perform (Reskin & Padevic, 1994). In a study conducted in Anambra State on sexual harassment, Okeke (2011) found that majority of the respondents had experienced one form of sexual harassment or the other, such as inappropriate touch, gestures and inappropriate jests expressed around them.

The common effects of sexual harassment include a decline in performance, stagnation, invasion of privacy, firing, resignation, defamation of character and reputation (Olowookere, 2010). He went further to say that sexual harassment could also result in stigmatization of the victim as well as fear and guilt. The effects

could equally include increased absenteeism, employee turnover time and capital expended on training and development of new employees, reduced performance and enhanced team conflict, and reduced job satisfaction (Moradeke, 2014). In a study carried out in the legal sector, Aina-Pelemo et al (2019) found that a decline in performance, and psychological and health challenges are among the effects of sexual harassment against female employees. McLaughlin, Uggen and Blackstone (2016) observed that sexual harassment forces some female employees out of their paid employment. They also noticed that there is a decline in productivity until a suitable replacement is gained.

To curb the menace of sexual harassment against the female folk in Nigeria, a bill passed in 2016 to prohibit sexual harassment which stipulated a 5-year jail term without an option of fine for culprits should be carried out without any favouritism (Adetutu & Iseoluwa, 2020). In line with this, the Senate of the Federal Republic of Nigeria passed a bill on sexual harassment against females (Adebayo, 2020). Irrespective of the stiff measures taken to curb the ugly incidence, sexual harassment against the female folk persist in workplaces in Anambra State in particular and Nigeria at large (Bello, 2020).

Theoretical Framework

To drive this study theoretically, the role identity theory was adopted as the theoretical framework. This theory was propounded by Sheldon Stryker in the year 1980. In Stryker's work, the core idea taken from Mead was that "society shapes self shapes social behaviour". According to Stryker, this theory postulates that when a person assumes any social role, he or she internalizes the socially constructed behavioural expectations associated with that status as part of his or her role identity. Also, according to Tajfel and Turner (1986), role identity is composed of the categorisation of the self as an occupant of a role. Negative outcomes occur when there is a lack of accord with meanings relevant to the self. If this state of affairs continues, the person becomes discomforted and suffers a contraction in self-effectiveness. Sexual harassment has been known to undercut an employee's work role identity by overemphasising the person's lower status (Collier, 1995). If allowed to prevail, it reduced the perceived competence and performance of female employees who experience it.

Methods

The study employed the descriptive cross-sectional survey research design. This research design assists in providing data that are used to describe the characteristic of a target population or to describe the relationship between variables in a study, within a specific point in time (Ihudiebube-Splendor & Chikeme, 2020). The study was conducted in the Anambra State Civil Service Commission (ASCSC). The target population is comprised of all the female employees within the Commission. A researcher-developed questionnaire was self-administered to 180 respondents within selected ministries in the commission, who were selected through the proportionate stratified random sampling technique. Data collected were coded into the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) software version 21, which was used in processing all the relevant statistical data. The descriptive aspect of the analysis like percentages, frequency tables, etc. was used to describe and interpret the data collected from the field. Chi-square (χ^2) statistical inference was used to determine the relationship between variables in the study.

Findings

Table 1

Distribution of socio-demographic variables of the respondents

Socio-Demographic Variables	Frequency	Percent
Age categories		
20 – 29 years	52	28.9
30 – 39 years	113	62.8
40 – 49 years	9	5.0
50year and above	6	3.3
Total	180	100.0
Marital status		
Single	82	45.6
Married	12	6.7
Widowed	20	11.1
Separated	31	17.2
Divorced	35	19.4
Total	180	100.0
Official Rank		
Senior Staff	32	11.1
Intermediate	40	34.9
Junior Staff	70	30.2
Casual staff	38	23.8
Total	180	100.0

Income per annum (₦)		
300,000 – 499, 999	46	25.6
500,000 – 699,999	75	41.7
700,000 – 899,999	35	19.4
900,000 & above	24	13.3
Total	180	100.0

Table 1 above contains data on the analysis of the socio-demographic variables of the respondents. Results from the table indicated that the majority (62.8%) of the respondents agreed between 30 – 39 years old, while the least proportion (3.3%) of them were aged 50 years old and above. This implies that the majority of the female employees that have experienced sexual harassment in any form were of youthful adult age.

