



The prevalence of sexual harassment in institutions of higher learning in Zimbabwe in the twenty-first century: Perceptions from students and lecturers in Zimbabwe State Universities.

Tenson T. Mugodzwa^a, Modester D. Ngwerume^b

^{a-b} Midlands State University, Zimbabwe

ARTICLE HISTORY

Published online, 2022

Abstract

Sexual harassment cases are on the increase in Zimbabwean institutions of higher learning. However, very few of them are officially recorded, reported, or made public. Sexual harassment as a gender issue, is of paramount importance as it has to do with human rights, individual dignity and psychological stability. Yet oral reflections from students indicate the soaring prevalence of sexual harassment and non-attention to the cases or rehabilitation of affected victims. This scenario requires attention, massive research, and strategies to mitigate the prevalence of sexual harassment in institutions of higher learning in order to produce all round, robust, creative, innovative and technologically motivated industrial graduates. This paper is of the contention that sexual harassment cases are not only prevalent but are on the increase in Zimbabwean institutions of higher learning, albeit with most of them going unreported or being swept under the carpet so as to protect the integrity, public scrutiny and image of the institutions involved. The paper argues that male and female students as well as lecturers are mostly perpetrators, victims or both of sexual harassment. The paper maintains that sexual harassment as a gender issue, is rooted in the feminist theory of gender inequality. This study is grounded in the radical and socialist feminist theories of gender inequality. The study comprised of 114 students, 4 Executive Deans of students, 4 Counsellors, and 20 lecturers. The research method used was both qualitative and quantitative. The research findings revealed that sexual harassment is prevalent in Zimbabwean institutions of higher learning and that very few cases are formally reported, recorded and made public. The study recommends that institutions of higher learning need to put in place and implement sexual harassment policies. Reporting structures must be communicated to all stakeholders and punitive measures, guidance and counselling be availed to reduce sexual harassment issues.

KEYWORDS:



Introduction

Sexual harassment is not only prevalent but is on the increase in institutions of higher learning not only in Zimbabwe, but regionally and globally as well. What makes sexual harassment sensitive, controversial and seemingly trivial is that it takes so many forms, and very few people want to talk about their experiences. Some of them happen in subtle ways and that both the perpetrator and the victim may not even be aware that they are actually sexually harassing each other. This observation is evident in the following statement:

...women's oppression causes the most suffering to its victims, qualitatively and quantitatively, although the suffering may often go unrecognised because of the sexist prejudices of both the oppressor (perpetrator) and the oppressed (the victim) (Jagger & Rothenberg, cited in Tong, 1995 p. 71).

The whole situation becomes more complicated because in the interest of confidentiality, protecting the image of the institution in question and the perpetrator and victim's dignity and privacy, most cases are not recorded, reported or published. Yet sexual harassment as a gender issue has profound effects particularly on the victim resulting in depression, stress, withdrawal from the public sphere and in some cases serious psychological consequences on the individual's future life. This study, therefore, investigates the prevalence of sexual harassment in institutions of higher learning in Zimbabwe focusing on occurrence, frequency, reporting structures and potential intervention strategies to reduce the prevalence of the issue under discussion.

Background

UNHCR (2003) defines sexual harassment as any unwanted sexual behaviour that makes someone feel upset, scared, offended or humiliated, while Areguin and Cortina (2021) define it as a type of sexual violence which happens without consent. The EEOC (1992) defines sexual harassment as unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favours, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature. According to UBOS (2018), unwelcome does not mean 'voluntary'; a victim may consent or agree to certain conduct and actively participate in it even though its offensive and objectionable. Therefore, sexual harassment is unwelcome whenever the person subjected to it considers it unwelcome. For this study, sexual harassment must be conceived, perceived, and understood in this context.

Sexual gender-based violence (SGBV) is a health and legal issue of global concern. The term 'SGBV' covers varying forms of sexual violence that include sexual, physical and emotional violence, socio-economic violence and harmful traditional practices that lead to sexual harassment (UNHCR, 2003). Across the world, one in every three women from the age of 15 has experienced physical and, or sexual intimate violence in their lifetime (UBOS, 2018).

In rural and poorer communities, this violence is fuelled by societal attitudes and practices that uphold gender inequality thus placing women in a subordinate position in relation to men (UNHCR, 2003).

In previous years, sexual harassment was conceptualised as a sexual problem only meaning that it mainly constituted sexual advances that emanate from natural feeling of sexual desire and romance. However, research has now shown that sexual harassment is gender harassment with contempt at its core. The perpetrator, therefore, aims to put the other person down and push them out and not necessarily pull them into sexual activity (Araguin & Cortina, 2020). In other words, the behaviour happens because of the sex of the victim, for example the use of offensive jokes made to embarrass the victim because she is a woman. The use of power makes the practice move from being an expression of male interest, invitation or courtship to the arena of intimidation and aggression.

Sexual harassment in tertiary institutions became topical in the media more than 40 years ago with the last decade zooming in on sexual violence on campus. Sexual harassment as a topic has moved from the research marginalized topics to the epicentre of institutional focus in institutions of higher learning (Jessup-Anger et al, 2018). At the moment, this issue has become a global pandemic in institutions of higher learning. The fact that the practice is cross cutting along race, age, gender and social status means that it cannot have a one size fits all solution as different people are affected differently after sexual harassment.

