



**BBC'S INVESTIGATIVE REPORT ON SEX FOR GRADES
IN AFRICAN UNIVERSITIES: KNOWLEDGE AND
ATTITUDE TO SEXUAL HARASSMENT AMONG
FEMALE UNDERGRADUATES**

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ABSTRACT

Sexual advances and threats by faculty in tertiary institutions demanding sexual favours of students in exchange for grades is a form of sexual harassment that is an issue of gender concern as female students have been most victimized. Despite efforts to curb this menace such as dismissal of faculty, high-ranking members of faculty as seen in Nigerian universities continue to perpetuate the act. Anchored on information-integration theory, this study sought to determine the impact of BBC's 2019 documentary on sex for grades on the knowledge and attitude to sexual harassment among Babcock University female undergraduates in final year. Adopting experimental research design, the knowledge and attitude to sexual harassment of 60 respondents were recorded pre and post exposure to the film. Findings reveal a significant increase in responses post exposure to film which reiterates the impact of the mass media on audience knowledge and attitude towards issues as they unfold in society. it is recommended that local media embark in investigative journalism into the nature of sexual harassment in Nigeria institutions as this will further lend credence to addressing this concern in society, as well as provide insights to society.

Key words: Sexual Harassment, Sex for grades, Tertiary institutions, Faculty, Knowledge, Attitude

INTRODUCTION

Cases of sexual harassment continue to escalate especially in tertiary institutions among students and faculty. Female students have been recorded to be the predominant victims of sexual harassment from male students and faculty (lecturers) who demand sexual relations in exchange for a pass grade which is referred to as “sex for grades”. Sex for grades have continued to ravage tertiary institutions especially in Nigeria where cases of sexual harassment perpetrated mostly by male faculty of high portfolio such as Professors and PhD holders have become a frequent subject of media coverage.

Ladebo (2003 p.121), in a study on the reality of sexual harassment in academia in Nigeria stated that victims of sexual harassment often experience psychological issues, low self-esteem, nervousness, irritability and even anger. All of these affect the academic performance and life of students coupled with other issues they have to deal with. In 2019, the *British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC)* released an undercover investigative report on sexual harassment of female students by male faculty in Nigerian and Ghanaian tertiary institutions. The nature of sexual harassment in the citadel of learning was presented in the report as faculty were shown making advances and demands for sexual relations.

The release of *BBC*'s report spurred global discourse on the subject of sex for grades as victims took to their various social media platforms to narrate their ordeal in the hands of faculty at the tertiary institutions presented in the report as well as other institutions. Some victims went as far as mentioning the names of faculty and posting evidence to support their claim. This reiterates the ability of the media to set the agenda of public discourse. In an attempt to determine the role of investigative journalism in eradicating sexual assault in Nigerian Universities, Egbegi, Ajah, and Onyejebu (2019), recommended that tertiary institutions adopt investigative journalism which they foresee to be a viable means to eradicate sexual assault in Nigerian universities.

Egbegi et al further stated based on the findings from their study that the watchdog role of the media will aid university administrators validate claims of sexual harassment when facts and evidence are uncovered. No doubt, this will guide the deliberations of the administration given that there are facts and not a mere word-of-mouth to work with. The ability of investigative journalism to

inform public belief, understanding and action is yet another dimension for which it is recommended.

This study sought to determine the impact of *BBC's* documentary on sex for grades in Nigerian and Ghanaian tertiary institutions on the knowledge and attitude to sexual harassment among Babcock University (BU) female undergraduates. This use of this institution is based on the fact that some faculty of this institution were named as perpetrators of sex for grades mostly by female students who had graduated on social media and the subject of sexton; harassment is not alien to the institution.

The study adopted a comparative approach to determine the knowledge and attitude to sexual harassment before and after exposure to *BBC's* documentary on sex for grades. The specific objectives include;

1. Ascertain the knowledge of sexual harassment among BU female undergraduates before and after exposure to *BBC's* documentary on sex for grades.
2. Establish the significant difference in the attitude of BU female undergraduates to sexual harassment before and after exposure to prior and post exposure *BBC's* documentary on sex for grades.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What is the knowledge of sexual harassment among BU female undergraduates before and after exposure to *BBC's* documentary on sex for grades?
2. What is the significant difference in the attitude of BU female undergraduates to sexual harassment before and after exposure to prior and post exposure *BBC's* documentary on sex for grades?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study was anchored on information-integration theory which centers on the way media audiences “accumulate and organize information about persons, objects, situations, and ideas to form attitudes, or predispositions to act in a positive or negative way”. A major assumption of the theory is the fact that attitudinal change can occur among media audiences when new information is brought to bear such that it is presented in a manner that gives a valence - a

direction that either support or refutes existing notions (LittleJohn and Foss, 2008 p.75 & 76).