Concerning the marital status of the respondents, the data analysis showed that a majority (45.6%) of them were single compared to about a quarter proportions (19.4%) of them who were divorcees. The data also indicated that 11.1% of them were widowed, 17.2% of them were separated, and 6.7% of them were married. In terms of the respondents' ranks within the commission, data showed that the majority (38.9%) of the respondents were the junior staff. This was followed by 22.2% of those who were the intermediate staff. The casual staff comprised 21.1% of the samples, while the senior staff was the least proportion (17.8%) within the samples. In terms of the income per annum, data analysis showed that the highest proportion (41.7%) of the respondents earned between ₦500,000 - ₦699,999 per annum, 25.6% earned ₦300,000 - ₦499,999 per annum, 19.4% earned ₦700,000 - ₦899,999 per annum while 13.3% earned ₦900,000 and above. This finding implies that the majority of the respondents were relatively in the junior cadre.

Forms of sexual harassment of female employees

Six items were introduced to help identify forms of sexual harassment in the workplace. The questionnaire item reads “what are the forms of sexual harassment experienced by female employees”. The analysis conducted on the responses gathered is shown in table 2.

Table 2

Respondents' views on forms of sexual harassment

Response	Frequency	Percent
Admiring in a sexual manner	46	25.6
Inappropriate touching	42	23.3
Sexual advancement	35	19.4

Unwanted sexual remarks	23	12.8
Sexual coercion	19	10.6
Deceptive entertainment	15	8.3
Total	180	100.0

Table 2 revealed respondents' views on the forms of sexual harassment of female employees. The results showed that 46(25.6%) respondents indicated admiring someone sexually as a major form of sexual harassment of female employees, 42(23.3%) respondents said inappropriate touching, 35(19.4%) respondents said sexual advancement, 23(12.8%) said unwanted sexual remarks. On the other hand, 19(10.6%) respondents indicated sexual coercion while 15(8.3%) respondents indicated deceptive entertainment as among the forms of sexual harassment of female employees. This implies that admiring sexually, inappropriate touching and sexual advancement are among the major forms of sexual harassment against female employees.

Effect of sexual harassment on level of performance among female employees

In trying to look at the effect of sexual harassment on the level of performance among female employees, it was necessary to first analyse their commitment intentions amidst sexual harassment. The analysis conducted in this respect is shown in table 3.

Table 3

Respondents' views on the effects of sexual harassment among female employees

Response	Frequency	Percent
Low performance	54	30.0
Stagnation	35	19.4
Stigmatization	38	21.1
Resignation	19	10.6
Absenteeism	34	18.9
Total	180	100.0

Table 3 depicts respondents' views on the effect of sexual harassment on female employees. The results revealed that 54(30%) respondents indicated low performance as one of the effects of sexual harassment on female employees. 35(19.4%) respondents said stagnation, and 38(21.1%) respondents said stigmatization. On the other hand, 19(10.6%) respondents indicated resignation while 34(18.9%) indicated absenteeism as among the effects of sexual harassment on female employees. This implies that low performance, stigmatization and stagnation are some of the major effects of sexual harassment on female

employees.

Extent sexual harassment affects the work performance of female employees

The respondents were obliged to describe the extent sexual harassment affects the work performance of female employees, using three distinct questionnaire items. The analysis conducted on their responses was presented in table 4.