In general, international instruments define sexual harassment broadly with emphasis on discrimination of women whilst national laws focus on the illegal conduct. However, all definitions agree that the behaviour is unwanted and causes harm to the victim. The EEOC (1992 p. 15) guidelines define sexual harassment as:

Unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favours, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature constitute sexual harassment when this conduct explicitly or implicitly affects an individual's employment, unreasonably interferes with an individual's work performance, or creates an intimidating, hostile, or offensive work environment.

Though there are global, national and regional agreements in place to achieve gender parity across the social, cultural, economic and political divide, the number of reported and unreported cases continues to rise. A study by Bellis (2021) showed that Kenyan institutions of higher learning revealed having a high level of intimidation of female students by those in positions of power as well as sexual favours for good grades were the major consequences of sexual harassment. As a result, this weakens student's rights and has a negative effect on their educational achievement.

The major challenge in all this is the culture of silence that the leadership takes on as they turn a blind eye to issue of toxic masculinity that fuel cases of sexual harassment in these institutions. Though meeting the legal definition of sexual harassment, most of the victims do not regard their experiences as crime and therefore fail to report. The underreporting of cases of sexual harassment is exacerbated in cases whereby the victim is incapacitated (Kilpatrick et al., 2007). Though the issues of sexual harassment in institutions of higher learning remain prevalent, most leaders in these institutions are immune to the issue therefore do not feel the urge to implement policies that can curb this problem.

Literature Review

Sexual harassment is a pertinent gender issue culminating in women's oppression, exploitation, discrimination, and resultantly gender inequality. This study, therefore, is grounded in the feminist theory of gender inequality. Feminist theory is not one, but many theories or perspectives. Each feminist theory or paradigm attempts to describe women's oppression, domination and exploitation, to explain its causes and consequences, and to describe intervention strategies for women's total emancipation and empowerment (Tong, 1995). The more skilfully a feminist theory can combine description of root cause, explanation and prescription, the better that theory is.

Most feminist-based theories identify their approach as essentially liberal, Marxist, radical, socialist, psychoanalytic, existentialist or postmodern (Tong, 1995). Most authors understand each of these paradigms to be a partial, and provisional answer to the oppression, exploitation, and domination of women, providing a unique perspective with its own methodological strengths and weaknesses. Most of these theories have points of convergence and divergence, joining together both to lament the ways in which women have been and continue to be oppressed, dominated, abused and suppressed, and to prescribe intervention measures for women's total liberation and empowerment.

The feminist paradigm which appears more correct and convincing is a matter of opinion.

Previous research findings Nisak and Sugirati (2020), Friebert et al (2020, Cheteni et al (2019), have revealed that sexual harassment as a gender issue is caused by poverty, lack of gender empowerment, confidence and assertiveness, unequal power relations and authority, labelling and fear of victimisation, among other things. Most victims of sexual harassment accept their existential ontological situation and mostly suffer in silence presumably because of patriarchy as a system and an ideology, largely a culmination of several factors grounded in gender role socialization. Guided by the ongoing discussion, this study therefore is rooted in the radical and socialist feminist theories of gender inequality.

According to Bryson (1999, 2003), radical feminism is a theory of, by, and for women. Radical feminists believe that neither liberal feminism nor Marxist feminism adequately addresses the woman question. Bryson (1999, 2003) argues that women oppression is total, affecting every facet of their lives, and that all men have oppressed women. Similarly, Jagger and Rothenberg, cited in Tong (1995), postulate that women's oppression is the most widespread, existing in virtually every known society. Radical feminists argue that it is the patriarchal system that objectifies and thingifies females, a system characterised by male-power, hierarchy, dominance and competition; a system that cannot be reformed but only ripped out root, branch and tree (Tong, 1995).

Chauraya and Mugodzwa (2015) define patriarchy as a social system that propagates male superiority and dominance over women as natural and God-given and that it will not change. The implied impossibility of the deconstruction and resultant destruction of patriarchy envisaged by Chauraya and Mugodzwa (2015) is reinforced by the following assertion:

women's oppression is the deepest in that it is the hardest form of oppression to eradicate and cannot be removed by other social revolutionary changes such as the abolition of a class society as called for by Marxists and Socialist Feminists" (Jagger & Rothenberg, cited in Tong, 1995 p. 71).

In patriarchal societies, even the poorest and weakest man has a woman to oppress and exploit (Meena, cited in Chauraya & Mugodzwa, 2015). Similarly, Bryson (2003) concluded that in patriarchal societies, in any encounter between a man and a woman, the man will attempt to exploit and dominate the woman. From the ongoing discussion, it can be inferred that in patriarchal societies, the

relationship between a man and a woman can be compared to that of a knife and a watermelon. In such a scenario, whether the knife falls on the watermelon or the watermelon falls on the knife, the watermelon suffers, (Achebe, cited in Matope & Mugodzwa, 2011). This study argues that it is in this context that victims of sexual harassment in institutions of higher learning particularly female students, must be perceived, conceived and understood.