Pre-existing attitudes resulting from knowledge and perception are either reinforced or a shift is led to occur resulting from the valence adopted by the media in their discourse and treatment of societal issues. Information-integration theory is of relevance to this study given that there is a pre-existing attitude to the subject of sexual harassment in society and particularly among female tertiary students who are the target audience of this study.

Sexual harassment as it is in virtually every part of the world is socially unacceptable in Nigeria. The incessant nature of this menace in society ranging from the sexual violation of children, workplace harassment, and harassment at the tertiary institution by faculty amongst other forms have gone on for a long time. On the 3rd of June, 2015, the Nigerian Senate passed a bill sponsored by Senator Chris Ayanwu which proposed that anyone found guilty of sex tourism, deliberate passage of HIV/AIDS to guiltless citizens or rape should be sentenced to life imprisonment (Nairaland Forum, 2015).

Also, in 2013, a new Sexual Offences Act (SOA) Bill was passed by the Senate. Sexual harassment was presented in Section 23 of the bill as a criminal offence punishable by imprisonment if found guilty in a court of law. Osinuga (2015 p.1), in an analysis of the matters arising from the SOA bill, stated that "misconceptions expressed in the media" on certain aspects of the bill have generated heated criticisms. The depiction of sexual harassment as in *BBC's* documentary will no doubt reinforce or cause a shift in their attitude. For instance, the narrative presented in the documentary; facts, human interest projection, issues all captured in reality will most likely affect attitude.

GENDER CONCERNS OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS

Sexual harassment as described by Fadipe and Bakenne (2020), is a major public relations crises tertiary institutions face. Scandals resulting from the allegations of sexual harassment of female students by faculty is tantamount to a "nightmare". It is particularly a sensitive issue that touches on gender concerns globally. The General Assembly of the United Nations (UN) in 1993 the "Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women which stipulates in Article 2 (b) that violence against women shall include "physical,

sexual and psychological violence occurring within the general community, including rape, sexual abuse, sexual harassment and intimidation at work, in educational institutions and elsewhere, trafficking in women and forced prostitution” (Osuna-Rodríguez, Rodríguez-Osuna, Dios, and Amor, 2020 p.3; UN, 1993 p.1).

The nature of sexual harassment is such that it is one of the most common forms of gender-based violence against female students in tertiary institutions. Female student victims in Nigerian institutions have succumbed to the demands of perpetrators (faculty) who often threaten to withhold grades earned or deserved if they do not perform sexual acts in exchange. Sexual harassment is underreported by victims because of possible stigmatization among colleagues and the fear of victimization by other members of faculty. This is a stressor that can become a hindrance to the academic performance and academic life of victims.

Nwadiani (2018 p.20), during the 12th convocation ceremony lecture of the Delta State University, Abraka Nigeria, stated that sexual harassment of female students especially by male faculty is a “dangerous development” that have become a common practice in many Nigerian universities, citing cases of Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile – Ife and Ambrose Ali University Ekpoma where two male Professors demanded sex from female students in exchange for grades.

NATURE OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN NIGERIAN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS

Sexual harassment is the act of making sexist or sexual remarks, sexual demands presented in forms of threat and blackmail for which a victim is left without a choice but to succumb. The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM, 2018) in Anierobi, Etodike, Nwogbo, Okeke and Nwiko (2021 p.269), classifies sexually harassing behaviours into three categories of: “gender harassment, unwanted sexual attention and sexual coercion”. Gender harassment includes verbal or nonverbal behaviors targeted at making a victim feel inferior based on gender, unwanted sexual attention includes unsolicited verbal or non-verbal sexual advances, while sexual coercion occurs when “professional or educational treatment one is entitled to

is conditioned in such a way that the person might not get them except by yielding to unwelcome sexual activity.

The nature of sexual harassment at the tertiary institution between faculty and female students is mostly that of sexual coercion. This is clearly exemplified by the term sex for grades. Instances of this form of harassment was captured in *BBC's* documentary as faculty exhibited seductive behavior while soliciting sexual gratification from victims, locking office doors with victims in the office, making pronouncement of a reward or threat of punishment while attempting to sexual imposition or assault.