Table 4

Respondents' view on the extent sexual harassment affects the work performance of female employees

Response	Frequency	Percent
Large extent	140	77.8
Very little	26	14.4
Not at all	14	7.8
Total	180	100.0

Table 4 above shows respondents' views on the extent sexual harassment affects the work performance of female employees. Observations from the table reveal that majority of the respondents (77.8%) believed that sexual harassment of female employees affected their performance at work to a large extent. A reasonable proportion of the total respondents (14.4%) believed that sexual harassment of female employees affected their performance at work to a very little extent, while a fewer proportion of the total respondents (7.8%) agreed that sexual harassment of female employees did not affect their performance at work. This implies that sexual harassment of female employees affected their performance at work reasonably.

Strategies that will help to reduce the incidence of sexual harassment against female employees

The respondents were urged to offer strategies that will help to reduce the incidence of sexual harassment on female employees, using four distinct questionnaire items. The analysis conducted on their responses was presented in table 5.

Table 5

Respondents' views on strategies that will help to reduce the incidence of sexual harassment against female employees

Response	Frequency	Percent
Encourage the victim to report every sexual harassment.	40	22.2

Handling every report of sexual harassment judiciously.	50	27.8
Implementation of what the law stipulated without any favouritism.	66	36.7
Protection of the fundamental human right of the victim of sexual harassment	24	13.3
Total	180	100.0

Table 5 depicts respondents' views on strategies that will help to reduce the incidence of sexual harassment against female employees. The results revealed that the majority (36.7%) of the respondents suggested: "implementation of what the law stipulated without any favouritism" as one of the strategies that will help to reduce the incidence of sexual harassment against female employees. A reasonable proportion of the total respondents (27.8%) believed that handling every report of sexual harassment seriously will equally help to reduce the incidence of sexual harassment on female employees. This was equally followed by 27.8% of the respondents who said that handling every report of sexual harassment seriously will as well serve as a strategy that will help to reduce the incidence of sexual harassment on female employees, while the least proportion in the sample was 13.3% of those who indicated that protection of the fundamental human right of the victim of sexual harassment is among the strategies that will help to reduce the incidence of sexual harassment on female employees. This finding implies that the majority of the respondents agreed that implementation of what the law stipulated without any favouritism is the most effective strategy that will help to reduce the incidence of sexual harassment against female employees.

Test of Hypothesis

The following hypotheses were tested in this study:

Hypothesis one

- H₁: Female employees in the junior cadre seem to experience a high rate of sexual harassment than those in the senior cadre.
- H₀: Female employees in the junior cadre seem not to experience a high rate of sexual harassment than those in the senior cadre.

Table 6*Distribution of respondents on employment status*

Employment status	Frequency	Percent
Junior cadre	108	60.0
Senior cadre	72	40.0
Total	180	100.0

$$\chi^2 = 7.2; df = 1; p = 0.00$$

To test the above hypothesis, respondents' employment status was cross-tabulated with the rate of sexual harassment. The Table reveals that 108(60%) of the respondents were mostly junior staff while 72(40%) of the respondents were senior staff (Table 1). The hypothesis was tested with the use of the chi-square (χ^2) statistic at a .05 significant level.

The data were subjected to a chi-square test and with $\chi^2 = 7.2$; $df = 1$; $p = 0.00$, there appears to be an association between employment status and the rate of sexual harassment. Thus, the substantive hypothesis is accepted thereby implying that female employees in the junior cadre seem to experience a high rate of sexual harassment than those in the senior cadre.

Hypothesis two

H_1 : *Female employees who earn less income seem to experience a high rate of sexual harassment than those with more income.*

H_0 : *Female employees who earn less income seem not to experience a high rate of sexual harassment than those with more income.*

Table 7*Distribution of respondents on level of income*

Level of income	Frequency	Percent
Less income	121	67.2
More income	59	32.8
Total	180	100.0

$$\chi^2 = 21.4; df = 1; p = 0.00$$

To test the above hypothesis, respondents' level of income was cross-tabulated with the rate of sexual harassment. The Table reveals that 121(67.2%) of the respondents were among the less

income earners while 59(32.8%) of the respondents were among the more income earners (Table 1). The hypothesis was tested with the use of the chi-square (χ^2) statistic at a .05 significant level.