Radical feminism argues that it is not only patriarchy, legal and political structures that must be overturned, but its social and cultural institutions (culture, religion, education) must also go (Tong, 1995). One of the revered themes of radical feminism is the effect of female biology on women's self-perception, status and function in both the private and public spheres of their lives (Bryson, 2003). Radical feminism has no interest in preserving the kind of natural order of life or biological status quo as implied in Chauraya and Mugodzwa (2015)'s definition of patriarchy because it permanently, socially and politically annihilates females and subjects them to male sexual pleasures, exploitation, abuse and domination. Rather the aim of radical feminism is to question the concept of the natural order of things and to overcome whatever negative effects patriarchy and biology has had on women and perhaps also on men. This observation is in line with Freire's (1990) liberative pedagogy that both the oppressor and the oppressed need to be liberated from the culture of domination, oppression, passivity, docility and the culture of suffering in silence, including dehumanizing each other.

Some radical feminists are of the opinion that women's biology is a potential source of liberating power for women, the only challenge is that very few women believe in their potential. Accordingly, Eisenstein, (cited in Matope & Mugodzwa, 2011 p. 97) maintains that:

`most women feel incomplete when they are without a man to structure their desire and forcefully argue that women are nothing but objects to be used in the service of the penis, and that men are equally nothing but their penises.

By making such arguments, radical feminism has explicitly articulated the ways in which men have constructed women's sexuality to serve not women's, but men's sexual needs, wants and interests. What women must do is to reconceive female sexuality in the image and likeness of women (McCain & Kim, 2013), thus dumping in the dust bins of history, the chauvinistic biblical image that God created man in his own image, and gave him the mandate and authority over all species including females, which has blatantly seen women relegated

to subjects and objects of men; what Freire (1990) calls the dehumanisation and thingification of females by males.

Given the will power of the female gender, and the whole situation under discussion can be changed and redefined because what is oppressive is not the female biology but rather that men have controlled and continue to control women as sex objects, child bearers and rearers (McCain & Kim, 2013).

Thus, if women are to be liberated, each woman must determine for herself when to or not to use reproductive controlling technologies. Each woman must determine for herself how, and how not, to rear the children she bears (Best, 2007). Radical feminism insists that male power in patriarchal societies is at the root of the social construction and perpetuation of gender stereotypes, gender inequality and male violence over women which comes in several forms such as wife bartering, rape, sexual harassment and sexual abuse among other forms of gender-based violence.

The task of weaving the several strands of feminist theory together seems to have been taken up most effectively by socialist feminists. Mitchel (cited in Tong, 1995), argues that women's condition is overdetermined by the structures of production (Marxist feminism), reproduction and sexuality (radical feminism), and the socialisation of children (liberal feminism). According to socialist feminists, women's status and function in all of these structures must change if women are to achieve anything approximating full liberation and empowerment.

The socialist feminist perspective brings together the central elements of the Marxian conception of power and the radical feminist conception of patriarchy. Eisenstein (cited in Matope & Mugodzwa, 2011) argues forcefully for such a synthesis, in order to formulate the problem of woman as mother and worker, reproducer and producer. Eisenstein argues that male supremacy and capitalism are the core relations determining the oppression of women.

Socialist feminists are committed to understanding the system of the power deriving from the capitalist patriarchy. Such an understanding must emphasise the mutually reinforcing dialectical relationship between capitalist class structure and hierarchical sexual structuring. The reasons are that power is dealt with in a dichotomous way by socialist women and radical feminists; it is seen as deriving from either one's economic class position or one's sex. But it is important to explore how the two concepts are interrelated through the sexual division of labour. Eisenstein further argues that the importance of Marxian

analysis to the study of women's oppression is twofold. Firstly, it provides a class analysis necessary for the study of power, and secondly, it provides a method of analysis that is historical and dialectical.

Although Marx provides the tools for understanding all power relations, claims Eisenstein, he was not sensitive to all power relationships (Best, 2007). Eisenstein focuses on the Marxian notion of alienation, which she applies to women's oppression. "Species beings", Eisenstein argues

are those beings who ultimately reach their potential for creative labour, social consciousness and social living through the struggle against capitalist society and who fully internalise these capacities in communist society (Matope & Mugodzwa, 2011 p. 22).

Emancipation of our human essence provides the revolutionary potential, without which we would become happy slaves, of which most women are. However, women are still potentially creative beings. It is this contradiction that provides women's revolutionary potential, although very few of them are aware of this.

For Eisenstein, exploitation is economic in nature and class based, whilst oppression is non-economic and rooted in alienation. Socialist feminists are critical of radical feminists because, they base their argument on the premise that men have power as men and that the world is organised into sexual spheres (Best, 2007). They do not link women's oppression and the economic class structure and are inclined to see the male hierarchical ordering of society as rooted in biology (Bryson, 2003), rather than in the economy and or history. In contrast, socialist feminism analyses power in terms of its class origins and its patriarchal roots. Capitalism and patriarchy are neither autonomous systems nor identical, they are mutually dependent; "oppression is inclusive of exploitation but reflects a more complex reality" (Eisenstein, cited in Matope & Mugodzwa, 2011 pp. 22-3).