Tertiary students in Nigeria are subjected to diverse issues resulting from sexual harassment as well as the pressure and threats from faculty. Aina-Pelomo, Oke and Alade (2021), in an empirical study aimed at comparatively evaluating the nature of sexual harassment in public and private Nigerian tertiary institutions found that sexual harassment was a common issue in both divide, however the issue of sex for grades was significantly more dominant in public tertiary institutions.

The attitude and reaction of the university administration have significantly changed in recent times as it used to be that cases of sexual harassment between faculty and students were trivialized. Today, perpetrators are suspended and sacked if found guilty by the university governing council as opposed to covering-up cases which used to be the norm. For instance, the Governing Council of the University of Lagos (UNILAG) approved the immediate dismissal of two high ranking faculties of the departments of European Languages and Integration Studies and Economics on the 31st of May 2021 over sexual harassment allegations (Edema, 2021).

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted the experimental research design whereby participants were exposed to *BBC's* documentary on sex for grades. They were given a copy of the research instrument before the intervention to record their knowledge, perception and attitude to sexual harassment by faculty. A second copy of the same research instrument was redistributed among the study participants after the intervention to determine the impact of the documentary on their knowledge, perception and attitude to sexual harassment.

A sample size of 60 Babcock University female undergraduates were utilized in the study. Purposive and volunteer non-probability sampling techniques were adopted. Purposive sampling was applicable in that only final year female students who had not seen the documentary were utilized in the study because of their experience and number of years at the tertiary institution, while volunteer sampling non-probability sampling technique was adopted as participants' decision to partake in the study was based solely on their accord. A content validated research instrument was utilized. A reliability test was also done using the Cronbach Alpha statistical reliability which presented a 0.7 level of reliability. The data gathered was analyzed using the Statistical Product and Service Sciences (SPSS) and presented using tables which show frequency and percentages.

PRESENTATION OF DATA AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

TABLE 1: Knowledge of Sexual Harassment before Exposure to BBC's Documentary on Sex for Grades

	SA Freq. (%)	A Freq. (%)	D Freq. (%)	SD Freq. (%)	U Freq. (%)	Mean (\bar{x})	Standard Deviation (SD)
Sexual harassment is when a faculty demand sexual favors	43 (71.7)	16 (26.7)	1 (1.7)	-	-	1.30	0.49
Sexual harassment is when a faculty send inappropriate text messages/chats to students	37 (61.7)	19 (31.7)	2 (3.3)	1 (1.7)	1 (1.7)	1.50	0.79
Sexual harassment is when a faculty touches me inappropriately	46 (76.7)	14 (23.3)	-	-	-	1.23	0.42
Sexual harassment is when a faculty ask me out on a date	22 (36.7)	11 (18.3)	16 (26.7)	2 (3.3)	9 (15.0)	2.41	1.40
Sexual harassment is when a faculty is overly friendly with me	14 (23.3)	5 (8.3)	27 (45.0)	4 (6.7)	10 (16.7)	2.85	1.32
Sexual harassment is when a faculty talks about sexuality with me	27 (45.0)	11 (18.3)	10 (16.7)	2 (3.3)	10 (16.7)	2.28	1.48
Sexual harassment is when a faculty makes sexual comments or jokes that make me feel uncomfortable	39 (65.0)	21 (35.0)	-	-	-	1.35	0.48
Sexual harassment is when a faculty threatens to fail me if I do not perform a sexual request	54 (90.0)	6 (10.0)	-	-	-	1.10	0.30

Sexual harassment is when a faculty demands to meet with me behind closed doors	46 (76.7)	11 (18.3)	1 (1.7)	2 (3.3)	-	1.31	0.67
Average Overall Mean						1.70	0.81

Source: Field Survey 2021

KEY: SA=Strongly Agree, A=Agree, D=Disagree, SD=Strongly Disagree, U=Undecided

The knowledge of sexual harassment before exposure to *BBC*'s documentary as seen in table 1 reveals that all (100%) of the respondents Strongly Agree and Agree that “sexual harassment is when faculty threatens to fail me if I do not perform a sexual request” (in order words, sex for grades), inappropriate touching, and sexual comments/ jokes, to be forms of sexual harassment. Anierobi et al (2021 p.269), classifies these as sexual coercion - when “professional or educational treatment one is entitled to is conditioned in such a way that the person might not get them except by yielding to unwelcome sexual activity. This implies that the predominate knowledge of sexual harassment among female undergraduates is sexual coercion which is exemplified by sex for grades.