The data were subjected to a chi-square test and with $\chi^2 = 21.4$; $df = 1$; $p = 0.00$, there appears to be an association between the level of income and the rate of sexual harassment. Thus, the substantive hypothesis is accepted thereby implying that female employees who earn less income seem to experience a high rate of sexual harassment than those with more income.

Discussion of findings

From the analysis of the generated data on the forms of sexual harassment of female employees, it was observed that more of the respondents (Table 2) believed that admiring someone sexually and inappropriate touching are some of the major forms of sexual harassment of female employees. The finding confirms the view of Okeke (2011) that the majority of female employees experienced one form of sexual harassment or the other, such as inappropriate touch, gestures and inappropriate jests expressed around them.

The findings of the study also revealed the effect of sexual harassment on female employees (Table 3). The majority of the respondents indicated that low performance and stigmatization are the major effects of sexual harassment on the work performance of female employees. This finding of this study is in agreement with the works of Olowookere (2010) that the common effects of sexual harassment include a decline in performance, stagnation, invasion of privacy, stigmatization, firing, resignation, defamation of character and reputation.

The findings of the study in Table 4 further revealed the extent sexual harassment affects the work performance of female employees. It was observed that the majority of the respondents (77.8%) believed that sexual harassment of female employees affected their performance at work to a large extent. The finding is also in consonance with the view of Ayodele (2021), who pointed out that workplace sexual harassment is still a prevalent issue in Nigeria and females are more likely to be victims.

Findings emanating from the study in Table 5 however revealed the strategies that will help to reduce the incidence of sexual harassment against female employees. It was observed that the majority of the respondents (36.7%) believe that implementation of the law stipulated without any favouritism, closely followed by handling every report of sexual harassment

seriously (50%) were among the strategies that will help to reduce the incidence of sexual harassment on female employees. This finding confirms the views of Bello (2020) who observed that irrespective of the stiff measures put in place to curb the ugly incidence, sexual harassment persists in workplaces.

Furthermore, the two hypotheses that guided the study were all tested. Findings from the test of hypothesis one as presented in Table 6 on employment status shows that majority of the respondents were mostly junior cadre. Thus, the substantive hypothesis (H1) is accepted thereby implying that female employees in the junior cadre seem to experience a high rate of sexual harassment than those in the senior cadre.

Finally, the result of hypothesis two as presented in Table 7 on level of income, shows that the majority of the respondents were mostly those who received less income. Thus, the substantive hypothesis (H1) is accepted thereby implying that female employees who earn less income seem to experience a high rate of sexual harassment than those with more income.

Conclusion/Recommendations

The study focused on the effect of sexual harassment of female employees on the level of performance among Anambra State Civil Servants. The findings of this study showed that admiring someone sexually and inappropriate touching was identified as among the forms of sexual harassment against female employees. Sexual harassment at workplaces needs to be avoided because its consequences are alarming, most often it leads to low productivity, stigmatization, stagnation, absenteeism and so many other negative outcomes.

Finally, the victims believed that sexual harassment can be prevented if only the management will get the culprits arrested and at the same time prosecute them without showing any form of favouritism. Against this backdrop, the following recommendations were articulated:

1. The commission should come up with tough policies aimed at reducing the incidence of sexual harassment.
2. There is a need for the commission to give sanctions on indecent dressing to serve as a deterrent for any involvement in sexual harassment in the workplace.
3. The commission should be willing to prosecute the offenders not minding the rank of the staff to serve as a deterrent for any future culprits.

4. Employees especially females should be educated on their fundamental human rights by ensuring that they know what to do when there is a sexual harassment situation.

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