According to Eisenstein, capitalist patriarchy, by definition, breaks through the dichotomies of class and sex, private and public spheres, domestic and wage labour, family and economy, personal and political, and ideology and material conditions. Eisenstein argues that the Marxian understanding of the relations of production cannot be defined without an explicit connection to the relations that emerge from women's sexuality and the relations of reproduction: "Capitalism uses patriarchy and patriarchy is defined by the needs of capital" (Eisenstein, cited in Matope and Mugodzwa, (2011 pp. 22-23). Socialist feminists conclude

by arguing that if the other side of production is consumption, then the other side of capitalism is patriarchy.

From the arguments presented by radical feminists and socialist feminists, it may be concluded that sexual harassment particularly for females is a deep-rooted phenomenon grounded in patriarchy, women's biology, capitalism, and socialisation. Other factors are deemed influential as causal factors of sexual harassment, although of lesser paramount consequences.

Methodology

This part of the study discusses the research method used in the study. Data is the term used to describe basic factors about a particular social phenomenon (Best & Khan, 1993) such as poverty, prostitution, and sexual harassment among other issues. Also, under discussion are the research design, the population and sample of the study, reliability and validity and how the pilot study was carried out.

Research design

Haralambos and Holborn (2008 p. 708) define a research design "as the study of carrying out research in a systematic way". For the purposes of this study, the survey research design was employed. Interviews were held with respondents from the sampled state universities. Discussion on focus groups proved useful in extracting information from both perpetrators and victims of sexual harassment.

Types of data

Both qualitative and quantitative data was used, although the study is basically qualitative in nature as it places individual actors (the perpetrator and the victim) at the centre.

Target population

The population of the study consisted of Executive Deans of Students, Student Representative Council members, lecturers and students i.e., the perceived perpetrators and victims of sexual harassment. A sample of four out of ten (40%) of the Zimbabwe State Universities was selected from the identified target population. According to Best and Khan (1993), 10% of the target population is the acceptable minimum sample size for a study and is a true and valid representation of the population under study. Table 1 illustrates the sample size of the study by gender.

Reliability and validity tests

The interview-guide was administered to respondents who were not part of the sample of the study to establish the reliability and validity of the research instruments during a pilot study carried out.

Findings

Table 1 shows the sample size by gender of the study.

Table 1: Ample size by post of the study

Occupation	Males	Females	Total
Executive Deans	1	3	4
Counsellors	0	4	4
Sub wardens	2	4	6
SRC	2	2	4
Ministers of Sports and Entertainment	4	0	4
Lecturers	12	8	20
Students	40	60	100
Grand total	61	81	142

Explanation of posts in Table 1

Deans are executive members of staff in Zimbabwean State Universities responsible for the welfare of students such as accommodation, food prepared and served in university Dining Halls, organizing local, regional and global sporting activities and entertainment among other things. This is their source of power for 'favours' and other subtle personal interests. These are different from Executive Deans of academic Faculties.

Each of the universities has one such post and a deputy dean. The findings of the study revealed that these Executive Deans wield a lot of power and authority over the whole student body and to a larger extent staff establishment, particularly members of staff who may need residence and other related favours for their children and close associates.

Counsellors are members of staff who deal with issues to do with sexual harassment and abuse, stress related issues and general guidance and counselling of university students. Because of the nature of their job, most of

them indicated that they are both popular and unpopular with both lecturers and students (their major clients) depending on the nature of the issue at hand, or the status and interests of the person in question as revealed in the following statement; “There are no innocent bystanders in any struggle...From the cradle to the grave, we are all in the battlefield. We all fall into one of two camps, either the oppressed.

Sub wardens are mostly students in residence in charge of the general conduct, behaviour and day to day running of the students in Halls of Residence. They have the authority to cause a student to be expelled from Halls of Residence or face other disciplinary measures depending on the nature of the act of misconduct at hand and the University’s Students Code of Conduct.

Besides this, there are also very influential in subtle ways though, of who gets university residence in the different Halls of Residence and rooms, each with each own uniqueness ranging from single rooms, semi-single rooms, double rooms or the general boarding halls comparable or under comparable to those found in some of the mostly mission secondary boarding schools.

This is their source of power and authority to get potential ‘favours’ and personal wants from perceived potential fellow students. Students do not report to the SRC or the general students, but to their appointing authority, the Executive Dean of Students’ Office and this puts students in Halls of Residence at their mercy.

To get the post one applies, gets interviewed and accepted and officially appointed by the Executive Dean of Students’ Office.

The Student Representative Council (SRC) is a mandatory student body elected by students to represent, defend, express and further their interests in the various Zimbabwe state universities. The number of posts and their titles vary from one university to another, but the posts of President, Vice President, Secretary and Vice Secretary General, Treasurer, Minister of Sports and Entertainment, are the most common and highly rewarding in terms of power, authority, ‘favours’ and benefits from the University Management, Members of Staff, and Students.

Of late, the power, authority and capacity by student leaders to victimise fellow students into acceptance has significantly multiplied. According to research findings of this study, there is also a significant increase of sexual harassment among people of the same sex among student leaders. Same sex relations and same sex sexual harassment continues unchecked because it is apparently a

new phenomenon. Therefore, these relations remain hidden as most of them go unreported.