Also, a significant majority of the respondents strongly agree and agree at 98.4% and 95% that sending inappropriate text and chat messages to students and demanding to meet behind closed doors were forms of sexual harassment. Although asking a student out on a date, being overly friendly, and talking about sexuality were also considered to be forms of sexual harassment by a majority, a significant number of respondents strongly disagreed and disagreed at 30%, 51.7% and 20%, while a few were undecided.

TABLE 2: Knowledge of Sexual Harassment Post Exposure to BBC's Documentary on Sex for Grades

	SA Freq. (%)	A Freq. (%)	D Freq. (%)	SD Freq. (%)	U Freq. (%)	Mean (\bar{x})	Standard Deviation (SD)
Sexual harassment is when a faculty demands sexual favors of me	51 (85)	5 (8.3)	4 (6.7)	-	-	1.22	0.56

Sexual harassment is when a faculty sends me inappropriate text messages/chats	48 (80.0)	10 (16.7)	-	-	2 (3.3)	1.30	0.79
Sexual harassment is when a faculty touches me inappropriately	56 (93.3)	4 (6.7)	-	-	-	1.06	0.25
Sexual harassment is when a faculty ask me out on a date	27 (45.0)	9 (15.0)	13 (21.7)	2 (3.3)	9 (15.0)	2.29	1.45
Sexual harassment is when a faculty is overly friendly with me	30 (50.0)	12 (20.0)	11 (18.3)	7 (11.7)	-	1.92	1.08
Sexual harassment is when a faculty talks about sexuality with me	33 (55.0)	5 (8.3)	15 (25.0)	3 (5.0)	4 (6.7)	2.00	1.28
Sexual harassment is when a faculty makes sexual comments or jokes that make me feel uncomfortable	34 (56.7)	18 (30.0)	5 (8.3)	3 (5.0)	-	1.62	0.85
Sexual harassment is when a faculty threatens to fail me if I do not perform a sexual request	54 (90.0)	6 (10.0)	-	-	-	1.35	0.73
Sexual harassment is when a faculty demands to meet with me behind closed doors	29 (48.3)	26 (43.3)	3 (5.0)	2 (3.3)	-	1.71	0.96
Average Overall Mean						1.61	0.88

Source: Field Survey 2021

The knowledge of sexual harassment after exposed to *BBC's* documentary among respondents revealed that (100%) strongly agreed and agreed to “sexual harassment is when faculty threatens to fail me if I do not perform a sexual request” (in order words, sex for grades), inappropriate touching, and sexual comments/ jokes, to be forms of sexual harassment.

Although 96.7% and 91.6% strongly agreed and agreed to sending inappropriate text and chat messages to students and demanding to meet behind closed doors as forms of sexual harassment, some (1.7% and 3.4%) respondents who had previously considered these to be forms of sexual harassment before exposure to the documentary changed their minds.

The disagreement to asking a student out on a date as a form of sexual harassment increased by 6.2% from 30% before exposure to the documentary to 36.2%. There was also a significant reduction in the number of respondents that Strongly disagreed and disagreed to being overly friendly by 21.7% from 51.7% before exposure to the documentary, while 10% more respondents disagreed to talking about sexuality as a form of sexual harassment.

TABLE 3: Attitude to Sexual Harassment before Exposure to BBC’s Documentary on Sex for Grades

	SA Freq. (%)	A Freq. (%)	D Freq. (%)	SD Freq. (%)	U Freq. (%)	Mean (\bar{x})	Standard Deviation (SD)
Sexually harassed victims should keep silent until they graduate from the institution	4 (6.7)	5 (8.3)	11 (18.3)	38 (63.3)	2 (3.3)	3.48	0.94
Cases of sexual harassment should be reported to institutional authority	38 (63.3)	19 (31.7)	1 (1.7)	1 (1.7)	1 (1.7)	1.46	0.76
Sexually harassed victims should tell parents/family	36 (60.0)	23 (38.3)	-	-	1 (1.7)	1.45	0.67
Cases of sexual harassment should be reported to student Union/Associations	33 (55.0)	22 (36.7)	2 (3.3)	-	3 (5.0)	1.63	0.95
Victims of Sexual harassment should tell senior colleagues with more experience	30 (50.0)	16 (26.7)	6 (10.0)	-	8 (13.3)	2.00	1.35
Cases of sexual harassment should be reported to law enforcement (Police)	40 (66.7)	16 (26.7)	-	3 (5.0)	1 (1.7)	1.48	0.87
Average Overall Mean						1.91	0.92

Source: Field Survey 2021

It can be seen from Table 3 that only 15% of the respondents strongly agree and agree to keeping sexual harassment a secret and taking no action until the victim graduates from the university. Majority (81.6%) of the respondents strongly disagree and disagree that sexually harassed victims should keep silent until they graduate from the institution. This negates the notion of silence which is highly encouraged in society in a guise to protect victims from labels and stereotypes.