In some cases, SRC members dine and wine with the university management members (the SRC President sits in the University Council Meetings, and leads the University Graduation Academic Processions, among other privileges).

This gives them unprecedented power over other students and the capacity to sexually harass vulnerable students. The fact that they are also highly connected with other lectures and external service providers gives them more power and luxuries that other students cannot afford.

From the interviewed students, the SRC members are very powerful, more powerful than their lecturers. Some of them are so daring and audacious to become national political figures upon completion of their studies, wherein SRC is used as an inroad into the national political arena during their campaigns into the SRC. According to the student respondents interviewed, SRC members are catapulted into their respective SRC posts mostly through funding from the various interested political parties, an assertion which, however, requires further research to substantiate.

The SRC Ministers of Sports and Entertainment, like other SRC posts, are elected by students specifically to represent, defend, and strengthen their interests in sporting activities and entertainment. They are popularly referred to by their fellow students as 'pleasure managers'. For instance, they are influential in organising musical shows and are also in charge of local, regional, and global students sporting tours. The study revealed that by virtue of this power, he can easily manipulate other students into travelling with him with the victims unaware that they are being sexually harassed in the process.

Lecturers are responsible for delivering lectures, setting of, and marking assignments and examinations, inclusive of dissertations and work-related learning reports; they are perceived to wield a lot of power, authority. Lecturers 'instil' fear and potentially victimise both male and female students as reported during interviews. In the final analysis, lecturers determine and actually influence decisions on whether a student fails or passes. Respondent lecturers and students concluded that the aforesaid marks the source of power, intimidation, fear, authority and the potential perpetrators and possible victims of sexual harassment.

Conclusively, and in relation to lecturers, it is a two-pronged trying situation which according to most males, requires caution, commitment, diligence, professionalism, and divine intervention as temptations from both female and male students are the order of the day, particularly towards and during writing, and marking of examinations and publication of semester results.

Students are general members of the student body in the Zimbabwe State Universities and the major stakeholders. They range from level one semester one to level four or five semester two, depending with the degree program being pursued. Numerically, they form the majority of all the other posts combined in the universities, yet they are the most vulnerable to sexual harassment and other forms of oppression, domination and exploitation. Just like females in patriarchal societies, female students are subjugated and suffer for long periods culminating in most of them, particularly females, accepting the culture of docility, passivity, and general suffering in silence. According to most of the female student respondents, the potential pool of sexual harassment victims and also possible perpetrators, depending on one's opinion.

What the respondents said in relation to the prevalence of sexual harassment in public universities in Zimbabwe?

This section of the study, responses from the interviewed sample categorised by the posts discussed above.

Executive Deans of Students

A total of four students, one male and three females, were interviewed. The results of the study revealed that most people occupying this post are females, fulfilling the patriarchal label and thinking that caring is a feminine role, as postulated by Chauraya and Mugodzwa (2015). Asked how they got the job, all of them pointed out that they applied, got interviewed, then appointed, conclusively revealing that they were appointed professionally, irrespective of their gender. This dismisses claims by some patriarchal disciples that there could have been carpet interviews. From the interviews, 100% of the deans of students said that sexual harassment cases were common, and are on the increase in institutions of higher learning, particularly among female students. It was reported that most of the cases are perpetrated by male lecturers and other members of staff in critical service departments such as Bursary and Information Technology Services (ITS). According to them, the challenge was that very few cases were brought to their attention largely because the victims feared victimisation, rejection, stigmatisation, and splendid isolation by their

perpetrators and colleagues. Reporting was noted as a situation which was seen as a threat to victims' survival and continued existence at the university.

Asked about the frequency of occurrence and records of sexual harassment, all deans of students referred the issue to the university counsellors who, according to the deans of students were responsible for such cases; and that such issues were too sensitive to discuss with outsiders even with Ministry Authorisation Letters as they had to do with confidentiality, individuals' privacy and protection.

Further enquiries about reporting structures and intervention measures produced common responses such as:

I have already told you all I can about sexual harassment at this university (Executive Dean of Students 1).

Look here, I am being very cooperative, all issues and records to do with sexual harassment are referred to, recorded and kept by the University Counsellor, allow me to tak

If I could be excused, I have an urgent meeting with the Vice Chancellor, I have already talked to the University Counsellor, and she will give you all the assistance you need, thank you and please follow me (Executive Dean of Students 3).

Comrade, I have a young family to look after and a job to protect, please bear with me (Executive Dean of Students 4).

What can be deduced from the ongoing discussion is that the Executive Deans are neither comfortable nor unwilling to entertain questions to do with sexual harassment in their institutions, presumably to protect their jobs and the image of their respective universities.

Counsellors

Four Counsellors, all females, were interviewed. Enquiries with them indicated that they were professionally trained counsellors and agreed that all cases to do with sexual harassment among students were referred to them. Asked about why all, if not most universities employed females as counsellors, the general response was that most sexual harassment victims were female students, and that they were more comfortable to discuss issues of a sexual nature with adult females whom they perceived as mothers and aunts as tradition prescribes This is similar to Chauraya and Mugodzwa's (2015) argument that in patriarchal societies, in the absence of a male figure, the perceived elder female represents patriarchy and male interests.

Further interrogation on perpetrators and victims from these custodians of female students' comfort and security during their stay on campus revealed that mostly male lecturers were the common perpetrators, and recently on the rise, male students in positions of power and authority, particularly Ministers of Sports and Entertainment, followed by the SRC Treasurers. Asked on the occurrence frequency and reporting structures of sexual harassment, the most common responses were:

I am a professionally trained Counsellor, and the most pertinent ethical issue is that of confidentiality, which has a jail sentence when broken (Counsellor 1)

I signed a contract with the University, one of the conditions of continued employment is non-disclosure of such sensitive, private, and personal information. Therefore, I will not release to anyone names of both perpetrators and victims of sexual harassment. However, with respect to lecturer perpetrators, some have been found guilty and dismissed, you can obtain such information from the University Registrar, but please do not mention that I gave you this information (Counsellor 2).

Ask the lecturers and the students as they are the people concerned (Counsellor 3).

Why don't you ask the SRC guys, you may find interesting information, plus they have few strings constraining them from releasing the information if you talk to them nicely (Counsellor 4).

Only 25% of the respondents agreed that same sex sexual harassment existed and that it was on the increase, although rarely talked about on campus social circles. One Counsellor 2 reported that:

I can tell you in confidence because that same sex sexual harassment exists, particularly among female students. It was brought to my attention by the Sub-warden of the respective Hall of Residence. Silent indications show an influx of this new phenomenon, although no one wants to talk about it, including myself. I can confirm one such case of two female students of the same level and semester who shared a room. The case became public among students because the perceived 'husband' was violent towards her partner, particularly over poor performance and incompetent cooking. When I called them for counselling, they withdrew from university residence. My further follow up about the case shows that both have since withdrawn from the university and have blocked me from further communication with them.

Further questions only served to 'persuade' the Counsellors to lead researchers to the SRC members, Sub-wardens and the general students.

Sub-wardens

A total of 6 (33,3 % males and 66,7% females) sub-wardens were interviewed. Not much information of significance in relation to sexual harassment was

obtained from these revered authorities, probably because females and males were assigned to female and male halls of residents respectively. The only issue arising from them was that of either females or males sleeping overnight in halls of residents designated to their opposite sex, an offence in its own right as outlined in Students' Code of Conduct.

Asked how they dealt with the cases, they said they reported to the responsible authorities for disciplinary measures although some acknowledged that they received 'favours' from the culprits to sweep the issue under the carpet. Only one university was found to be officially allowing both female and male students to reside in one hall of residents, although in different wings or floors. It would be worthwhile to conduct further research on the positive and negative consequences of such a scenario and maybe adopt it across all the State Universities country wide.

The SRC

It was revealed that some SRC members were involved in mismanagement of SRC funds to entice victims to sexual favours, particularly male members in relation to females. The most accused were the Treasurers and Ministers of Sports and Entertainment. Some of the responses from interviewees were that:

You can go to any university trip and enjoy monetary allowances as long as you treat the SRC guys nicely, particularly the 'pleasure manager' (Treasurer) (SRC Representative 1).

It is easier to get university residence year in year out, including single rooms if you are in good connection with one SRC person (SRC Representative 2).

These guys have become more powerful than any University Authority, even lecturers treat them with caution and respect. Most of them dine and wine with some lecturers (SRC Representative 3).

The easiest way of getting connected to a male lecturer is to use an SRC member close to him. You reduce the stress of assignments, dissertations and exams because the lecturer actually writes for you. Just be a good girl and you are done with your degree (SRC Representative 3).

The responses from the students show that the SRC has become a powerful emerging and formidable force in universities as they can apparently get away with any form of sexual harassment towards fellow students. This issue requires further research to establish the authenticity of this new powerhouse and how it can be arrested for better developmental purposes. Another new dimension concerning the SRC is their revealed connection and funding from political

parties, particularly the two major rivals in Zimbabwe, ZANU(PF) and CCCZ as revealed in the following response:

Most of these SRC guys got there through funding from their political parties, that continue to fund them post- elections. They hardly get broke and are assured of possible employment upon completion of studies. Please him during his stay here and you are sure to rise with him beyond university life (SRC Representative 2).

Lecturers

A total of 20 (40% females and 60% males) were interviewed. Of the female lecturers, 87,5% said that sexual harassment was common and that the cases were on a rapid increase largely because the victims, mostly female students, were afraid of reporting. The situation was noted as being exacerbated by the harsh economic environment currently prevailing in Zimbabwe. From the respondents, 62.5% of them revealed that they were former students mentored within their respective departments and that they had been sexually harassed and sexually abused at some point during their college years, particularly during post-graduate degree thesis supervision phases. Asked why they did not report, it was indicated that they feared failure and dismissal ostensibly for failing to rise to the expected standards of a lecturer, and one of them who dared to report was resultantly fired.

All the female lecturers agreed that female student victims were at the mercy of male lecturers as most of them ganged up to protect each other and eventually intimidate the victim, or simply fail her in modules which were not taught by the actual perpetrator until she submitted to the sexual demands of the perpetrator or eventually withdrawing from the university in question altogether.