Respondents’ unanimously concur as 98.3% strongly agree and agree that sexual harassment should be reported to parents and family, 95% strongly agree and agree to reporting cases of sexual harassment to the university authority. Reporting cases of sexual harassment to law enforcement is another cause of

action which the respondents deem necessary as 93.4% strongly agree and agree.

Also, respondents were favorably disposed to involving student union and association in cases of sexual harassment as 91.7% strong agreed and agreed to this, while 76.7% which is also a significant majority strongly agree and agree that victims of sexual harassment can confide in senior colleagues at the university who have more experience.

TABLE 4: Attitude to Sexual Harassment before Exposure to BBC’s Documentary on Sex for Grades

	SA Freq. (%)	A Freq. (%)	D Freq. (%)	SD Freq. (%)	U Freq. (%)	Mean (\bar{x})	Standard Deviation (SD)
Sexually harassed victims should keep silent until they graduate from the institution	16 (26.7)	-	16 (26.7)	28 (46.7)	-	2.93	1.25
Cases of sexual harassment should report to institutional authority	31 (51.7)	21 (35.0)	2 (3.3)	3 (5.0)	3 (5.0)	1.77	1.08
Sexually harassed victims should tell parents/family	41 (68.3)	16 (26.7)	3 (5.0)	-	-	1.37	0.58
Cases of sexual harassment should be reported to student Union/Associations	38 (63.3)	16 (26.7)	3 (5.0)	-	3 (5.0)	1.57	0.98
Victims of Sexual harassment should tell senior colleagues with more experience	29 (48.3)	17 (28.3)	3 (5.0)	3 (5.0)	8 (13.3)	2.07	1.40
Cases of sexual harassment should be reported to law enforcement (Police)	50 (83.3)	7 (11.7)	3 (5.0)	-	-	1.22	0.52
Average Overall Mean						1.82	0.97

Source: Field Survey 2021

There is a significant difference in the attitude of the respondents’ to sexual harassment haven been exposed to *BBC’s* documentary. This can be seen in the distribution of response to the statement on keeping silence about sexual harassment until a victim graduates from the university. Contrary to the initial response where 15% of the respondents strongly agree and agree with this, 26.7% strongly agreed which is a significant increase. Also, only 73.4%

strongly disagree and disagree with this as opposed to 81.6% before exposure to the documentary.

Respondents maintained a unanimous agreement on confiding in parents/family at 95% which is 3.3% less the initial response as is seen in table 3. Also, there was also a decline in the number of respondents that strongly agreed and agreed to reporting cases of sexual harassment the university authority at 86.7% which is a decline from the 95% initially recorded.

Interesting to note is the fact that more (95%) respondents strongly agree and agree to reporting sexual harassment to law enforcement which initially stood at 93.4%, while there was a decline in responses to involving the student union/association from 91.7% to 90% in agreement, while there was not a significant difference in response to disclosing cases sexual harassment to senior colleagues as 76.6% of the respondents' strongly agree and agree to this as opposed to 76.7% initial response.

The change in attitude to sexual harassment following the exposure of respondents' to *BBC's* documentary on sex for grades confirms the postulation of the information-integration theory which states that attitudinal change can occur among media audiences when new information is brought to bear and is presented in a manner that gives a valence - a direction that either support or refutes existing notions (LittleJohn and Foss, 2008 p.75 & 76).

CONCLUSION

BBC's investigative report on sex for grades in African tertiary institutions of Nigeria and Ghana was of significant reaffirming impact on the knowledge and attitude to sexual harassment among Babcock University female undergraduates as is seen in their response pre and post exposure to the documentary. Also, significant increase was recorded in responses post exposure to film which reiterates the impact of the mass media on audience knowledge and attitude towards issues as they unfold in society.

RECOMMENDATION

Based on the study findings, it is therefore recommended that the media especially local media embark on investigative journalism into the nature of sexual harassment in Nigeria institutions as this will further lend credence to

addressing this concern in society, as well as provide insights to shape perception and attitude.

Also, subsequent studies in this direction should seek to determine the response of male undergraduates on the subject of sexual harassment in tertiary institutions

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