Of the female lecturers, 37.5% said that they were chairpersons of departments and that numerous cases, although unrecorded for confidentiality, victims feared and the protection, largely of the male colleague perpetrator and ostensibly the victim's privacy, were brought before them for guidance and counselling. They pointed out that some of the male perpetrators publicly claimed that they were strongly politically connected and threatened to pull political muscles when threatened. Some of the common responses from the female lecturers were:

Sexual harassment cases are a common feature, but they are difficult to handle as they have personal consequences on the victim and the perpetrator who is a workmate, and the person dealing with the case (Lecturer 1).

As a chairperson, I regularly get complaints from some female students. I listen to the victim's case, privately invite the male lecturer concerned and amicably solve the issue, in some cases culminating in a marriage (Lecturer 2).

As a chairperson, I have dealt with numerous of such cases, but further interrogation of both the perpetrator and victim reveal some sort of consent, then you become a problem in people's personal and private affairs (Lecturer 3).

Some of the female students are the problem. The moment you point out that you want to escalate the case, they withdraw it, and you are left in a quandary, particularly when the case has become Departmental public knowledge, which is often the case (Lecturer 4).

Of the male lecturers, 66.7% interviewed agreed that sexual harassment of female students by male lecturers was on the rampage, while 33.3% prophesied ignorance. Asked about where such records could be found, they said that very few members of staff would want to be associated with such cases as they usually haunted such members in their future lives, particularly the person handling the issue and the perpetrator.

Asks why the cases were soaring, it was indicated that there were so many factors such as lack of confidence, fear of failing or wanting good grades and easiness in completing and passing dissertations, notwithstanding the current economic hardships and enjoyment of paid for luxuries in exchange of sex. This is in line with Matope and Mugodzwa's (2011) findings that some female students participate in prostitution with their male lecturers because of poverty and the need for good grades, (i.e., a thigh for a pass). Matope and Mugodzwa (2011) concluded from their study that, when the stomach is hungry, morality is thrown out the window.

Some of the lecturers who prophesied nonexistence of sexual harassment pointed out that most of the few cases reported turned out to be trivial and meant to victimise lecturers for failing under-performing students, they questioned the integrity of the venue of the sexual harassment case pointing out that they mostly occurred outside lecture rooms or offices, and that this was a strong indicator of the element of consent. Such denials are strongly linked to radical feminists' argument that in any encounter between a man and a woman, the man will attempt to oppress, exploit, and dominate the woman, and that men control women's sexuality for their pleasure (Bryson, 2003).

Students

Student interviewed were 100 (60% females and 40% males). Both females (100%) and males (100%) agreed that sexual harassment cases were not only

prevalent, but on the increase in Zimbabwe state universities. Further probing to explain the causes of the prevalence and the rise of sexual harassment produced the following responses:

There are more female than male students on campus resulting in competition among the female students for the few males in the university community to enjoy, mostly intimate relationships (Student 1).

Some of the female students want to reap where they did not sow; they want luxuries and comfortable lives which most male students cannot afford, so they harass male lecturers (Student 2).

Some of these female students lack confidence or are just lazy. They want to pass assignments and dissertations without writing them, so they run after male lecturers. They sexually harass them and only report when they fail exams in order to 'fix' the male lecturer (Student 3).

Some of these female students come from poor backgrounds and their parents cannot afford to meet their costs required for their upkeep on campus. They are left with no choice except to go out with a willing funding male lecturer or the outside 'sugar daddies' (Student 4).

Most of these male students are too poor or mean to take you out, all they want is free sex, better to have sex with a male lecturer and enjoy your university stay (Student 5).

Most of these sexual harassment cases you are referring to may not be classified as such. these female students are willing participants who are in the habit of running after male lecturers, who if they refuse may be fixed (Student 6).

The above submissions are in direct contrast to EEOC's (1992) observation that a victim may consent or agree to certain conduct and actively participate in it even though its offensive and objectionable. Therefore, sexual harassment is not welcome whenever the person subjected to it considers it unwelcome.

Conclusion

The results of this study revealed that sexual harassment is not only prevalent, but rampant and on the increase in Zimbabwe state universities. Most of the victims are female students while the perpetrators are mostly male lecturers, SRC members particularly Ministers of Sports and Entertainment, and other members of staff particularly in the ITS and Bursary Departments.

There is evidence to induce conclusions that some female students are perpetrators of sexual harassment with male lecturers as their victims, particularly for passing assignments, dissertations and good degree classes.

The results of the study also unearthed a new phenomenon of sexual harassment in institutions of higher learning in Zimbabwe, which is the same sex sexual

harassment, particularly among female students, although rarely discussed in public.

All the universities sampled for the study have reporting structures and sexual harassment policies, yet very few cases of sexual harassment are reported, recorded, documented, or made public for various reasons including fear, intimidation, threats, failure, and stigmatisation, among others. Poor family backgrounds, lack of assertiveness, the skyrocketing inflation rate compounded by the difficult economic environment currently prevailing in Zimbabwe amid overworked and underpaid parents or guardians of students. General poverty among female students, emerged as the major motivational and influencing factors for most victims of sexual harassment in Zimbabwe state universities.

Faced by such circumstances, most female students live by the law of the hyena which states that, 'don't be choosy, eat what is available', relegating them into readily available passive and docile victims of sexual harassment who have accepted the culture of suffering in silence.

Recommendations

This study recommends that there be need for gender education, gender training, gender awareness campaigns, and gender conscientisation among students and members of staff in Zimbabwe state universities in order to reduce sexual harassment cases. The Zimbabwe state universities are encouraged to develop thorough sexual harassment policies and to provide regular sexual harassment training to all students and employees.

Universities should have clear and effective reporting structures and procedures in place. There is need to take every single complaint seriously and build trust among students and members of staff. The Zimbabwe state universities are seriously advised to consider creating an office to deal with sexual harassment at managerial level. Respective offices should be endowed with powers to recommend dismissal of offenders if need be. They could also help the situation by appointing more female lecturers for readily available enviable role models by female students. Universities could institute heavy punitive measures to perpetrators of sexual harassment.

The government avail grants to fund disadvantaged students to reduce poverty, hunger and general suffering among students. Banks could also come in by providing loans to students payable upon completion of studies with reasonable interest rates.

Parents and guardians need to be educated and reminded that children have a right to education, shelter, and food as enshrined in the Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment NO. 20 Act (2013), and that it is their responsibility to see to their children's welfare.

Lastly, if all victims of sexual harassment and abuse in particular, and gender-based violence in general, could be guided by Rodney's (1981 p. 119) observation that, "do not mourn and agonise, but organise". To become fully liberated, emancipated, and empowered human beings with full human rights and dignity, irrespective of one's sex. All those moving together with such a revolutionary band wagon joining the late singer Bob Marley in singing the 'international anthem' of empowerment:

preacher man don't tell me, that great God will come from the sky, and take away poverty,
now you see the light, come on get up, stand up, stand up for your rights!

He adds that,

emancipate yourself from mental slavery, none but ourselves can free our minds!

The late singer Buju Banton also lamented that; "destiny, I wanna rule my destiny", strongly cementing the view that one's destiny lies in their own hands. Therefore, it is up to the individual to be a victim or perpetrator, the oppressor or the oppressed, or none of the above! The choice is theirs to make.

References

- Areguin, M, A. and Cortina, L, M. 2021. Putting people down and pushing them out: sexual harassment in the workplace. *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behaviour*, 8: 285-309.
- Bellis,A.L (2021). *Sexual Violence in the Context of Higher Education: The Current State of Research and Policy*, Handbook of Interpersonal Violence and Abuse Across the Lifespan, 10.1007/978-3-319-89999-2_218, (4061-4082).View
- Best, J. W. and Khan, J. V. (1993). *Research in education*. London: Allyn Bacon.
- Best, S. (2007). *Social theory*. London: Sage Publications.
- Bob Marley (1980). Redemption Song. Uprising Album
- Bryson, V. (1999). *Feminist debates. Issues of theory and political practice*. New York: Palgrave and MacMillan.
- Bryson, V. (2003). *Feminist political theory*. New York: Palgrave and MacMillan.
- Buju Banton (1997). Destiny. Inna Heights Album,
- Chauraya, E. and Mugodzwa, T. T. (2015). Understanding gender. In Mawere, D.
- Matsa, W. and Chauraya, E. (eds.) *Introduction to gender studies: A student's guide* (p 108). Gweru: Mambo Press.
- Cheteni, P, Khamfula, Y. Mah, G. (2019) *Gender and Poverty in South African Rural Areas*, Cogent Social Sciences, 5:1, DOI: 10.1080/23311886.2019.1586080
- EEOC (1992). *Preventing Sexual Harassment*. London: BNA Communications
- Freire, P. (1990). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. London: Penguin Books.
- Friebert, S. Needle, J. Thompkins, J.D, Baker J.N, Cheng Y.I, Wang J, Lyon ME (2020). *Intersectionality of gender and poverty on symptom suffering among adolescents with cancer*. J Pain Symptom Manage.60(1):227-228.
- Haralambos, M. and Holborn, M. (2008). *Sociology: Themes and perspectives*. London: Routledge.
- Jessup- Anger, JE, Lopez, E &Koss MP. (2018). *History Of Sexual Violence In Higher Eduvation*. College Of Education Faculty Research and Publications.

McCann, C. R. and Kim, S. (eds.) (2013). *Feminist theory reader*. New York: Routledge.

Matope, N. and Mugodzwa, T. T. (2013). Motivations for promiscuous behaviour among some female students in institutions of Higher Learning in Zimbabwe. *The Dyke* 7(3),148-161

Nisak, S. and Sugiharti L. (2020). *Gender Inequality and Women Poverty in Indonesia*. International Journal of Innovation, Creativity and Change 11(9)375-387, 2020

Rodney, W. (1981). *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. Harare: ZPH.

Smith, W. (1990). *Golden fox*. London: MacMillan.

Tong, R. (1995). *Feminist thought: A comprehensive introduction*. London: Routledge.

UBOS (2018). *Uganda demographic and health survey*. Uganda Bureau of Statistics and ICF, Kampala.

UNHCR (2003). *Framework for Durable Solutions for Refugees and Persons of Concern*, 16 September 2003. EC/53/SC/INF.3